# Data Sources on Poverty

Carmel Corrigan (editor)
Eithne Fitzgerald, Jessica Bates
and Anne Matthews

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**Eithne Fitzgerald, Jessica Bates
and Anne Matthews**

IPA
INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION

Combat Poverty Agency
*working for the prevention
and elimination of poverty*

The views expressed in this text are the authors' own and not necessarily those of the Combat Poverty Agency.

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# FOREWORD

## INTRODUCTION

Combat Poverty is the statutory body for research on poverty and on policies to tackle poverty in Ireland. One of its objectives is to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of poverty and social exclusion, so as to inform and influence policy and debate. In this context, Combat Poverty undertook a study to assess the contribution of a wide range of data sources to inform poverty research. This study has produced two companion reports:

1. The original research, *Finding Out More About Poverty – the Potential of Secondary Data Sources to Provide Information on Poverty*, from which this study is derived, is published online at www.combatpoverty.ie

2. This guide to national statistical data and administrative records provides information on poverty. Its key elements are:
   - an overview of the principal sources of information on poverty in Ireland
   - an outline of some of the issues that arise in accessing and using secondary sources of data on poverty
   - detailed information on potential sources of data on various aspects of poverty
   - identification of some of the gaps in the secondary data and proposals on how these might be addressed.

## THE POLICY CONTEXT FOR DEVELOPING DATA ON POVERTY

The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) and National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS), *Building an Inclusive Society*, emphasise the collection of data for the comprehensive monitoring of poverty trends. The PPF stresses the need to provide relevant data and data collection systems for monitoring poverty trends, including systems of measuring poverty among groups not currently included in national figures (e.g. people living in institutions, people who are homeless, Travellers and some asylum seekers).[1] The NAPS includes a commitment to develop a data and research strategy on poverty (to be led by the National Office for Social Inclusion and supported by a Technical Advisory Group).[2] Combat Poverty will have a support role to this initiative, reflecting our statutory advisory and research roles.

A recent review of poverty proofing by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) identified data deficiencies as a barrier to effective poverty proofing. It noted that 'identification, collection and processing data relating to poverty in a timely manner is a pre-requisite for effective impact evaluation …'[3]

There is emerging interest amongst public policy makers in the use of social indicators, at policy formulation stage, to measure the potential impacts of policy on poverty and, post-implementation, to measure the extent to which policies have impacted on poverty. Combat Poverty has recently published a report on poverty reduction indicators.[4] This identifies important methodological principles influencing the selection of statistics which would act as indicators of poverty trends, identifies a possible list of indicators and outlines a number of challenges in terms of selecting indicators for monitoring poverty trends. This study is an important contribution to the emerging framework for monitoring progress in reducing poverty. The EU-led national action plans against poverty and social exclusion also depend on the availability of reliable and up-to-date information. As with the NAPS, a key element of these plans is to monitor progress in reducing poverty.

## THE ROLE OF DATA IN PROVIDING INFORMATION ON POVERTY

Effective policy making demands several resources and competencies, including specialist knowledge. In Ireland, specialist knowledge on poverty is generated in many different ways. These include national and local research by state organisations, third level academics and researchers and community and voluntary organisations. Consultations by policy-making bodies with people experiencing poverty or their representatives also inform the policy process. Poverty measurement in Ireland, to date, has relied heavily on the Living in Ireland Survey. This is a national household income survey undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute and forms part of the European Community Household Panel Survey.[5] From 2003, the EU Statistical Instrument on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) will be the new tool for collecting national poverty data and this will be implemented by the Central Statistics Office. Comprehensive data also contribute to assessing policy outcomes.

National survey data need to be complemented by data at local or regional level, on specific groups of people experiencing or at risk of poverty and on poverty related issues such as education, health and housing. At local level, for example, within local authorities and health

boards, there is a need to identify, gather and analyse data on the extent and nature of poverty, to support the implementation and monitoring of actions towards social inclusion. For groups experiencing poverty, data based on households omit the experiences of people in health care, people in institutional care, people who are homeless, Travellers and some asylum seekers. While valuable data are available, the relative paucity of social statistics is a challenge to policy making. A lack of data, outdated data or the irregularity of data collection may mean that we have an incomplete picture of poverty, those experiencing it and the impact of policy measures to prevent or reduce it.

This study was motivated by a concern to identify, explore and promote the potential of existing data sources and to assess their contribution to strengthening the framework for research to enhance policy action against poverty.

**Contribution of the guide**

This guide provides a comprehensive account of the potential of national statistical data and administrative records to provide additional information on poverty. It draws out principal sources of data, focusing in particular on national survey data, data from administrative records and area-based information. The study outlines a number of challenges with respect to accessing and using such data sources, namely the format of data, technical and human resource constraints, and ethical constraints and legal boundaries.

Particular attention is given to secondary data sources on:
- income poverty
- wealth and indebtedness
- unemployment and long-term unemployment
- educational disadvantage
- housing, accommodation and homelessness
- health
- drug misuse
- equality.

Attention is also given to groups at high risk of poverty:
- lone parents
- minority ethnic groups
- women, children and older people
- people with disabilities.

The guide concludes by highlighting some remaining poverty data gaps and possible measures towards addressing them.

## FURTHER WORK TO DEVELOP DATA SOURCES ON POVERTY

The *National Anti-Poverty Strategy* contains a commitment to develop a data and research strategy on poverty. The National Office for Social Inclusion will have the lead role here, assisted by a technical advisory group. The need for more comprehensive data on poverty forms part of a wider requirement for improved social data on, for example, equality, women, children, minority ethnic groups and general quality of life, which is being investigated by the Steering Group on Social and Equality Statistics under the auspices of the National Statistics Board and in association with the Department of the Taoiseach and the Central Statistics Office. This group is concerned with identifying ways of addressing existing gaps in social data and its work will involve, inter alia, the development of linkages across a range of administrative data systems. Its establishment represents an important development towards addressing the long-term deficit in the collection of data for social policy purposes and its work will build on the information presented here.

Combat Poverty will continue its efforts to develop data sources on poverty. It will in particular contribute to the NAPS data strategy, based on its statutory advisory function and research expertise.[6] Combat Poverty will consider further research on social indicators, including analyses of international approaches through participation in the EU Social Exclusion Programme and other policy exchanges.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 THE GUIDEBOOK

The aim of this guidebook is to look at some sources of secondary data that may be useful in poverty research. *Secondary data here refers to data that are collected for purposes other than research, but which may be of use in research. In the context of this report, secondary data sources on poverty also include data collected for research purposes other than poverty research, but which may shed light on various aspects of poverty.* The primary focus of this guidebook is on the administrative records of Government Departments, Local Authorities, statutory organisations and community and voluntary groups. Poverty research has drawn extensively on national data sources, including the Census of Population, the Quarterly National Household Survey, the Living in Ireland Survey and the Household Budget Survey and it is assumed that the reader will have some knowledge of such major data sources. These widely used sources are outlined later. However, this guidebook is also concerned with drawing attention to less well-known and often under-utilised sources that can yield information on poverty.

While a wide range of data sources is covered, the guidebook is not intended as an exhaustive list of sources of data or information on poverty. Such an undertaking would involve consideration of the data held by a substantial number and wide spectrum of organisations with an interest or remit in combating and/or analysing poverty.

In addition, this guidebook is primarily concerned with ongoing data collection, that is, data that are collected repeatedly over a period of time, thereby affording it the capacity to produce at least some temporal analysis. This is not intended to denigrate the many once-off research projects that have been undertaken by a very wide variety of organisations. These are essential in addressing some of the gaps in our knowledge of poverty and play a central role in areas such as highlighting new and emerging issues, identifying innovative practices

and ascertaining needs. To identify all such studies would involve an extensive literature review and is beyond both the scope and the ambition of this work.

It is important to recognise that numerous organisations carry out once-off research studies. Many of these organisations are dedicated to addressing the needs of specific groups, such as women, children, older people, Travellers and refugees in inner city or rural communities. Frequently, the value of such research lies in its specialised, and often local, nature. In carrying out research, it is important that such organisations are among the first points of contact, not only in respect of their own research and other work, but also because they are often a valuable source of expertise and information on data held and studies carried out by other relevant organisations.

## 1.2   POVERTY IN IRELAND

Despite rapid economic growth in Ireland in the past number of years, the reduction and ultimate elimination of poverty remains a challenge. While improvements have been seen in some areas such as child poverty, the proportion of households living on less than 40 or 50 per cent of average disposable income has not declined. The gap between the better off and the less well off has widened and the real incomes of people experiencing poverty continue to fall significantly behind the majority of society.[1]

Research has shown that particular groups have a higher than average risk of poverty. These include people parenting alone, people living alone (including older people), women, children (particularly those living in families with three or more children), unemployed people, ethnic minorities (including members of the Traveller Community, refugees and asylum seekers), people with disabilities or experiencing long-term ill health and homeless people.

Many of these groups are included in national surveys such as the Household Budget Survey, the Living in Ireland Survey and the Quarterly National Household Survey. However, inclusion in these surveys is dependent upon residence within a private household. Consequently, some groups, such as Travellers, homeless people and those residing in institutions (including some asylum seekers and refugees as well as a number of those with disabilities and long-term illness) are not included at all in these surveys or are included in such small numbers that detailed analysis of their situation is not possible. In such instances, sources other than national surveys will assist in filling in some of the gaps in our knowledge.

## 1.3   THE POLICY CONTEXT

In 1997, Ireland adopted a ten-year National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). The NAPS defines poverty as follows:

> *People are living in poverty, if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society.*[2]

Although low income is the most widely used measure to define poverty, it is of significance that the NAPS definition goes beyond inadequate income and basic needs. Instead, the definition used in the NAPS clearly recognises that exclusion from the normal living standards of society due to lack of resources is a key component of poverty. Normal living standards here are seen as access to goods and services, which include both private consumer goods like food and clothing, and publicly-provided services such as education and health, as well as participation in economic, social and cultural life. Despite this wider focus, much of the public and policy debate on the extent of poverty in Ireland has concentrated on income poverty. Because of this there has been a relative neglect in such debates of other dimensions of poverty and need.

The five key themes of the original NAPS were chosen after lengthy consultations with, and receipt of submissions from, a wide range of organisations and individuals. These key themes were educational disadvantage, income inadequacy, unemployment, urban disadvantage and rural poverty. Specific targets for the reduction of consistent poverty,[3] the reduction of unemployment and particularly long-term unemployment, the reduction of early school leaving and illiteracy among children, and increasing social welfare incomes were also included. Following from a commitment in the current national agreement, the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (PPF)[4], the NAPS was reviewed in 2001. The revised NAPS now has updated targets in relation to income inadequacy, educational disadvantage, unemployment and urban and rural poverty. It also contains new targets on the additional themes of housing/accommodation and health, as well as new associated targets and actions related to child poverty, women's poverty, older people and ethnic minorities.[5]

In recent years, however, a number of changes in the policy context have brought about an increasing interest at national and local level in developing social indicators, setting measurable targets and benchmarking progress. The ongoing development of the NAPS and the inclusion of a social chapter in the national agreements have stimulated and contributed to this interest. In addition, the inclusion of new targets and monitoring procedures in the revised NAPS, the roll-out of NAPS to Local Authorities and the subsequent development of local anti-poverty strategies, as well as the further refinement of poverty proofing, all signal renewed and wider interest in this area. In addition, the need to monitor and evaluate our performance against the EU National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion, known as the EU NAPincl, has further reinforced this interest in measurement and data.[6] In pursuing work on common measurement approaches and compatibility in the development of indicators of poverty and social exclusion, the EU Social Protection Committee has issued an agreed set of primary and secondary indicators that require specific data.[7] The Employment Equality Act, 1998, the Equal Status Act, 2000 and the establishment of the Equality Authority have focused attention on monitoring policies and provisions in respect of the nine grounds on which discrimination is now prohibited. These grounds – gender, age, family status, marital status, religion, sexual orientation, membership of the Traveller Community, disability and race – overlap considerably with poverty concerns. All of these processes can be seen to have at least one factor in common, that is, the need for appropriate data on which to base policy decisions and monitor and evaluate progress.

## 1.4   THE ROLE OF DATA

There is now little challenge to the idea that good policy requires good information, and that good information can and has influenced and informed policy and provision. For example, the NAPS is informed by a number of data sources, but in particular the Living in Ireland Survey (LIS) undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on behalf of Eurostat.[8] Assessing the scale, nature and depth of poverty, setting targets for its reduction and monitoring progress all depend critically on access to appropriate, comprehensive and timely data. The need for such data has been highlighted in a number of policy documents including the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* and the revised NAPS which includes a commitment to develop a data strategy to support its

implementation.[9] A cornerstone of this data strategy is the new EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), which will replace the LIS in 2002 as the primary survey on which the NAPS is based (see section 2.3.3 below).

Although primary research, including surveys and censuses, is invaluable in contributing to our knowledge and understanding of poverty and in the generation of a sound basis for anti-poverty policy, such research also has limitations. Central among these are costs, which almost invariably tend to be high, and timeliness, given the resources needed to gather, clean and analyse raw or primary data.

In as much as primary research has a central role to play in poverty research, so too do secondary data sources. As stated above, secondary data are defined here as data collected for a primary purpose other than research, or other than poverty related research. Most frequently, the primary purpose of these data is the planning, administration and management of services. Attendant to this is the requirement of such data for reasons of financial management and budget allocations.

Many public bodies, voluntary organisations and community groups work with people who are poor. The administrative records of these organisations offer a potentially rich source of information on different aspects of poverty. For example, community and voluntary organisations and statutory bodies dealing with asylum seekers hold a diverse range of information relevant to the living standards of this particular group. Where available in a format that preserves client anonymity and confidentiality, the caseload and case mix of agencies involved in direct service provision can offer an early warning system on emerging problems of poverty. The administrative records of the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA)[10] are an important latent source of information on issues such as the geographical distribution, age and family profile, and benefit history of claimants. This guidebook highlights a number of such secondary data sources and looks at their potential for the identification and analysis of poverty.

## 1.5  THE ROLE OF THE COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY

The Combat Poverty Agency works to promote a more just and inclusive society by working for the prevention and elimination of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland. Combat Poverty advises the Minister for Social and Family Affairs on policy relating to poverty, initiates measures aimed at overcoming poverty, promotes, commissions and interprets poverty-

related research and promotes greater understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty through information and awareness-raising activities.[11]

While Combat Poverty does not in itself hold administrative records for the study of poverty, it has a clear role in commissioning poverty-related research, supporting poverty research by others and conducting secondary analysis. Under its research programme, Combat Poverty has commissioned and published an array of research studies on various aspects of poverty. Some of these studies have involved the creation of new data, both qualitative and quantitative, while others have been based on existing data sources.

In the past number of years, Combat Poverty has commissioned a number of studies based on the Living in Ireland Survey (see section 2.3.3 below). Combat Poverty supports research by others in a number of ways, including providing funding for poverty-related research through its grants scheme, its Fellowship Awards which support doctoral students, and its ongoing programmes of work in supporting the roll-out of the NAPS to Local Authorities. Publications such as this one also aim to support poverty-related research. In addition, Combat Poverty conducts analyses on existing datasets, not least in producing its pre-budget submissions and post-Budget analyses.[12]

## 1.6 STUDY METHODS

The study team employed a number of methods in identifying and reviewing the wide range of materials and information on which this guidebook is based. These methods included a literature review, the examination of the types of records held by public bodies as identified in their Guides to Records prepared under section 15 of the Freedom of Information Act, 1997 (see section 3.3 below), interviews with key information holders and postal surveys of Health Boards, Local Authorities, Area-Based Partnerships and community and voluntary organisations.

### 1.6.1 Literature Review

A wide range of published research on poverty was reviewed including the annual reports, research and statistical publications of Government Departments and public bodies such as the Revenue Commissioners and Health Boards, as well as those of voluntary organisations and community groups.

### 1.6.2    Interviews

On-site interviews were conducted with major administrative data holders such as the DSFA, the Department of Health and Children (DHC), the Eastern Health Board, and two of the larger local authorities, Dublin Corporation (now Dublin City Council) and Cork Corporation. Meetings were held with the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to discuss their survey data. A meeting was also held with the former Data Protection Commissioner. Umbrella bodies such as Area Development Management Ltd (ADM), which is the umbrella organisation for Area-Based Partnerships, and Comhairle, the umbrella organisation for Citizen's Information Centres, were contacted and interviewed by telephone.

### 1.6.3    Freedom of Information Section 15 Guides

All Government Departments and a growing number of public bodies are covered by the terms of the Freedom of Information Act, 1997 (see section 3.3). All such Departments and organisations are required to produce a guide, known as a Section 15 Guide, to their records every three years. These guides provide details of the information and records held. They were examined and those records that could be of relevance in studying poverty were identified. The key record holders in the relevant public bodies were telephoned to clarify the type of data available, how they are stored and conditions of access to them.

### 1.6.4    Postal Surveys

The study team explored two particular poverty related issues – local authority housing and possession of a medical card – via a postal survey of the relevant public bodies. Local authority tenants have a particularly high risk of poverty[13] and a postal survey of local authorities with significant rented housing stock was conducted to identify the kind of records they keep in relation to local authority tenants, including their incomes and housing and estate conditions. Twenty-five of the thirty-five local authorities contacted responded to the survey. A postal survey of Health Boards relating to records held on medical cardholders was also conducted and a 100 per cent response rate was achieved.

Finally, a postal survey was conducted of a number of community and voluntary organisations, bodies funded under the Community Development Programme of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA) and Area-Based Partnerships.

## 1.7  STRUCTURE OF THE GUIDE

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the principal sources of information on poverty in Ireland. It looks briefly at the main national surveys before moving on to identify the main alternative sources of data that may yield relevant information on poverty. Chapter 3 outlines some of the issues with regard to accessing such secondary sources, including the format in which such records are held, technical and human resource limitations and legislation relating to access to and use of data. Chapter 4 presents more detailed information on potential sources of data on a range of poverty issues and finally, Chapter 5 identifies some of the more significant data gaps that remain.

## CHAPTER 2

# PRINCIPAL SOURCES OF DATA ON POVERTY

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter starts by looking briefly at the Census of Population and the major national surveys from which much poverty-related data are drawn. However, as these sources are relatively well known and widely used in poverty research it is not intended to dwell on them at length. The chapter moves on to identify the main types of administrative records held by statutory, community and voluntary organisations as well as sources of area-based information that may yield data on poverty. The detail of these sources in respect of particular aspects of poverty is covered in Chapter 4.

## 2.2 THE CENSUS OF POPULATION

The Census of Population is designed to include every individual resident in the State on Census night. Census data, generally available on a five-yearly basis,[1] provide information on characteristics such as age, education, occupation, employment status and household structure. Housing information is usually collected at ten-yearly intervals. The detailed housing questions were included in Census 2002.

Following a pilot test in September 1999, the Government agreed to include a number of new questions in Census 2002, some of which will be useful in examining poverty, disadvantage and quality of life. These include questions on personal computer (PC) ownership and access to the Internet, membership of the Traveller Community, time of leaving home for school or work, the provision of unpaid help for a friend or family member, nationality, disability (two questions), third-level qualifications held and labour market participation according to International Labour Office (ILO) classifications. A question on income was included in the pilot exercise but was found to have a significant negative effect on response rates. For this reason, an income question was not included in Census 2002.

The Census is one of the principal sources of data for all national and regional planning and has a number of particular advantages for poverty research. It attempts to capture all persons in the State on Census night, including those in institutions, people who are homeless and members of the Traveller Community. These are frequently missed by, or under-represented in, surveys. The Census also allows for small area analysis on the basis of the 3,400 District Electoral Divisions (DEDs) that go to make up the State. Analysis across a range of socio-economic characteristics is possible using the Census that is not possible in surveys due to their limited size. On the negative side, there have been considerable time delays in the release of information from the Census. However, for the first time, Census 2002 forms will be scanned into computers rather than manually entered as before. This is expected to decrease the time-lag between data collection and release of collated information. In addition to time delays, the Census does not collect information on income with the result that income poverty measurement and poverty rates cannot be calculated from the Census.

The CSO, which is responsible for the Census, published preliminary results from Census 2002 in July 2002 and anticipates that full results will be available in October 2003. Summary statistics are posted on the CSO central website (www.cso.ie). In addition to publications, some of the Census data will also be made available on the CSO's Eirestat website.[2] Further to this, the CSO will carry out special analyses requested by individuals or organisations for a fee. This fee is based on the amount of time involved in computing the analysis.

## 2.3 NATIONAL SURVEYS

### 2.3.1 The Quarterly National Household Survey

As its name suggests, this national survey is conducted on a quarterly basis by the CSO. Beginning in September 1997, the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) replaced the annual Labour Force Survey. The QNHS is a continuous survey and collects information from 3,000 households each week, giving a total sample of 39,000 households in each quarter. Households are asked to participate for five quarters, after which they are replaced by a new selection of households. Data are collected by interviewers and are entered directly onto laptop computers.

The principal purpose of the QNHS is to collect up-to-date information on the labour force for people aged 15 years and over. As labour force

status has a close relationship with the experience of poverty, the importance of the QNHS to poverty research is evident. Both Principal Economic Status (PES) and the International Labour Office (ILO) classifications of the labour force are used.[3] The importance of these is that the PES classification allows for Irish figures to be compared over time, while the ILO analysis allows for international comparisons. In the QNHS much of the data are broken down by gender and region. The fact that the survey is carried out on a quarterly rather than annual basis, and also that the time-lag between collection and publication is reduced to approximately three months due to computerised data collection, gives the QNHS the particular advantage of producing timely information.

An additional advantage of the QNHS is that it allows for the occasional collection of information on a range of supplementary issues. For example, the survey has already carried modules on housing and households, family structure, home computing, recycling, commuting, health, disability, and crime and victimisation. These modules are important in signalling potentially important issues and repeat modules can subsequently be carried out at a later date. Due to priority being given to the provision of the main QNHS results, the publication of the results of the modules follows the main labour force results. Some of the main categorical variables from the core QNHS are included on the modules file which makes it possible to analyse the data across households with various labour force and socio-demographic characteristics. However, the QNHS does not collect information on income and therefore poverty rates cannot be calculated from this source.

Results from both the main QNHS and specific modules are available from the CSO and are posted on their website (www.cso.ie). The CSO will provide specific data from the survey on request and almost all of the data are posted on the Eirestat website. Microdata files for specific quarters can also be accessed through the Irish Social Science Data Archive (see section 2.3.4 below).

### 2.3.2 The Household Budget Survey

The Household Budget Survey (HBS) is based on a nationally representative random sample of approximately 8,000 private households and collects detailed income and expenditure data along with information on sources of income and household facilities. The primary purpose of this survey is to calculate the expenditure weights used in the Consumer Price Index. Previously conducted on a seven-year cycle, the HBS is now to be carried

out every five years. The last HBS was carried out between June 1999 and July 2000. Provisional results from this most recent survey were released in October 2001 and full results are expected to be made available in August/September 2002.

The relatively large sample size of the HBS allows relationships between income and expenditure to be explored. Conducted on a rolling fortnightly basis throughout the year, data are collected through individual and household questionnaires and an expenditure diary is kept by household members for a two-week period. The HBS also collects information on themes such as welfare income, household tenure and possession of a medical card. This information has been used alongside income data to calculate how tax, welfare and state services redistribute income and resources.[4]

While the HBS is a rich source of data on incomes and household spending patterns, the main disadvantage of this source is the five-year intervals between surveys. The anonymised microdata available to researchers is 'top-coded', that is, the full range of values is not used in relation to the highest incomes. This can affect the calculation of the mean which is used to achieve average income.[5] However, in relation to published results from the HBS 'top coding' is not an issue and data on the mean incomes etc are inclusive of the full range of income values captured.[6]

As with the majority of CSO statistical publications, summary statistics will be available at www.cso.ie. Requests for specific data are accepted by the CSO.

### 2.3.3    The Living in Ireland Survey
The main source of data used in poverty research has been that collected by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) through national household surveys. In 1987, the ESRI conducted its Survey on Income Distribution, Poverty and Usage of State Services. This has been widely used as a baseline for more recent studies, and in particular for the annual Living in Ireland Survey (LIS). The LIS is part of the EU's Community Household Panel Survey (ECHP), with the same households surveyed in successive years since 1994. The LIS uses standard, internationally agreed questions determined by Eurostat, with additional questions of national interest added by the ESRI team.

These surveys were designed to collect detailed information on income distribution. With a household questionnaire and individual questionnaires for household members aged over 16, data can be analysed at the level

of the individual, the tax unit or the household. Because of the longitudinal nature of the LIS, movements into and out of poverty over time can be tracked. With common questions and a common format in participating countries, inter-country comparisons are possible. In addition, using the income data, income poverty lines have been developed and these have allowed comparisons in poverty risk and distribution over time and between countries. Furthermore, the ESRI has developed a consistent poverty measure combining income poverty lines with a deprivation index, which comprises enforced lack of certain basic items.[7]

However, the sample size places a limit on the degree of analysis possible, such as by smaller geographic area or particular welfare dependent groups. There is attrition (that is, drop out of respondents) in the sample over time, with only 67 per cent of the original 4,000 survey households from 1994 still participating in 1998.[8] The time-lag from collection of data to final processing takes approximately 12 to 15 months, given the human resources required to enter, clean and prepare the data for analysis. This means that the timeliness of the availability of results has been an important issue.

A significant product of the LIS has been the development by the ESRI of a micro-simulation model known as SWITCH (Social Welfare and Income Tax Changes). This is constructed from the microdata on individuals and households from the LIS and is updated regularly to take account of changes in tax and welfare rules, or underlying demographic trends.[9] The model is in use by a number of organisations, including Combat Poverty, the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Department of Finance. The ESRI can be requested to run specific simulations for other organisations but, due to limited human resources, may not always be in a position to meet these.

In addition to providing data for monitoring progress towards the NAPS targets, the LIS has given rise to an extensive array of once-off research papers and reports on various aspects of poverty. Many of these have been commissioned by Government Departments, statutory agencies and community and voluntary organisations. Not least among these has been Combat Poverty, which has pursued a comprehensive research programme based on the LIS over the past number of years. Work based on the LIS has been commissioned by Combat Poverty on areas such as income distribution, the spatial distribution of poverty, women's poverty, child poverty, cumulative disadvantage and the dynamics of unemployment.[10] Whilst these are once-off studies, the longitudinal nature of the LIS has provided a temporal analysis.

The last LIS was conducted in 2001 and results from this are expected in late 2002/early 2003. It will be replaced by 'EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions' (EU-SILC) for which the CSO will be responsible. The focus of the EU-SILC, which was piloted in July/August 2002, will be on meeting the data needs of the EU as well as national needs and priorities. However, the CSO has made a commitment to the inclusion of additional questions of national interest, including questions which will allow calculation of deprivation indicators. The manner and timescale in which the analysis of these data will be carried out is not yet known.

### 2.3.4    The Irish Social Science Data Archive

In the context of secondary analysis of the Census and national surveys, an important recent development is the creation of the Irish Social Science Data Archive (ISSDA). Launched in autumn 2001, the ISSDA is managed jointly by University College Dublin's new Institute for the Study of Social Change and the ESRI, with the collaboration and support of the CSO. The ISSDA will hold, process and harmonise machine-readable data from a number of national surveys (including the QNHS, the HBS and the LIS), the Census, geographical data bases, election results etc., and make them readily available to users in the academic, public and commercial sectors.[11] At present, the Archive holds Irish data from CSO datasets, such as the QNHS, the HBS 1994 and the Labour Force Survey 1994-1997, along with international data from the Eurobarometer and European Values Survey. The Archive also holds data from the ECHP for 1994-1998, including the data for Ireland.

Data from the Irish Social Science Data Archive are accessible as File Transfer Protocol (FTP) download or on CD-ROM.[12] Access varies according to the type of data and some datasets will have restrictions. CSO datasets, for example, are only available for non-commercial social science research. Some will also have costs attached. For instance, a fee of between €125 and €400 applies to the ECHP data, depending on the particular dataset required.

In making datasets available more systematically to a wider group of researchers, the ISSDA will facilitate more comprehensive analysis of data collections by allowing more people to work on any particular dataset. Experience elsewhere suggests that once the data archive is up and running, and the confidence of the research community has been established, the pace of deposit of survey information will increase.

## 2.4    ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS

Administrative records are those that are collected by Government Departments, Local Authorities, and statutory, community, voluntary and private organisations and agencies in their day-to-day work. Unlike the Census or purposely designed surveys, administrative records are primarily collected with the operation of the organisation in mind, rather than further research or analysis. Here we briefly examine the strengths and weaknesses of the administrative records of statutory agencies and voluntary and community organisations.

### 2.4.1    Statutory Agencies

People who experience poverty are likely to face problems in a number of areas of their lives and come into contact with a range of Government Departments and State services. The administrative records held in relation to issues such as social welfare payments, medical card applications, local authority housing, and job-seeking contain information about the lives of people living on a low income and their families, as collected in the process of establishing eligibility for social services. While ensuring client anonymity, these records have the potential to deepen our understanding of the experience of, and pathways into and out of, poverty.

Because poverty is multi-dimensional, the administrative records of a wide range of Departments and State agencies may yield useful information. These include the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA), the Department of Health and Children (DHC), the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR), the Department of the Environment and Local Government (DELG) and the Department of Education and Science (DES), as well as the Health Boards and Local and Regional Authorities. Individual Departments and agencies draw to a limited extent on their own administrative data to prepare regular statistical reports. For example, the DSFA, the DHC and the DES each publish an annual statistical report, and there are quarterly bulletins of housing statistics compiled by the DELG.

The 1993 Statistics Act gave a mandate to the CSO to compile, extract and disseminate statistics from administrative records held by public authorities.[13] In its Strategy for Statistics 1998-2002 the National Statistics Board (NSB)[14] identified 'greater emphasis on co-ordination and exploitation of these sources' as a strategic goal.[15] To address existing gaps in the social data, the NSB recently proposed that a framework for social statistics be developed which would support policy formulation

across a range of key social concerns in Ireland.[16] A Steering Group on Social and Equality Statistics[17] has been established as a first step in this direction. The overall objective of this Group is to improve our capacity to produce statistics along the lines of those produced in other countries (e.g. the Social Report for New Zealand). This will involve, inter alia, the development of linkages across a range of administrative data systems.

The work of the Steering Group is being assisted by two sub-groups which were themselves established to progress work simultaneously in the areas of policy and data. The first group has responsibility for undertaking an *audit of data needs in government departments and agencies*. This includes developing a comprehensive picture of current data needs across all relevant domains,[18] anticipating emerging future needs in the medium to longer terms, and establishing data priorities. The second group is concerned with undertaking an *audit of data sources in government departments and agencies* which involves identifying all statistical surveys in the social domain and all relevant administrative sources. The group will also be providing a systematic overview of each source of information available and examining the potential for improving each source. The Steering Group will conclude its work with recommendations to address the information gaps.

## 2.4.2  Voluntary Agencies and Community Groups

The client records of voluntary agencies, advice services and community groups working on the ground with people experiencing poverty and exclusion offer important insights into various aspects of poverty. Such records may yield focused quantitative and qualitative information[19] on small groups who can otherwise be difficult to identify. They can also be a useful source of information on people who are missed by household-based surveys, such as people who are homeless, drug users or those working in the sex industry. Voluntary sector records can be particularly useful sources of qualitative information such as case studies of individuals or descriptive material on multiple facets of poverty.

While information from national surveys or administrative records of State agencies and departments is generally either representative or comprehensive, the records of community and voluntary agencies usually reflect customer-initiated contacts. These do not give a random or a necessarily representative sample of the group in question or of social service users as a whole. Records are based only on clients who use the particular agency or service. For example, the 1999 Assessment of

Homelessness in Dublin showed that about half of homeless people had not been in contact with any of the various homeless services in the city, and that service users and non-users had quite different profiles.[20] Even where service coverage is good, there may be poor take-up if people do not know about the service or are reluctant to look for help. Community and voluntary services may only succeed in reaching a fraction of their target population for a variety of reasons, including resource constraints, limited geographical cover and/or limited opening hours.[21]

However, despite these caveats, information and trends from local or specialist voluntary organisations are valuable not only in complementing information available from other sources but also in providing an early warning system on emerging poverty issues. In addition, it is worth noting that many local community and voluntary groups have completed their own area or community profiles that may prove useful starting points in looking at particular localities.

Given the size and variety of the voluntary and community sector, a good place to start if looking for particular information is the National Database of Research on the Voluntary Sector. This is maintained by the Department of Library and Information Studies at UCD. First compiled in 1996/7, the database contains details of research on and within the voluntary sector dating back to 1986.[22]

## 2.5  AREA-BASED INFORMATION

With the reform of local government in Ireland and the extension of NAPS to Local Authorities, there is now a growing interest in, and need for, local area-based information on poverty and social exclusion. Here, three potential sources of local area-based information are briefly examined.

### 2.5.1  Local Authorities

Public housing and homelessness are the primary areas in which Local Authorities hold poverty-related administrative records and data. Data on these areas are further discussed in Chapter 4. However, with the reform of local government and the roll-out of NAPS to the Local Authorities, their data needs and their role in data collection and compilation are changing. All Local Authority areas now have a Director of Community and Enterprise, a County Enterprise Board, and a City/County Development Board; some Local Authorities also have Social Inclusion Units.

Each City/County Development Board was required to draw up a County/City Strategy for economic, social and cultural development by

2002. This was to be primarily based on local information from a range of sources and include data in respect of excluded and disadvantaged groups. As there was a broad common framework for the City/County Strategies, some comparison across Local Authority areas will be possible.

Tackling local poverty issues now falls clearly within the remit of local government. In seeking to enhance the capacity of Local Authorities in meeting this responsibility, the DELG allocated resources for the establishment of pilot Social Inclusion Units in nine Local Authorities in 2001. These Units are also supported by Combat Poverty and the NAPS Unit[23] in the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The number of these units may be increased on foot of the experience of this pilot phase. The specific role of these Units in identifying, collating and generating local poverty-related data will emerge and develop over the coming years.

The Local Authorities are operating within the same data restrictions as all researchers. The process involved in developing the City/County Strategies has highlighted both the lack of, and need for, local and county level data. Few national surveys are of sufficient size to allow for detailed spatial analysis. The Census is the main source of data and the Census-based Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS)[24] remain the principal basis for local planning. However, the five-year gap between each Census presents Local Authorities and others involved in local planning, policy making and service provision with significant challenges. It is in such circumstances that secondary data generated at county, DED, street and other local levels may be of particular importance. It is worth noting that the City/County Strategies identify the lack of up-to-date poverty-related data available at the local level.

### 2.5.2   Area-Based Partnerships

The 38 Area-Based Partnerships have a mandate to tackle disadvantage on a local basis in specifically designated geographical areas.[25] Area profiles based on the 1996 SAPS are available for each Area-Based Partnership. These reports, which exist in a common format, were commissioned by Area Development Management (ADM) Ltd,[26] and were compiled by a consultancy firm called Gamma.[27] These reports present information at District Electoral Division, Partnership, county/region and national level. They offer useful and accessible profiles of Partnership areas and comparisons of indicators such as unemployment, social class, age of completed education and incidence of single parenthood for the Partnership area and national averages.

All Area-Based Partnerships have carried out individual pieces of research on issues relevant or important to their own communities. For example, Ballyfermot Partnership has conducted research on unemployment and the Clondalkin Partnership has conducted research on school absenteeism.[28] Such research offers a rich source of information on issues of poverty within individual areas and on aspects that may be common to a number of communities, although most of this is on a once-off basis.

In 2002 Area Development Management (ADM) Ltd is launching a new electronic monitoring and management system called SCOPE (System for Co-Ordinated Programme Evaluation) for use by the Partnerships. SCOPE will require each Area-Based Partnership to record standard information on its clients including, where relevant, information on socio-economic characteristics such as gender, age, target group, employment status and education. This information will be returned electronically to ADM Ltd where it will be compiled to give a national picture. Within the confines of the relevant legislation (see Chapter 3), the Area-Based Partnerships may each choose the level of access they wish to grant to external researchers. When the system is fully operational, ADM Ltd will, when possible, provide statistical information to external researchers and agencies on request.

### 2.5.3 Comhairle – Citizen's Information Centres

Comhairle is the umbrella body for 85 local Citizen's Information Centres (CICs) nationwide. These CICs provide information to anyone who contacts them on a wide range of issues. While the users of CICs are not necessarily living in poverty, records in relation to issues raised suggest that a substantial proportion of them are experiencing disadvantage or exclusion.

Comhairle has developed an electronic query management and social policy recording database. The query system contains client information under headings such as age, gender, family circumstances, nationality, housing circumstances and source of income (detailing any social welfare payment received). The Social Policy Logging Database records the category of the query, for example health, social welfare, education, employment, disability or housing, and classifies the problems of public service clients under various headings such as inaccurate or incomplete information, anomalies/inconsistencies in delivery of services, delays in the application process and discrepancy between schemes as described

and schemes in practice. Details of age and gender are recorded if relevant to the query. This database is in turn used to generate policy reports and submissions on issues identified by the network of CICs.[29]

These reports clearly identify the particular issues of importance within and across CICs. Currently only data from the CIC network are collected, but Comhairle intends to expand this system to other voluntary bodies. If the query management system was to be used across a wide range of voluntary organisations, drawing together information from client records of individual voluntary bodies would clearly be simplified. Social policy and annual query returns, along with analytical reports on returns and submissions, are published on the Comhairle website.[30]

## 2.6   CONCLUSION

This chapter has looked briefly at some of the main sources of data on poverty. While covering the Census of Population and the principal national surveys, the chapter has also looked at some less well-known sources of poverty-related information, and specifically administrative records, including those relevant to local area-based analysis. Administrative records of State and community and voluntary organisations offer a potential source of data on issues relating to poverty and exclusion. However, none of these sources is of use if they are not accessible. Broad issues in respect of access are examined in the next chapter.

# ACCESSING DATA

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Having identified potential sources of secondary data on poverty, a number of issues arise in accessing and using such data sources. Primary among these are the format in which data are held, technical and human resource constraints, and ethical considerations and legal boundaries.

## 3.2 THE FORMAT OF DATA

There is a great deal of latent information of potential relevance to the study and analysis of poverty. In practical terms, access to such information may be restricted by the format in which it is held. Data are held in either paper or electronic form and are either textual, numerical or a combination of both. By-and-large, most correspondence and formal reports are now typed on a word processor, but records such as case notes relating to individuals made by staff (for example, public health nurses, doctors or social workers) are still mainly handwritten. Access to such personal case history material is almost invariably restricted by law and confidentiality concerns arise. Where material in text format (either handwritten or on computer) is open to research access on an anonymised basis, its processing and analysis is intrinsically much more time-consuming than material in statistical format.

The maintenance of Local Authority housing records illustrates the mix of manual and computerised records. Certain Local Authorities, largely those with fewer tenants such as Bray, Clare and Dundalk, have primarily manual record systems and in most Local Authorities transfer applications and applications to buy are frequently handled manually. Information on the condition of the rented housing stock is also mainly kept in manual reports from which it would have to be extracted and collated. However, a considerable number of Local Authorities now have computerised tenant records and while the contents of these vary, all such computerised systems record tenant income, family size and rent. The situation is further

complicated by the fact that while many Local Authorities use the Local Government Computer Services Board (LGCSB) system,[1] others use in-house systems or commercial software packages.

Accessibility is also affected by the layout of administrative records. Because the administrative records of statutory and voluntary agencies are primarily designed to meet the organisation's own needs, they are not necessarily laid out in the ideal format or under appropriate headings for research purposes. While researchers or others wishing to access data for information or policy purposes may be interested in combining information under several headings about particular individuals, households or communities, this information may be organised in very different ways for administrative reasons. In addition, data may be held in different formats by individual sections of an organisation. This problem is multiplied when trying to compile information on the same group or issue across several organisations.

## 3.3 TECHNICAL AND HUMAN RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS

In principle, it is easier to grant and obtain access to statistical information than to textual records. However, in some cases, when in-house computer systems are used to store information, the format in which the information is held may make it difficult to extract data in a way that makes them suitable for research and similar purposes. For example, all Health Boards computerise their medical card records and, with the exception of the South-Eastern Health Board, record information under a number of categories corresponding to income, family circumstances and other issues taken into account in the means test for the medical card. Taking the example of Local Authority housing records again, these are usually organised into a number of different and separate record systems, including a system for recording rent payments, one for housing allocations and another for condition of the housing stock, and this information is usually held separately by different sections of any given Local Authority. Compiling data across Authorities is even more fraught. These examples show that, unless there is an appropriate system design, computerisation does not necessarily facilitate easy analysis of the information held. This is primarily because computer systems are designed to facilitate administrative tasks and controls, and are not always compatible with research and policy purposes.

While some organisations keep records on widely used commercial computer packages such as dBase or Excel, many of the large State

organisations hold information on complex databases which have been specially designed for them. In such cases it is probably more efficient to have data retrieved by internal staff familiar with those systems than by outside researchers. While most agencies are readily prepared to carry out simple analyses of their data for researchers, more complex analyses would require them to commit additional staff resources to the task.

The problems from the data holder's perspective are well illustrated by considering the largest set of computerised administrative records, those of the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The DSFA's computerised records are maintained on four main in-house systems (see Chapter 4 below for further details). These databases are not easily used or manipulated by outside researchers and specific information requests must therefore be handled by internal staff. However, the Department's priority is to ensure that timely and accurate payments are issued to welfare recipients. It is this concern, rather than research requirements, that is the first priority for the relatively small number of Information Technology (IT) staff employed. Other practical concerns, such as preparing and managing the introduction of the Euro, were among the priorities of the IT division during 2000, 2001 and into 2002. These internal priorities, as well as the high turnover of IT staff in the Department (which reflects the high demand in the economy for those skills) has restricted the Department's capacity to assign IT staff to research and away from the core functions of ensuring that payments are issued on time and maintaining the databases.

The limited availability of IT and research personnel to analyse data is one of the main obstacles to using administrative records as resources for research on poverty. This is the case across most Government Departments and agencies. Even among specialist organisations, such as the CSO and the ESRI, lack of specialist staff time is the main constraint on fuller analysis and timely publication of statistical material already collected.

## 3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND LEGAL BOUNDARIES

There are a number of ethical issues that need to be taken into consideration when accessing certain types of information. These relate not only to those who have responsibility for holding and/or releasing the information, but also to those on whom the information is based. It is critical that those involved in the collection and analysis of information on poverty conform to ethical guidelines that protect people's rights to

confidentiality or anonymity. This involves achieving a balance between the generation of knowledge, on the one hand, and the protection of people's privacy, on the other.[2] There are two principal Acts determining the legislative boundaries on access to data and their use which lend support to the development and application of research ethics. These are the Data Protection Act, 1988 and the Freedom of Information Act, 1997.

### 3.4.1    Data Protection Act, 1988

This Act protects computerised records on individuals, whether held by public bodies, voluntary organisations or private companies. It places restrictions on the use of computerised data on individuals for purposes other than that for which the data were collected, therefore making it highly relevant to the use of administrative data for research purposes.

Because the focus of the Data Protection Act is primarily on individual privacy, confidentiality and the prevention of unwarranted use of computerised data, it can serve to place restrictions on the conduct of research. For very many of the organisations who hold poverty-related data but for which research is not a priority, neither the resources nor the necessary skills are available to remove all identifying information from their records in order to create anonymised datasets for use by external researchers.

Few problems may be expected where anonymised data can be provided to external researchers. In cases where an organisation cannot anonymise its records, an outside researcher is only allowed access to prepare an anonymous data file under a formal contract. This contract appoints the researcher as an agent of the organisation for the purpose of selecting and preparing an anonymised data file for use in further research. If the researcher creates anonymised data files through this mechanism, these files are outside the remit of the Data Protection Act and can be used for research purposes.[3]

### 3.4.2    The Freedom of Information Act, 1997

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, 1997 confers a legal right on members of the public to access records held by a public body prescribed under the Act. Prescribed bodies include government departments, health boards, voluntary hospitals, local authorities, publicly funded bodies providing services to persons with a disability, certain state agencies and third-level education institutions.[4] FOI facilitates research based on official data or documents held by such bodies where previously access to relevant records and statistics might not have been provided.

Access under the Act is open to anyone, not just accredited researchers or those who are approved by a public agency. This enhances the capacity of non-governmental bodies and individuals to conduct research on aspects of poverty and, by placing public records in the public domain, makes public policies more accountable to the groups or communities who are the subject of these policies. For example, people with disabilities can access records about policy and funding choices which have been made on disability, or residents of disadvantaged neighbourhoods can check on official plans and proposals to regenerate their communities. Delays in addressing crisis problems can be tracked through official papers. Campaigning groups can assess the scale of public interventions to tackle disadvantage relative to official estimates of total need. Such information is often critical in poverty research.

There are, however, very many public records and identifying those of relevance and use to poverty-related research could be very time-consuming. Under Section 15 of the FOI Act, public bodies are required to publish a guide to their structures, organisation and classes of records held and to update these every three years. Known as Section 15 Manuals, these provide a useful profile of the kind of information held in Government Departments and public bodies and allow for easier identification of information which could bring light to bear on poverty trends and issues.

The FOI Act gives access rights to information held in manual and electronic form. Access is normally given in the form sought by the requester and the information provided can be given as a data file or spreadsheet, which would facilitate further statistical processing of the information concerned. As with the Data Protection Act, FOI protects personal privacy and limits the right of access to certain kinds of information which would identify individuals and breach privacy or confidentiality. Personal records of individuals, such as case notes, will generally not be available for research under the Act.

Importantly for research purposes, there is an indirect right of access to records of non-governmental organisations providing services under contract to a Department. Under this provision, for example, the raw data from completed research work undertaken by external consultants may be requested under the Act via the commissioning public body.

## 3.5 CONCLUSION

The identification of appropriate secondary data sources for poverty research is only the first step in secondary data analysis. Gaining access

to these data in a user-friendly format and timely manner is of central importance. The ease with which this is achieved will be heavily dependent on the technical skill and human resources of both the supplier of the data and the researcher and individual seeking the information. In addition, the right of individuals to confidentially must be respected and is covered by both the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act. However, this legislation also allows for the wider availability of anonymised personal and non-personal information. This latter point is of significance as it allows for information relating to the formation and implementation of policy, including policies in relation to combating poverty, to be examined and analysed.

# SOURCES OF SECONDARY DATA ON ASPECTS OF POVERTY

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, secondary data sources in relation to various aspects of poverty are outlined. There is an uneven distribution of data on these issues, with several sources being available in some areas and few in others. It should be remembered that this guidebook is not seeking to provide a definitive list of data sources on every conceivable aspect of poverty. Instead, the following is intended to provide some signposts to secondary sources of data on poverty and highlight their usefulness and some of their limitations.

## 4.2 INCOME POVERTY

While providing many useful sources of information, administrative records relating to income have limitations. Administrative records on income held by various Government Departments and agencies may have different functions, be based on different definitions of poverty, ask different questions and therefore suggest different answers. Broadly, however, such administrative records relate either to the income provided by the State under various payments and programmes, the income used to assess eligibility for such payments, or both. Administrative statistics which are based on payments under specific programmes, such as social welfare payments or farm subsidy schemes, can therefore show the distribution of income received only in relation to that particular programme. Most households, however, have multiple sources of income. For example, over a third of welfare households in 1994 got more than 50 per cent of their incomes from other sources[1] and on half of all farms, either the farmer or his/her partner had an off-farm job.[2]

In order to assess whether applicants qualify for particular payments or schemes, public bodies use information on income to establish whether

they are above or below particular income thresholds. There is, however, no administrative reason to record in a database the extent to which their income falls above or below the threshold.[3] Where income from a particular source is disregarded under the terms of a payment, it would be unusual for any details of such income to be sought on the application form or carried through to data files. Therefore, information irrelevant to qualification for payments, but important for research, is not routinely collected.

Income details may be kept at the level of the individual, the tax unit, the family unit, or the household. The Revenue Commissioners have information on income for tax units, that is, individuals and married couples who are jointly assessed for tax. Social welfare records detail recipients and the insured population, while Local Authorities have income details for principal earners who are current tenants of Local Authority housing and some limited information on subsidiary earners in these households. A caveat needs to be noted here with respect to household income. Where this is pooled to a high degree, such as in many family households, analysis of the household income presents a realistic picture of the living standards of its members.[4] Where income is not pooled, for example among young adults sharing a flat, household income may be a poor indicator of the living standards of the individuals concerned.

### 4.2.1    Social Welfare Records
The Department of Social and Family Affairs has the largest set of computerised administrative records in the State. Social welfare records contain a wealth of information about people in receipt of various payments. These records are on four main systems specifically designed to meet the requirements of the Department. These are the Central Database, the Integrated Short-Term Scheme (ISTS), the PENLIVE Computer System, and the Means Test Database.

***Central Database***
This database has 3.8 million records of adults (insured population) dating back to 1979, and of 900,000 children born since 1992. Children are issued with their Personal Public Service Number (PPSN), previously an RSI number, at the age of 16, and added to the database. Self-employed people have been included on the system since 1988. The PPSN/RSI number of the claimant can be used to trace welfare payments claimed back to the late 1980s. Since 1994, the PPSN/RSI numbers of

qualified adults (spouses/partners) and children of claimants have been available and, while not routinely done at present, these could be linked with the claimant's records. The main gaps in this database are older non-contributory claimants, women on home duties whose spouse/partner was never a claimant and those not entitled to State benefits, such as civil servants. In addition, records on the database are not deleted so it may contain details of people who are now deceased.

Central database records contain the following information:

- *Personal details:* name, address, gender, date of birth, mother's birth surname, own birth surname, date of marriage, nationality
- *Contribution records:* employer (P35 returns) with earnings details, paid contributions and credited contributions. The system has information on full earnings back to the late 1980s, and on earnings up to PRSI ceilings for the early 1980s
- *Payment details:* details of claims made giving start and end dates for each payment.

As social insurance contribution details are supplied in the annual employer P35 tax return at the end of the tax year, details on contribution records and associated earnings are only available in arrears.[5] The accuracy and timeliness of the records depends on employer compliance.

### Integrated Short-Term Schemes (ISTS)

The ISTS database has been in operation since 1994 and holds information on claimants of Unemployment Benefit and Assistance, Disability Benefit, Supplementary Welfare Allowance, Maternity Payments, Occupational Injuries Benefit and payments under the Back to Work scheme.

### The PENLIVE Computer System

The PENLIVE computer system is used to manage pension, lone parent, invalidity, pre-retirement and other long-term claims paid via a book system. At present it is difficult to relate records back to the central system via the PPSN/RSI number. However, a new integrated long-term claims system is currently being developed by the DSFA that may make such links easier.

### Means Test Database

This database was created in 1992 and contains information on assessed means for assistance payments, i.e. non-contributory payments. Records can be linked to other records for clients via PPSN/RSI numbers.

Information on capital means is, at least in principle, available in these records. However, its accuracy is affected not only by any under-reporting of income but also by the disregards of means which are in operation in respect of various payments.

Bearing in mind the limitations of administrative records for generating income data outlined above, one of the major advantages of the social welfare databases is their size and comprehensive nature. A high proportion of people who experience poverty depend on a social welfare income. In addition, homeless people and others who may be excluded from the ambit of household surveys are recorded in the social welfare records. These databases have major potential to generate information on welfare and work. They can be used to extract information by street or postal district for claimants of particular payments. For example, the Statistics Branch of the DSFA was able to generate statistics in relation to the long-term unemployed aged 35 or over in two postal districts, and in particular flat complexes in Dublin's north inner city, within twenty-four hours.[6] Using PPSN/RSI numbers, full case histories of welfare and work records could be retrieved to build up a picture of the lives and welfare histories of people in a particular area. The social welfare databases also offer the possibility of sampling individuals based on their PPSN/RSI number and tracking their movements into and out of various welfare statuses, such as unemployment and lone parenthood.

### The REACH Initiative

The REACH Initiative is worth a mention here. Arising from the work of the Interdepartmental Committee on an Integrated Social Services System, the REACH Initiative aims to co-ordinate services and information across a range of providers. Work on designing the integrated electronic system for storing data began with the establishment of the REACH Agency in September 2000. REACH envisages a new Personal Public Services Broker which will operate as a virtual one-stop-shop. Through this Broker individuals will be able to apply for public services and transact business with public agencies electronically using their PPSN/RSI number. Use of the PPSN is gradually being extended beyond the taxation and welfare areas. It is already in use in the health area and is now being extended to the education and Local Authority sectors. Through the Broker, people will be able to contact all public services and develop Personal Vaults. These will contain personal information that the customer will be able to update at any time. Customers will also be able to notify changes in personal data

to all agencies by simply keeping their records up-to-date. For example, change of address can be notified to all agencies by simply changing the address held in the Personal Vault.[7]

It is not possible as yet to assess how the REACH Initiative will affect potential research access to social welfare administrative databases. If individuals chose to opt out of centralised administrative databases into their own Personalised Data Vaults, it could weaken the representative nature of information remaining in Departmental databases. On the other hand, if protocols for research access to the new storage media were built into the final system design, the wider range of data to be stored in these proposed Vaults could broaden the scope for research. REACH is a long-term project, the results and research capacity of which will only be worked out over the coming years.

### 4.2.2    Income Tax Records

The Revenue Commissioners maintain a valuable database on tax payers' incomes. However, where poverty and low income are the focus of study, the limited coverage in revenue records of people who are tax exempt and have tax exempt forms of income, limits the practical usefulness of income tax records.

An advantage of tax records, however, is that they show aggregate income from different sources for the tax units concerned. Notwithstanding this, certain welfare payments, such as Unemployment Assistance, Child Benefit and Maternity Allowance, as well as the tax-exempt element of Unemployment and Disability Benefit, are excluded from the definition of income used. These are significant omissions in the context of research on low income.

Because tax is levied on an annual basis, the bottom bands of income includes not only those who have low incomes all year round, but also those who are only earning for part of the tax year, such as new entrants to employment who start a job towards the end of the tax year, seasonal workers or students in summer jobs. This complicates the picture at the very bottom of the income distribution. Also, there are strong incentives towards under-declaration or non-declaration of income. In addition, delays in submitting income tax returns can affect the timeliness of the data.

### 4.2.3    Local Authority Records

Traditionally, the information held by Local Authorities of direct relevance to poverty is in respect of differential rents and the incomes on which these

are based. Differential rents are calculated on the basis of income data submitted in respect of each earner in the household. Tenants' income data are recorded on computer for about 60 per cent of tenancies. This information can be used to construct a picture of the distribution of incomes of the tenants in particular housing estates or among the tenant group as a whole. These data are usually collected once a year. In the case of tenants where incomes are expected to be stable (such as old age pensioners) updating is often less frequent. However, because of the scale of sales of Local Authority housing to tenants, many housing estates originally provided by Local Authorities now contain relatively few Local Authority tenants.[8]

### 4.2.4    Health Board Records

The Health Boards have responsibility for administering the General Medical Card Service (GMS) to low-income groups. As this is means tested, the distribution of medical cards could be seen as a proxy for the distribution of low family income. However, a number of problems arise here. The means test is based on a discretionary guideline and medical cards may be awarded on medical grounds where income exceeds the prescribed limits. In addition, access to medical cards has been extended in ways which relax the link between the card and low income thresholds for certain groups. First, in a move designed to promote community care, the income limits for older people were progressively raised and then abolished with effect from July 2001 for those aged 70 or over. Secondly, to ease the poverty trap on return to work, long-term unemployed people may retain the medical card for a further three years after taking up employment.

Problems also arise in the extraction of data on income. As indicated in Chapter 3, although the majority of Health Boards have computerised their medical card records, including information on income, only a minority can readily extract data by income range from their databases.

## 4.3    WEALTH, ASSETS AND INDEBTEDNESS

Access to resources is not just about income. The holding of assets and savings, or of the opposite, indebtedness, is also of importance. In considering wealth, a number of data reliability problems arise and detailed questions are required to extract reliable information.[9] In particular, there is a tendency for the value of personal assets or wealth to be under-reported and for those in the top end of the distribution not to

reply to questions about wealth. In addition to issues of individual privacy, one particular reason for this is fear of disclosure of information to the Revenue Commissioners.

With regard to indebtedness, it is important to distinguish between problem debt and routine borrowing. The latter includes borrowing such as mortgages or car loans, which most people service without difficulty. Problem debt arises where people have recurrent difficulties in meeting day-to-day living expenses. A very low income increases the likelihood that unforeseen expenditure will precipitate a cycle of debt, or that any lack of money-management skills will lead to a build-up of debt problems. Problem debt may be triggered by events such as business failure, long-term illness, marriage breakdown or long-term low income. Chronic arrears of rent, mortgage or utility bills, or regular indebtedness to moneylenders, are signals of problem debt.

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) was set up by the DSFA in 1992 to address problems of personal debt and money management in disadvantaged communities.[10] A common computerised record-keeping system has been devised for MABS centres. This is designed to facilitate the provision of statistical information and research on the nature and causes of problem debt for each centre. Processing of information for outside researchers is conducted by MABS staff in order to preserve confidentiality. MABS collects information on family circumstances, sources of income and size and type of debt, and this is reported on a monthly basis to the DSFA. The information system also records information on possible debt triggers and actions taken in relation to arrears or other debt problems. However, there is no computerised means of collating data at the central or regional level. For a national picture to be created each of the 50 plus MABS offices would have to be contacted and the information for each compiled.

The Irish Mortgage and Savings Association compiles figures on duration of arrears from records of lending agencies for its annual reports. Local Authority housing departments also have details on tenants in rent arrears, with this information generally being held on a standard computer package provided by the Local Government Computer Services Board. The extent of Local Authority rent arrears in any individual area may reflect how well rent collection and arrears are managed as well as the underlying financial difficulties of tenants.[11] In general, however, families with a persistent history of arrears and the areas they live in can be identified from the data.

Statistics on orders for possession applied for and granted can be found in the court records. However, this information does not necessarily shed light on the numbers at risk of losing their homes through debt, because this procedure is used as a regular tool by Councils to encourage compliance with arrangements made to clear arrears.[12] Actual evictions on foot of court orders may, on the other hand, underestimate the numbers forced to surrender their homes as a result of housing debt as these figures exclude those who simply surrender a tenancy or who privately carry out a forced sale in response to substantial housing arrears and threats of eviction.

## 4.4   UNEMPLOYMENT AND LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

Research has shown a link between unemployment and in particular long-term unemployment and poverty. There have been many discussions about the most accurate measure of unemployment centred on the difference between the internationally used ILO measure which is based on active job search, the Principal Economic Status (PES) measure, which records people's own assessment of their current economic status, and the Live Register figures which record application for income support or social insurance credits. There are significant differences between the results shown by the three main measures of unemployment, with the lowest figures shown by the ILO measure and the highest by the Live Register.

### 4.4.1   The Live Register

Unemployment statistics are available from the administrative records of the DSFA for those signing on the Live Register for unemployment payments or welfare credits. Live Register information on the DSFA short-term claims database ISTS can track previous work or welfare history of claimants. However, the number of Live Register claimants is affected by administrative rules governing entitlement to sign on, as well as how effectively the rules are applied.

Despite this, the Live Register database offers a rich data source on unemployment. Updates on the Live Register are posted on the DSFA website (www.welfare.ie) and the Department can supply breakdowns of Live Register inflows by previous status (for example, first time job-seeker, returned from abroad, lost previous job etc.) and occupation, as well as age, gender and marital status. These details can be supplied for each of the individual local social welfare offices. Caution should be exercised here, however, particularly in the case of large urban areas where people

may have to sign on at a local office that is a long way from where they live.

The current analysis of long-term unemployment is based on continuous duration of unemployment measured by the Live Register and the QNHS. The accuracy of figures based on the Live Register has been queried for a long time. This is largely due to the reclassification of the long-term unemployed as short-term unemployed following what are often brief breaks in their unemployment. For instance, people who take up temporary or seasonal employment, or participate on a training or employment scheme, but who then return to unemployment, are reclassified in the statistics as short-term unemployed. The capacity of the Live Register to adequately reflect short-term trends in employment and unemployment has also been reduced by welfare provision designed to support unemployed people in moving back into employment. It now also includes, for example, many people who have moved back into employment on a part-time or casual basis, but who are still entitled to claim social welfare benefit in respect of the days for which they are not working.[13]

### 4.4.2    Job-Seeking Activity

FÁS maintains a database of jobseekers who have registered with them and who constitute about 60 per cent of those on the Live Register. This contains details of education, most recent occupation and current welfare status. It is linked to the DSFA database via the PPSN/RSI number. Through this link, outcomes for people interviewed by FÁS are monitored and a monthly report produced.

The Local Employment Service (LES) database is connected to the main FÁS database. The system, known as HOLOS, gives details of the background and current status of clients of the LES. Information keyed in at local Contact Points is automatically stored on the central FÁS system. For example, if clients get a job or go on a Community Employment scheme, the system automatically categorises them as such in the main FÁS database. Access to HOLOS and the database on jobseekers is restricted to FÁS staff but written requests for data will be considered and processed where possible.

The new SCOPE system in the Area-Based Partnerships (see 2.5.2 above) will yield information on those who come into contact with the employment and unemployment services of the Partnerships.

## 4.5 EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

The link between low educational attainment and poverty is one that has been long established through the Census of Population and national surveys. The annual School Leaver's Surveys, conducted about one year after pupils have left school, show the clear links between education level and subsequent employment probability and earning capacity. Commissioned by the Departments of Education and Science (DES) and Enterprise, Trade and Employment and carried out by the ESRI, data from this survey are now lodged in the ISSDA (see 2.3.4 above) for further analysis.

### 4.5.1 Educational Participation and Early School Leaving

The DES has a post-primary pupil database which, based on returns supplied by schools every October, records age, gender, school and home address. From this it is possible to calculate educational participation in mainstream secondary education by year of age and location of the school, but not social group.

The system of recording participation has recently been changed from one based on an allocated pupil number to one using the PPSN. This will allow identification of those students who have left school early but who are in apprenticeships, Community Training Workshops, Traveller training centres, or other training schemes. Conversely, it will also identify those who have left the education system early and who have not moved on to further training or employment. However, as financial and teacher allocations to schools are based on enrolment at the end of September each year, there are strong disincentives against reporting pupils who are chronically absent as having actually left the school. This may lead to some over-reporting of participation levels and under-reporting of early school-leaving. Statistical data from this database can be requested from the DES.

Statistics on early school leaving at primary level are derived from reports by school principals on whether pupils have transferred to second level. However, these returns are generally incomplete as the destination of the pupil is not always known. The construction of a new primary pupil database is under consideration in conjunction with the tighter monitoring of participation and absenteeism under the Education Welfare Act, 2000 (see under Absenteeism, 4.5.2 below). The design of this database is not yet complete and socio-economic variables that would increase its relevance to poverty research may be included.

### 4.5.2    Absenteeism

Absenteeism figures are an important predictor of potential early school leaving. Evidence from local studies shows significant problems of non-attendance at school in disadvantaged communities.[14] Tighter monitoring of absenteeism, including improved record keeping, is provided for under the Education Welfare Act, 2000. This requires schools to notify the new Educational Welfare Board of any instance where a pupil is absent for more than 20 days from school. It is intended to put in place a new system based on information communication technologies that will allow for the more timely and accurate provision of information on absenteeism and early school leaving.

## 4.6    HOUSING, ACCOMMODATION AND HOMELESSNESS

Housing is a key element in the general quality of life. Access to a home of one's own, security of tenure, the standard and size of accommodation, neighbourhood amenities and neighbourhood quality are all factors that contribute to quality of life. Conversely, insecure housing and homelessness are key aspects of the experience of poverty for many people.

### 4.6.1    Assessing Housing Need

Under section 9 of the 1988 Housing Act, Local Authorities are obliged to carry out an assessment of housing need in their area every three years, from which an aggregate national count can be derived. This assessment is intended to establish the level of need for Local Authority housing and for Traveller accommodation. It filters out duplicate housing applications to different Local Authorities and also seeks to establish how many of those who are on housing lists might have their housing needs more appropriately met in other ways, for example in private rented housing.

Under this assessment, Local Authorities are required to categorise housing applicants by income band, family size and status and by length of time on the waiting list. The numbers are also divided into ten separate categories of housing need, including 'those living in unfit housing', 'those in overcrowded housing', or 'those unable to afford their present accommodation'. People who are homeless are classified into three categories by current accommodation – 'Health Board accommodation', 'hostels', or 'nowhere they can reasonably remain'. A needs assessment was carried out in 2002 and for the first time Local Authorities will return their results to the Department of the Environment and Local Government (DELG) electronically on standardised spreadsheets. Detailed results are

published by the DELG. Additional breakdowns of the data may be requested from the DELG and spreadsheets may be made available for further analysis.

### 4.6.2    Counting the Homeless

Many problems exist in relation to achieving accurate counts of people who are homeless. The flow into and out of homelessness over any period is higher than the number of homeless people who will be counted at a single point in time. Stock estimates of homelessness may therefore underestimate the number of people who experience an intermittent pattern of homelessness. Many homeless people are not counted in assessments and surveys as they are neither tenuously attached to private households nor in contact with service providers.

Homeless services maintain records of those who use their services. For example, Focus Ireland, one of the principal voluntary agencies involved in providing services to, and lobbying on behalf of, homeless people has an extremely detailed computerised database on its service clients. However, many smaller homeless services may not maintain computerised records. Some homeless people may also use several homeless services, such as different hostels or meal centres, within a short period. Others do not access homeless services at all. A simple aggregation of the number of users of different homeless services would therefore involve both an element of duplication and failure to record some homeless people.

A detailed review of homelessness in the Eastern Health Board Area highlighted a number of these difficulties, as well as providing the most accurate counts and profiles of the homeless.[15] Conducted by the ESRI/ Homeless Initiative this review was based on a newly developed methodology for counting homeless people as part of the 1999 Assessment of Housing Need. A striking finding of this review was how few of the homeless service users were registered as homeless with the Local Authority and, conversely, how few of those registered as homeless had used any of the homeless services.

Under the government's Integrated Strategy on Homelessness[16] each Local Authority is required, in conjunction with the Health Boards and voluntary bodies, to draw up a city or county level plan for addressing homelessness. Many of these plans are now complete. The plan for Dublin was launched in 2001 and is of particular interest here. The aim of the plan is to eliminate homelessness by 2010. Under this plan the Homeless Initiative was replaced by the Homeless Agency which focuses on Dublin

City and County. The Homeless Agency will lead the Dublin plan and has a co-ordinating, research, policy and information dissemination role. Under its research function the Homeless Agency will carry out a number of research projects. Among these is the 2002 Assessment of Homelessness in Dublin, using a methodology based on that used in the 1999 Assessment. Requests for data from this assessment will be accepted by the Homeless Agency.

Also of particular interest is the introduction of a new Internet-based tracking system called LINK. Under this system, a person who accesses a service for homeless people will, with their permission, have their details entered onto a computer database. Each homeless person will be assigned a unique identification code that will allow his/her movement between services to be tracked. The organisations delivering services will have access only to information concerning their own services but the Homeless Agency will have access to the complete set of records. It is anticipated that the majority, if not all, of the homeless services in Dublin will be operating this system by the end of 2003. Direct access to the data is unlikely to be granted to external researchers or agencies given the use of identifying information, but the Homeless Agency will accept requests for statistical information when the system is fully operational.

### 4.6.3    Private Rented Accommodation

While timely data on house prices are readily available,[17] the DELG does not collect or publish information on private rents, nor is there any such regular representative series available elsewhere. The DELG and the 1999 and 2000 Bacon Reports[18] rely on data from auctioneering sources, based on surveys of their members by the Institute of Professional Auctioneers and Valuers (IPAV) and the Irish Auctioneers and Valuers Institute (IAVI). However, such data are not necessarily representative of rent levels and housing conditions across the private rental sector as a whole, and particularly at the lower end of the housing market where letting agents are less commonly used.[19] Differential changes in rents in the different segments of the housing market serving the better-off and those who are on low incomes may not be captured by this information.

Threshold is the main voluntary agency dealing with the private rented sector. Threshold's records offer a useful up-to-date dataset on what is happening to rents, particularly at the low-income end of the private rented housing market. As with all advice services, information on Threshold case files is representative only of those who use the service.

Detailed case files are not yet computerised, but detailed information on every call received by the agency is held on computer and could be made available for analysis on request.

## 4.7 HEALTH

The relationship between social class and health status has been verified in international research. In Ireland research into health inequalities has been hampered by a lack of data.[20] However, recent policy documents, and most centrally the new National Health Strategy launched in 2001,[21] have identified research on health as one of the major requirements in the improvement of the health service.

A common public health information system is in place in each Health Board which provides information by county in relation to overall population, mortality, births and fertility, and standardised discharge rates of local residents from acute hospitals. Also, a deprivation index derived from small area Census data is used by Health Boards to identify areas with populations at higher risk of ill health.[22]

The Hospital In-Patient Enquiry (HIPE), conducted and managed by the ESRI, collects information on acute hospitals and acute units. Demographic, clinical and administrative data are collected on each instance of acute care. Possession of a medical card is recorded but, as is noted above, this does not always operate as a good proxy for social class or income status. A public/private patient variable has been included since 1999. This may prove to be a more useful variable for poverty analysis. Specific information from the study can be requested from the ESRI.

The National Psychiatric In-Patient Reporting System operated by the Health Research Board (HRB) collects and analyses data on in-patients admitted to psychiatric facilities in Ireland. Details cover admissions, discharges and diagnoses. Socio-economic status is also collected and allows data to be analysed across social groups. The HRB publishes annually from this source[23] and additional information can be requested.

The main survey on health status is the National Health and Lifestyles Surveys: the Survey of Lifestyles, Attitudes and Nutrition (SLÁN) and the parallel study, Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC).[24] First conducted in 1998, SLÁN collects information for adults aged 18 and over on self-assessed health status, together with information on health-related lifestyle behaviours including drug, alcohol and tobacco use, weight, exercise and eating habits. This study is carried out by the Centre for Health Promotion Studies, National University of Ireland, Galway on

behalf of the DHC. A range of socio-demographic and economic information is also collected which facilitates analysis of health status and behaviour by social group. The HBSC survey collected similar kinds of information for school children. These studies are to be repeated every four years, with the next survey due in 2002.

Access to the SLÁN data is not possible at the moment but this may become available once the 2002 data have been analysed and compared to the results from 1998. Requests for specific analyses to be extracted from the data are accepted by the Centre for Health Promotion Studies and fees are charged on the basis of nominal staff costs.

Under the recent National Health Strategy, provision has been made for a research strategy that will establish a research and development officer in the DHC as well as in each Health Board and specialist health agencies, and a Forum for Health and Social Care. This is in the very early stages of implementation but will undoubtedly increase the data available on various aspects of health. The place of poverty and exclusion within this strategy is not specified and it is only as the strategy develops that the poverty relevance of the research carried out will be known.

## 4.8    LONE PARENTS

The principal source of administrative data on lone parents is the DSFA's computerised databases (see 4.2.1 above). Social welfare records for lone parent claimants are kept on the PENLIVE (long-term) claims system. While claims history as such is not available on the system, an analysis of duration of payment and of closed claims can show transitions to and from lone parent status and long-term dependence on these payments. To illustrate the capacity to look at duration issues, the DSFA undertook a special run on the system on live and terminated claims for 1984 through to end 1996. This showed an average length of payment of 4.2 years for terminated claims in respect of recipients who were never married and 2.7 years for claimants who previously married but were subsequently separated, divorced, widowed etc. Nearly 38 per cent of the One-Parent Family Payments from 1990 were still claimed at the end of 1996.

The DSFA's Review of the One-Parent Family Payment illustrates the type of data that can be obtained in relation to lone parents. For this review, information on the distribution of earnings of lone parents was extracted from the Central Records database, and a survey of 1,000 new claims was extracted from the PENLIVE database.[25] The information from this survey includes previous marital status, employment status, earnings,

maintenance status, employment status of the other parent, living arrangements and rent or mortgage, where rent allowance is being paid. As with other areas, the DSFA will consider requests for specified data on lone parents.

## 4.9 DRUG MISUSE

As an illegal activity, statistics on drug misuse are difficult to estimate accurately, particularly in respect of those drug users who do not come into contact with any of the available services. The main source of published data on treated drug use is the National Drug Treatment Reporting System operated by the Drug Misuse Research Division of the HRB.[26] This system is based on records for those who have sought treatment for problem drug use. This includes use of controlled drugs such as heroin, ecstasy and cannabis, misuse of prescription drugs such as benzodiazepines and misuse of glue and other solvents. As drug misuse which occurs outside the treatment context is not included, the figures represent minimum estimates of the extent of drug abuse. The system does not receive returns from all treatment centres, with pressure on limited staff understood as one of the main causes for incomplete returns. The gradual inclusion of GPs who offer methadone treatment and the prison drug service in the reporting system is ongoing.

Data entered on the reporting system include socio-economic information relating to gender, age, area of residence, nationality, employment status, highest educational level reached and age of leaving school. The HRB will carry out specific data runs on this database, when possible, on foot of written requests.

The Drug Misuse Research Division of the HRB also compiles information on a number of indirect indicators of drug misuse, including drug-related AIDS/HIV cases, drug-related deaths, admissions/ discharges to psychiatric hospitals and general hospitals, health services data, such as demand and usage of drug treatment facilities, and the number of persons charged for drug offences.

Some of the Local Drugs Task Forces, which operate in 12 disadvantaged areas in Dublin, in North Cork City and in Bray, have undertaken research on the extent of drug abuse in their catchment areas. Access to the data arising from this and to administrative records can be expected to vary between the Task Forces. However, as much of the administrative data concerned will contain identifying information, access is likely to be restricted to preserve client confidentiality.

## 4.10 EQUALITY

Sections 4.11 to 4.13 below look at data issues in respect of some of the most vulnerable groups in our society, namely ethnic minorities (including members of the Traveller Community, refugees and asylum seekers), women, children and older people, and people with a disability. Before looking at these it is worth considering the work of the Equality Authority (EA) as its remit covers many of these groups. The EA was established in 1999 when the Employment Equality Act, 1998 came into force.[27] The EA also works under the Equal Status Act, 2000. These Acts outlaw discrimination in employment, vocational training, advertising, collective agreements, the provision of goods and services and other opportunities open to the general public on nine grounds. The grounds are: gender, age, marital status, family status, disability, race, sexual orientation, religious belief and membership of the Traveller Community. Many of these grounds are closely related to the experience and risk of poverty.

The EA will contribute to the databank on equality information in two ways. First, its administrative records show the number and detail of legal cases investigated by the EA on the basis of each of the nine grounds. This information is published in the annual reports of the EA. Second, the EA has a research function and has already commissioned a number of research studies, including some on the data required to improve our understanding as well as to monitor and evaluate progress on the elimination of discrimination and inequality in relation to the labour market and employment. While these are likely to be once-off studies, given the relative lack of research on equality in Ireland to date, they are of particular significance.

## 4.11 ETHNIC MINORITIES

Under the revised NAPS, particular attention is given to the experience and needs of a number of groups considered to be at particular risk of poverty and exclusion. These groups include members of the Traveller Community, refugees and asylum seekers.[28]

### 4.11.1 Travellers

To date, the Census has counted Travellers living in halting sites, encampments, caravans and mobile homes. These are listed separately from others living in temporary dwellings. For the first time, the 2002 Census will include a question on membership of the Traveller Community, which will allow other Census information such as education, household

size, employment status or disability to be analysed for Travellers living in houses as well as for those living in temporary dwellings.

An annual count of Travellers in temporary dwellings or living on sites is carried out each November by Local Authorities. This seeks to establish how many Travellers are living in standard housing, in group housing, in permanent or temporary halting sites and on the roadside, as well as the services, such as water and sanitation, available on different sites. Information on Travellers requiring accommodation is also compiled as part of the three yearly assessments of housing need required under the 1988 Housing Act.

Further information and profiles of Travellers and their living conditions have been compiled by local and national Traveller support groups. Access to much of these data may be restricted as it may contain identifying information.

### 4.11.2   Asylum Seekers and Refugees

The Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (RAC) is responsible for processing applications from those seeking a declaration for Refugee status. The RAC collects data at the point of application from each individual applicant, including detailed biographical information, route travelled and the reason for applying for asylum in Ireland. These data are held electronically. Following acceptance of an application, a detailed questionnaire is completed by each applicant. This questionnaire contains significant data on the applicant's life history but it is not stored electronically or collated, even on an anonymised or aggregate basis. Each application is assessed on its merits and applicants are not profiled. All of the information is collected with a guarantee of individual confidentiality and as such it cannot be released and is not made accessible to external organisations or researchers. It is important to note that much of the data collected are not verifiable as most applicants do not have or do not produce identification papers.

The system on which data are held is designed for the purpose of tracking applications as they progress through the system. Socio-economic data are not collected, and are unlikely to be collected in the future. Such data could be seen as a tool for selecting applicants on the basis of their wealth or possible labour market value rather than on the basis of need for asylum or refuge due to fear of persecution.

Statistical information regarding applications received and processed is made available on a monthly basis. Statistics on applications and the

processing of applications in terms of nationality, age, gender and similar factors are also provided on request, where the request is reasonable and will not take an inordinate amount of time to complete. Data containing identifiable personal information are not released.

The Directorate for Asylum Support Services (DASS), which dealt with the provision of services to asylum seekers, was replaced by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) in April 2001 and incorporates the Refugee Agency. The remit of this new agency has been broadened to include refugees given leave to stay in Ireland. The RIA has responsibility for those accommodated directly by the State in hostels and other centres. Details of socio-demographic status are collected and can be provided by the RIA on foot of written requests.

Asylum seekers not living under direct provision arrangements receive Supplementary Welfare Allowance or, if eligible to work and unemployed, Unemployment Assistance. The DSFA's ISTS database (see 4.2.1 above) records such claimants and can distinguish between asylum seekers in ordinary private rented accommodation and those in special accommodation rented on behalf of asylum seekers by a Local Authority. One major weakness in these data is the absence of any information on the quality of accommodation offered.

## 4.12 WOMEN, CHILDREN AND OLDER PEOPLE

The revised NAPS identifies women, children and older people as being among the most vulnerable groups in our society.[29] Data on these three groups can be obtained, in two ways, from many of the sources identified in previous sections of this chapter. First, some of these sources are specifically concerned with collecting information on these target groups, such as the primary pupils' database. Second, many of these sources provide a breakdown on information by age and gender, such as much of that relating to social welfare payments.

There are, however, a number of areas that are specific to each of these groups. In the case of children, one such area is 'children in care'. An annual survey, conducted for the DHC, of children in the care of Health Boards provides details of the number of children in care in each Health Board area, their age and gender, their family situation, reason for coming into care and reported cases of abuse. Admissions to care and discharges from care in the current year are also recorded. This information is collected manually at present. A new computerised management information system is currently being developed by consultants under the

auspices of a Steering Committee for the Development of a Comprehensive Information System for Child Welfare and Protection Services. This will undoubtedly yield more detailed information. However, due to a number of concerns, including the need for those using the system to have a knowledge of the various difficulties in the area of defining and reporting information on children in care, as well as the sensitive nature of the material concerned, it is unlikely that this will be released for external analysis. Requests for specific data will be considered by the DHC.

A National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland has been approved by Government and will be jointly managed by the National Children's Office and the Department of Social and Family Affairs. By looking at a representative sample of children over time, it is intended to study the factors which contribute to or undermine the wellbeing of children in contemporary Irish families and, through this, to contribute to the setting of effective and responsive policies relating to children and to the design of services for children and their families. While focusing on children from all of the socio-economic backgrounds, the study has the capacity to highlight the needs of vulnerable children. The tender to carry out the study is currently underway.

In the case of women, a commitment was given in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) to the provision of relevant data and data collection systems for the monitoring and evaluation of poverty. Specific in this is a commitment to consider the data needed to address the gender dimension of poverty.[30] One of the most significant developments in meeting this commitment has been the creation of a databank of gender disaggregated statistics under the auspices of the DJELR. Containing more than 500 statistics, this databank represents the first comprehensive collation of gender-disaggregated statistics from a wide range of Irish sources into a single databank. Originally compiled in spring 2000, the databank is currently being updated and can be accessed through the DJELR's website at www.irlgov.ie/justice.

While many of the sources identified in this chapter already provide gender breakdowns, a number of additional specific poverty-related areas that are of particular relevance to women can be identified. These include the distribution of income and other resources within households and opportunities for participation in social, cultural and civic life. Information on such areas is primarily amassed through surveys or administrative records. Access to data will depend on the sensitivity of the issue in question as well as considerations concerning staff and technical resources.

For older people, no specific datasets are available. Some of the issues relating to their poverty status, such as income, health and housing, will be covered by other sources identified above. For instance, the DSFA PENLIVE system contains information on old age pensions. Through the identification of recipients of such payments, the Physical and Sensory Database reveals some information on the occurrence of a physical or sensory disability in the older population. One area worth mentioning here, however, is the situation of people living in nursing homes or other long-term care institutions. While the administrative records of these institutions may provide useful insights into the experience of older people, central sources of information do not exist. There is no reason to believe that institutions such as nursing homes maintain standardised records from which data could be easily collated or that socio-economic data on their residents are collected to any significant degree.

## 4.13 PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Disability is one of the nine grounds on which discrimination is now prohibited under the Equal Status Act, 2000 and the Employment Equality Act, 1998 and people with disabilities are among the particularly vulnerable groups identified in the revised NAPS.[31] The Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities drew attention to the absence of comprehensive and accurate statistics on the number of people with disabilities.[32] In Appendix A of its Report, the Commission documents the different potential sources of information on disability and their limitations. It is worth noting here that questions in the 2002 Census on disability should improve information on the prevalence of conditions which reduce mobility, hamper daily life or prevent someone from working. It will also be possible to link this information to socio-economic group, educational attainment, housing tenure and family status. Currently, the number of claims for disability-related social welfare schemes is available, but sources omit many people with a disability who are not receiving disability payments, including many children.

The National Disability Authority (NDA) was established in 2000 under the National Disability Authority Act, 1999.[33] Among its functions, the NDA is charged with undertaking research and developing statistical information for the planning, delivery and monitoring of disability programmes and services. The NDA has commissioned a survey of public attitudes towards people with disabilities which is now completed[34] and is currently undertaking a study on advocacy. Given that the NDA is a new

organisation and its research programme is in its initial stages, it will take some time before the potential of this agency as a key source of data on disability is realised.

### 4.13.1 The National Intellectual Disability Database

This database was instituted in 1996 by the HRB as a planning tool in relation to intellectual disability services. Statutory and voluntary agencies providing services, those responsible for the Community Care areas and school principals make returns in respect of people with an intellectual disability who are in receipt of, or who are on the waiting list for, services. The information collected includes age, degree of disability, area, current level of service and future service required. As more services are being put in place, more people come to light as needing a service. The database managers expect the numbers to continue to grow in this way for some time to come. Children with a mild disability who are in special schools are included on the database until they leave school, after which time they are generally removed. Only adults with moderate, severe or profound disability are included on the database. All data returned to the HRB are anonymised.

### 4.13.2 Physical and Sensory Disability Database

A Physical and Sensory Disability Database was launched by the HRB in March 2002.[35] This will detail the specialised health and personal social service needs of people with a physical or sensory disability. The database will contain personal details, whether the person has a medical card, living arrangements, details of disability and degree of functioning (using recognised international scales), current service provision and anticipated service needs for the next five years. As with the Intellectual Disability Database, the project is managed by the HRB on behalf of the DHC. With the consent of the individual in question, information is collected by key workers who are in contact with and know the individual. This information is then returned to the HRB in an anonymised format.

There is an established link between disability and poverty and the two national databases can be expected to offer more information and greater detail than was previously available. The national databases do not collect information on socio-economic status or total income, but information on the type of State payments received is sought. Although these payments will represent only one source of income for many, this information, when cross-tabulated with other details (such as age, sex,

living arrangements and service usage) could yield significant poverty-relevant data.

Access to the databases for research purposes is possible and must be approved by the relevant Health Board in the case of regional information and the National Database Committee in respect of national data.

## 4.14 CONCLUSION

Significant data are held by Government Departments, statutory agencies and public authorities in relation to indicators of poverty and deprivation. Some are collected in databases as a by-product of the administrative process and statistical information can be fairly readily extracted. Other sources do not facilitate easy access by external researchers or the generation of poverty-relevant statistics. Information from official sources can be supplemented by information from the records of relevant community or voluntary agencies. However, caution must be exercised here as many of these data are not anonymised and may be difficult to gain access to.

While this chapter has looked at a number of potential sources of secondary data on poverty, in some cases what is more evident is the number of data gaps. Some of these include the absence of information on wealth, the lack of data on the relationship between health status and poverty and the absence of specific data sources on older people. The most obvious gaps left by administrative data sources reflect those already highlighted in relation to national surveys. These relate to the most vulnerable groups in our society, including the homeless, drug misusers, those living in institutions, families experiencing domestic violence, members of the Traveller Community and other ethnic minorities including refugees and asylum seekers. While secondary data may address some of the gaps left by the Census of Population and national surveys, these secondary data sources themselves are far from exhaustive. Suggestions on how such gaps might be addressed are included in the next chapter.

# ADDRESSING POVERTY DATA GAPS

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This guidebook set out to provide an introduction to some of the sources of secondary data that could potentially fill gaps in our knowledge of poverty. In attempting to achieve this, the guidebook has concentrated on the administrative records of statutory and non-statutory bodies, the type of information they yield, their strengths and weaknesses and the level of access to them. Here, it concludes by acknowledging some of the gaps in these administrative records and examining how these might be addressed, as well as highlighting the need for co-ordinated approaches to data collection and analysis and the role of specialist organisations.

## 5.2 REMAINING GAPS

### 5.2.1 Income, Wealth and Assets

A number of areas can be identified in which data are either of poor quality or are not available. Included here are data on wealth and assets, which are difficult to collect due to concerns among those with such assets in respect of confidentiality and fear of disclosure for tax reasons. It is difficult to see how this gap can be addressed given the legal protection afforded to the records of financial institutions. With respect to the wider question of income data, the main gaps left by national surveys are in relation to the absence of information on the homeless population, Travellers, people living in institutions and refugees and asylum seekers. People living in these situations are particularly likely to have a high risk of poverty. Administrative data can contribute to filling this gap but, on balance, specifically designed studies may prove to be the most reliable source of information. A baseline inquiry of those not living in private households would considerably add to our knowledge on some of the most vulnerable groups in society. In all of this, consideration should be given to the most relevant methodologies and means of data collection

and appropriate use made of both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

### 5.2.2    Unemployment

In the case of unemployment, due to the importance of this for monitoring overall economic performance, relatively few gaps exist in terms of counting the unemployed and the collection and analysis of administrative information in this area is relatively sophisticated. However, the administrative rules governing the recording of long-term unemployment result in an under-estimation of this problem. A system that allows for the analysis of long-term work histories may yield politically less attractive statistics but would add considerably to our knowledge of movements into and out of various employment situations and the relationship between these and the experience of poverty. An example of such a database exists in the UK and could be examined as a potential model.[1]

### 5.2.3    Education

Improved tracking of school attendance, educational participation at primary level and rates of transition to second level would monitor an important predictor of future poverty and life chances. Accurate and regular figures on educational participation of Travellers and children of asylum seekers and refugees would help to identify and design interventions to address any failures of the system in respect of these children's needs. The potential of the new systems being developed by the DES to address these gaps will be seen over the coming years.

### 5.2.4    Housing, Accommodation and Homelessness

A number of issues arise in respect of housing. Given the rapid pace of change in the Irish housing market in recent years and the critical implications of escalating housing prices, particularly for those at the lower end of the income distribution, it is somewhat unsatisfactory that assessment of need takes place only every three years. Notwithstanding the provisions of the 1988 Housing Act, it would be of significant benefit if such assessments of need were carried out by Local Authorities on an annual basis. Also, in order to keep up with the pace of change in the private rented sector, housing tenure information should be collected at five-yearly intervals in the Census, rather than every ten years.

The absence of reliable data on the homeless population represents one of the most significant data gaps in our knowledge and understanding of

poverty. An appropriately designed baseline study of homelessness carried out by each Local Authority would be a considerable addition. At a minimum, a twice-yearly count of street homelessness (one conducted in summer and one in winter) should be undertaken along with a full annual count of all homeless people.

### 5.2.5    Health

With regard to health, relatively little data are available on the relationship between health status and various socio-economic characteristics such as income, occupation and social class. The health status of various groups, such as Travellers, asylum seekers and refugees and children living in poor households is also relatively unknown due to the absence of information. While specific measures are being taken to improve data in these areas, the routine recording of information on occupation in administrative records and databases would substantially increase the value of such data for poverty research.

### 5.2.6    Vulnerable and Excluded Groups

Information in respect of many of the vulnerable groups in society, including those explicitly recognised in the revised NAPS, often arises as a by-product of information collected for administrative reasons. In some areas, however, only specifically designed surveys will yield information. This is the case in a number of areas considered to be of a particularly sensitive nature. These include sexual orientation, the incidence and experience of domestic violence and other forms of domestic abuse, drug use and misuse. While occasional studies and anecdotal evidence inform us of a link between poverty and such experiences or behaviour, regular data collection would considerably add to our knowledge and also assist in the design of policy and delivery of services for such target groups.

### 5.3    THE NEED FOR A CO-ORDINATED APPROACH

One remaining issue concerns the overlap in the populations served by the various Government Departments, State agencies and voluntary and community bodies. This reflects the multi-faceted and cumulative nature of poverty. For instance, those who rely on social welfare incomes are often the same people who require public housing, experience educational disadvantage and are reliant on the public health system. This requires what is sometimes called 'joined-up-thinking', whereby the different policies that affect a particular group are designed in conjunction with

each other. To date, there has been no way of tracking people's use or engagement with a variety of services. However, the introduction and use in a number of systems of the PPSN now opens the possibility of tracking people's engagement with services across a range of providers. Consideration of a system or systems that facilitate this should be seen as essential in facilitating research, improving policies, designing services and ultimately eliminating poverty.

## 5.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF SPECIALIST ORGANISATIONS AND AGENCIES

Chapter One referred to the central role of specialist organisations and agencies in filling gaps in our knowledge which are not covered by national surveys and administrative records. These include statutory and community and voluntary agencies, as well as agencies operating at both national and local level. At the national level, Combat Poverty, the Equality Authority and the National Disability Authority all have a research function. While much of the research commissioned by these bodies is of a once-off nature, both the studies and the agencies themselves are key sources of information and expertise on poverty, inequality and exclusion. Outside the statutory arena national organisations such as Pavee Point (which works with members of the Traveller Community), the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the National Women's Council of Ireland, Women's Aid, Barnardos (which represents the interests of children), the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, the Homeless Agency, and the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism may be able to provide not only administrative and research data and studies, but also detailed and informed insights into the experiences of groups living in poverty. Local community and voluntary organisations, as well as the local branches of national bodies, can significantly contribute to our knowledge of poverty at the local level. These specialist organisations should be among the first points of contact in any given research project.

## 5.5 CONCLUSION

A number of significant developments have recently refocused attention on the need for data in respect of poverty and social exclusion. The revised NAPS contains a commitment to the development of a data strategy that will help improve our understanding of the causes, nature and consequences of poverty and monitor progress towards meeting the targets

set down in this Strategy. The strengthened EU involvement and interest in national anti-poverty plans, the introduction of equality legislation and the continued interest in benchmarking progress towards various social objectives all signal the importance of data in the development of effective social policies. While primary research will continue to be of central importance in this, the potential contribution of administrative records should be recognised and, where possible, enhanced.

A society must be judged by the presence or absence of extremes of hardship or exclusion. Effective social policy to address poverty, exclusion, disadvantage and inequalities must be informed by reliable, accurate and timely data. In this, every effort should be made to ensure that those excluded from mainstream society are not also excluded from the sources of information that inform and influence their quality of life.

# SUMMARY OF MAIN IDENTIFIED SOURCES OF DATA ON POVERTY

| NATIONAL SURVEYS | SOURCE | AVAILABILITY |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Census of Population** | CSO | Available in published reports with summary data available at www.cso.ie and additional selected material available at www.eirstat.ie. Additional data can be requested and is subject to a fee. Some material is also lodged in the ISSDA for analysis subject to certain conditions. |
| **Quarterly National Household Survey** | CSO | Reports available from www.cso.ie. Additional material can be requested. Some material is also lodged in the ISSDA for analysis subject to certain conditions. |
| **Household Budget Survey** | CSO | Available in published reports with summary results available at www.cso.ie. Additional data can be requested. Some material is lodged in the ISSDA for analysis subject to certain conditions. |
| **Living in Ireland Survey** | ESRI | Data are primarily used in commissioned and published research. Some material is also lodged in the ISSDA for analysis subject to certain conditions and payment of a fee. |
| ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS | | |
| **Statutory Agencies** | Government Departments and statutory agencies | Availability is dependent on the type of data in question, the applicability of the Data Protection Act and the FOI Act, as well as technical and human resource capacity. |

| NATIONAL SURVEYS | SOURCE | AVAILABILITY |
|---|---|---|
| **Community and Voluntary Organisations** | Various | As with statutory agencies, availability is dependent on the type of data in question, the applicability of the Data Protection Act and the FOI Act, as well as technical and human resource capacity. National Database of Voluntary Sector Research is a good starting point at www.heanet.ie/volsec. |

| AREA-BASED INFORMATION | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Local Authority Administrative Records** | Local Authorities | Relevant data are primarily concerned with housing and homelessness. Difficulties arise in relation to the various systems used to record different information. |
| **Area Partnerships** | 38 Area Partnerships | Good source of local data but much is of a once-off nature. |
| | ADM Ltd | The SCOPE system to be launched by ADM will bring data on all Area Partnerships together. Requests for specific information from this will be accepted when the system is up and running. See www.adm.ie. |
| **Comhairle Database** | Comhairle and individual CICs | Much of the information arising from this source can be accessed at www.comhairle.ie. |

| INCOME POVERTY | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Administrative Records on Social Welfare** | DSFA | Four databases house the principal administrative data of the DSFA. They yield limited data on income. As these are specifically designed in-house, systems analysis must be carried out by staff of the DSFA. Data can be requested but limited human resources restrict the DSFA's capacity to engage in research activity. |
| **Income Tax Records** | Revenue Commissioners | These provide only limited data on poverty due mainly to the exemption of low incomes from the tax net. |

| NATIONAL SURVEYS | SOURCE | AVAILABILITY |
|---|---|---|
| **Local Authority Records** | Local Authorities | Information on the incomes of those paying differential rents is not routinely extracted from these records but could be made available on request. Information on rent arrears is also available across Local Authorities. |
| **Health Board Records** | Health Boards | Information on income can be inferred from the records on Medical Card holders. However, information on income is difficult to extract from the computer systems in the majority of Health Boards. |
| **Records on Indebtedness** | MABS | The use of computer systems specifically designed with research in mind means that external researchers can be provided with statistics on MABS clients in individual MABS centres. See www.mabs.ie for further details. |

| UNEMPLOYMENT AND LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT | | |
|---|---|---|
| **The Live Register** | DSFA | This is a much used and rich source of data but is vulnerable to administrative changes in welfare schemes. See www.welfare.ie for further details. |
| **Administrative Records on Job Seeking** | FÁS National Office | A database of job seekers is held by FÁS. Data are primarily released in the form of monthly reports available from FÁS. |
| **HOLOS Database** | LES Offices and FÁS National Office | This houses details on LES clients. Access is restricted to FÁS staff but written requests for information are met when possible. |

| EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Post-Primary Pupil Database** | DES | This is of limited use in poverty research but can be used to identify at least some early school leavers, though not their social group. Requests for statistics will be accepted by the DES. |

| NATIONAL SURVEYS | SOURCE | AVAILABILITY |
|---|---|---|
| **Primary Pupil Database** | DES | This is of limited research use in its current form but a new system is being developed that may yield richer socio-economic data. |

**HOUSING, ACCOMMODATION AND HOMELESSNESS**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Assessments of Housing Need** | Local Authorities | Results of these are available in the published reports of the DELG. Additional requests for information can be made to the Department. See www.environ.ie. |
| | DELG | |
| **Administrative Records of Community and Voluntary Housing Agencies** | Various Agencies | In some agencies computerised records are maintained of service users. Availability will vary between agencies. |
| **Homeless in Dublin** | The Homeless Agency | This Agency will conduct once-off research but also holds data on the 2002 Assessment of Homelessness in Dublin and co-ordinates the collection of information from service providers on a new Internet-based system called LINK. Requests for specific data from datasets are accepted. |
| **Administrative Records on Private Rented Accommodation** | IPAV and IAVI | Surveys of the members of these associations provide some indication of activity in the private rented sector. These may be requested from the associations. |
| | Threshold | Details of telephone contacts are held on computer and could be made available for analysis. See www.threshold.ie. |

**HEALTH**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Administrative Records** | Health Boards | These contain standardised data by county on population, mortality, fertility, births and acute hospital discharges. No socio-demographic data are collected. |

| NATIONAL SURVEYS | SOURCE | AVAILABILITY |
|---|---|---|
| **Hospital In-Patient Enquiry – HIPE** | ESRI | Annual reports are published by the ESRI and specific information can be requested. |
| **National Psychiatric In-Patient Reporting System** | HRB | Annual reports are published and additional information can be requested from the HRB. See www.hrb.ie. |
| **SLÁN Survey** | Centre for Health Promotion Studies, NUI Galway | This survey is to be conducted every four years. Published reports are available from the Centre for Health Promotion Studies. Additional information may also be requested and a nominal fee applies. See www.nuigalway.ie/faculties_departments/ health_promotion/healthp.htm. |
| LONE PARENTS | | |
| **Administrative Records on Social Welfare** | DSFA | The Central and PENLIVE databases contain significant information on lone parents. Information may be requested from the DSFA. |
| DRUG MISUSE | | |
| **National Drug Treatment Reporting System** | HRB | Socio-economic information is collected on drug misusers who present for treatment. This is published annually by the HRB and additional data can also be requested. |
| EQUALITY | | |
| **Administrative Records** | The EA | The administrative records of the EA will yield information on the number of cases investigated under the nine relevant grounds. See www.equality.ie. |
| ETHNIC MINORITIES | | |
| **Annual Count of Traveller Accommodation** | Local Authorities | The annual count of members of the Traveller Community living in different types of accommodation is carried out each year by the Local Authorities. Information can be accessed through each local authority and the DELG. |

| NATIONAL SURVEYS | SOURCE | AVAILABILITY |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Administrative Records on Asylum Seekers and Refugees** | RAC | Statistical information on applicants, including nationality, age and gender, can be requested from the RAC. |
| | RIA | Socio-economic data on refugees housed in State accommodation are collected by the RIA and can be made available on request. |
| **Administrative Records on Social Welfare and Accommodation** | DSFA | The Department of Social and Family Affairs ISTS database can identify refugees in receipt of Unemployment Assistance and distinguish between private rented and Local Authority rented accommodation. Information can be made available on request. |
| **CHILDREN** **Children in Care** | Health Boards DHC | A new data system is being developed in this area. Due to the sensitivity of the data concerned, external access is strictly controlled. Requests for specific data will be considered by the DHC. |
| **Longitudinal Study on the Well-Being of Children** | The Children's Office and the DSFA | This will be jointly managed by the National Children's Office and the DSFA and will have the capacity to highlight the needs of vulnerable children. The tender to carry out the study is currently being prepared. |
| **WOMEN** **Gender Disaggregated Statistics** | DJELR | A new databank containing over 500 gender disaggregated statistics has been created and is held by the DEJLR. This database can be accessed through the DEJLR website at www.justice.ie. |

| NATIONAL SURVEYS | SOURCE | AVAILABILITY |
|---|---|---|
| **DISABILITY** | | |
| **National Intellectual Disability Database** | HRB | This provides details on people with an intellectual disability who are in receipt of or on waiting lists for services. Data can be requested but access must be approved by the relevant Health Board or National Database Committee. |
| **Physical and Sensory Disability Database** | | This new database will collect details on people with physical and/or sensory disability. Data can be requested but access must be approved by the relevant Health Board or National Database Committee. |

# Useful Website Addresses

| | |
|---|---|
| Area Development Management (ADM) Ltd | *www.adm.ie* |
| Central Statistics Office | *www.cso.ie* |
| Combat Poverty Agency | *www.cpa.ie* |
| Comhairle | *www.comhairle.ie* |
| Data Protection Commissioner | *www.dataprivacy.ie* |
| Department of Education and Science | *www.irlgov.ie/educ* |
| Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment | *www.entemp.ie* |
| Department of the Environment and Local Government | *www.environ.ie* |
| Department of Health and Children | *www.doh.ie* |
| Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform | *www.irlgov.ie/justice* |
| Department of Social and Family Affairs | *www.welfare.ie* |
| Economic and Social Research Institute | *www.esri.ie* |
| Equality Authority | *www.equality.ie* |
| Focus Ireland | *www.focusireland.ie* |
| Health Research Board | *www.hrb.ie* |
| Irish Social Science Data Archive | *www.ucd.ie/~issda/ucd.ie* |
| Money Advice and Budgeting Service | *www.mabs.ie* |
| National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism | *www.nccri.ie* |
| National Council on Ageing and Older People | *www.ncaop.ie* |
| National Database of Research on the Voluntary Sector | *www.heanet.ie/volsec* |
| National Disability Authority | *www.nda.ie* |
| National Women's Council of Ireland | *www.nwci.ie* |
| Office of the Information Commissioner | *www.ilrgov.ie/oic* |
| Office of the Revenue Commissioners | *www.revenue.ie* |
| Pavee Point | *www.paveepoint.ie* |
| Threshold | *www.threshold.ie* |

# NOTES

## FOREWORD

[1] Government of Ireland (2000), *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*. Dublin: The Stationery Office, p.78.

[2] Government of Ireland (2002), *Building an Inclusive Society. Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*. Dublin: Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, p.26.

[3] NESC (2001), *Review of the Poverty Proofing Process* Dublin: NESC, pp.20-23

[4] Palmer, G. and Rahman, M. (2002), *Monitoring Progress on Poverty A Policy Guide on the Use of Social Indicators*. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

[5] See www.combatpoverty.ie and www.esri.ie for further details on published research from the Living in Ireland Surveys 1994-2000.

[6] Government of Ireland (2002), *Building an Inclusive Society: Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness,* p.26.

## CHAPTER 1

[1] Layte, R. et al (2001). *Monitoring Poverty Trends and Poverty Dynamics in Ireland*. Dublin: ESRI.

[2] Government of Ireland (1997). *Sharing in Progress; National Anti-Poverty Strategy.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

[3] Consistent poverty is defined as the proportion of households living on less than 50 per cent or 60 per cent of average disposable incomes (that is, income after tax and social insurance contributions have been paid and welfare and other payments have been received) and experiencing an enforced lack of at least one item on the following list of eight necessities: one substantial meal each day; chicken, meat or fish every second day; a 'roast' or equivalent once a week; two pairs of strong shoes; a warm coat; new rather than second-hand clothes; and, being able to pay everyday household expenses without falling into arrears.

[4] Government of Ireland (2000). *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

[5] Government of Ireland (2002). *Building an Inclusive Society: Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*. Dublin: Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.

[6] Arising from the Lisbon European Council meeting and the Nice Summit, National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPincl) are intended to develop a common EU-wide basis for national actions on poverty and social exclusion. Each member state is responsible for the production of its own country report based on national priorities, policies and targets based on established EU guidelines and procedures. See www.europa.eu.int/comm/ employment_social/index_en.htm for further details.

[7] Social Protection Committee of the European Communities (2001). *Report on Indicators in the Field of Poverty and Social Inclusion, October 2001.* Luxembourg: Commission of the European Communities. See http:// europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2002/jan/report_ind_en.pdf

[8] Eurostat is the central statistical agency of the EU.

[9] See Government of Ireland (2002). *Building an Inclusive Society: Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness.* Dublin: Department of Social and Family Affairs, p. 26.

[10] Formerly the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA).

[11] Combat Poverty Agency (2001). *Annual Report 2000,* Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

[12] These are produced using the ESRI SWITCH Model. This is a computerised simulation model based on the LIS. It allows for the simulation of social welfare and taxation changes and shows the effects of these on the distribution of income as well as the costs of the specific change. See section 2.3.3 below.

[13] Nolan, B., Whelan, C.T. & Williams, J. (1998). *Where are Poor Households?* Dublin: Oak Tree Press.

## CHAPTER 2

[1] The Census, which was due in 2001, was postponed by the Government acting on the advice of the Expert Group on Foot and Mouth Disease. Instead, it took place on 28 April 2002. Details are available at www.cso.ie

[2] These data will be in spreadsheet format and can be accessed at www.eirestat. cso.ie.

[3] ILO and PES represent two differing approaches to measuring unemployment. According to the ILO approach, 'employment' refers to all those who worked for one hour or more, for payment or profit, in the week prior to the survey. It also refers to all persons who had a job but were not at work during that week due to illness, holidays etc. Unpaid work where the work contributes directly to a business, farm or practice owned by another family member is also considered to constitute employment. 'Unemployment' refers to all those who in the week prior to the survey were without work, were currently available for work and had taken specific steps to find work in the preceding four weeks. The PES approach, however, is concerned with people's indication of their usual situation with regard

to employment. Specifically, it includes all those who stated that they were unemployed at the time of the survey, regardless of job search activity.

[4] Rottman, D. and Reidy, M. (1988). *Redistribution through State Social Expenditure in the Republic of Ireland 1973-1980*. Dublin: NESC and Central Statistics Office (1996) *Redistributive Effects of State Taxes and Benefits on Household Incomes in 1987*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

[5] The mean is calculated by adding all the values and then dividing by the number of values.

[6] Nolan, B., Maître B., O'Neill, D. and Sweetman, O. (2000). *The Distribution of Income in Ireland*. Dublin: Oak Tree Press. CSO (1996). *Redistributive Effects of State Taxes and Benefits on Household Incomes in 1987*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

[7] 'Enforced deprivation' means having to do without an item because it cannot be afforded.

[8] See Layte, R. et al (2001). *Monitoring Poverty Trends and Poverty Dynamics in Ireland*. Dublin: ESRI, p. 7, table 2.1. Further details on the LIS are included in this publication. The organisation of the first survey and details of the information sought are described in Callan et al. (1996). *Poverty in the 90s: Evidence from the 1994 Living in Ireland Survey*. Dublin: Oak Tree Press, Chapter 3.

[9] For more detailed information, see: Callan, T. et al (1998). *Simulating Tax and Welfare Changes*. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.

[10] See www.cpa.ie for a list of Combat Poverty Agency publications.

[11] For further information, see: www.ucd.ie/~isscda/ucd.ie or email issda@ucd.ie

[12] Application forms for data downloads are available on the website.

[13] The courts, however, are not covered by this Act.

[14] The primary function of the NSB is to guide the strategic direction of the CSO in meeting Ireland's need for official statistics in economic, social and other areas. It was established on a statutory basis in November 1994 when the *Statistics Act, 1993* came into effect. The Board is currently reviewing a range of strategic issues for statistics in Ireland, including clarifying the respective roles of the CSO and other departments and agencies in providing statistics for Ireland, defining the roles of the NSB and the CSO in promoting greater use of statistics for policy and examining ways in which administrative information can be harnessed and developed to generate policy-oriented statistics. See National Statistics Board (July 2002). *Implementation of Strategy for Statistics, 1998-2002*. Dublin/Cork: CSO.

[15] National Statistics Board (1998) *Strategy for Statistics 1998-2002*. Dublin/Cork: CSO.

[16] Implementation of Strategy for Statistics 1998-2002. Progress Report 2001. Dublin/Cork: CSO.

[17] This Steering Group is chaired by Francis Ruane, Chairperson of the National Statistics Board.

[18] The Data Needs Sub-Group has prepared a draft list of domains as part of its work. These domains also define the scope of the data sources that are relevant to the work of the Data Sources Sub-Group and are as follows: health and access to health; labour market and working conditions; income and wealth; education and training; households and families; housing; safety and security; social relationships and integration; environment; transportation; lifestyles and consumer expenditure; and population.

[19] Quantitative information is numerical in nature and is generally used to produce quantified and, if possible, generaliseable conclusions about events and experiences. This information is collected using survey methods, such as structured interviews and questionnaires. Qualitative information, on the other hand, describes various events and experiences in words rather than numbers. This information is generally gathered using techniques such as observation, unstructured interviews, focus groups and assessments of documents and contemporary records. For more information on quantitative and qualitative research see Bowling, A. (2002). *Research Methods in Health: investigating health and the health services. Second Edition.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

[20] Williams, J. and O'Connor, M. (1999).*Counted in – Report of the 1999 Assessment of Homelessness in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow.* Dublin: ESRI/Homeless Initiative.

[21] Research on public information and advice services has catalogued some of the difficulties potential clients would have in accessing appropriate services (see Ralaheen, 1999. *Information Provision at Local Level – An Integrated Approach. Working Paper.* Dublin: National Social Service Board, pp 6-14).

[22] This database can be searched directly at: www.heanet.ie/volsec.

[23] Under the revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy, the functions of the NAPS Unit are to be taken over by the National Office for Social Inclusion.

[24] Small-Area Population Statistics reports are drawn from the Census of Population and provide detailed analyses of counties and DEDs. These are available from the CSO.

[25] Area-Based Partnerships were established in areas designated as disadvantaged by the government. These are private companies with a Board consisting of representatives from the community and voluntary sector, state agencies, social partners and elected public representatives. The 38 Partnerships and an additional 33 Community Groups that operate in areas not formally designated as disadvantaged adopt a partnership approach to integrated measures to combat local disadvantage and exclusion. These are funded under the Local Development Measure of the Social Inclusion Sub-Programme of the EU Regional Operational Programmes. More details are available at www.adm.ie.

[26] Area Development Management Ltd is a private company established in 1992 by the Irish Government. Its mission is to support integrated local economic and

social development through managing programmes targeted at countering disadvantage and exclusion, and promoting reconciliation and equality. ADM Ltd is the main support body of the Area-Based Partnerships and Community Groups funded under the Local Development Measure of the Social Inclusion Sub-Programme of the EU Regional Operational Programmes. See www.adm.ie.

[27] GAMMA is a private consultancy firm specialising in advanced spatial databases and geographical information systems. See www.GAMMA.ie.

[28] See McElroy, I. (1997). *Developing the Capacity of the Community to Respond to the Long-Term Unemployed.* Ballyfermot Partnership/ADM, and McSorley, C. (1998). *School Absenteeism in Clondalkin – Causes and Responses.* Clondalkin Partnership.

[29] See for example: Ellis, D. (2000). *Employment Rights – A Social Policy Report.* Dublin: Comhairle.

[30] These can be accessed at www.comhairle.ie.

## CHAPTER 3

[1] The Local Government Computer Services Board was set up in 1975 by the then Minister for Local Government. Its functions are to organise and provide a service for the supply of computer facilities to local government and to co-ordinate and secure compatability in the use of computers by local authorities. See www.lgcsb.ie for more details.

[2] For further information on research ethics see Chapter 3, 'Values and ethics in the research process' in May, T. (2001). *Social Research. Issues, methods and process. Third Edition.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

[3] This information was obtained during a meeting with the former Data Protection Commissioner.

[4] The list of bodies covered is available from www.irlgov.ie/finance/ publications/foi/foibodies.htm or from the Department of Finance.

## CHAPTER 4

[1] See Callan, T., Nolan, B., and Whelan, B. J. (1996). *A Review of the Commission on Social Welfare's Minimum Adequate Income. ESRI Policy Research Paper 29.*

[2] See Teagasc (1998). *National Farm Survey 1997.* Dublin: Teagasc.

[3] Under Section 18 of the FOI Act people are entitled to reasons for decisions, so case files or correspondence may indicate how far above the means limit they are. However, such information is not readily amenable to analysis and may be exempt under the Act as personal information.

[4] It should be noted that a child's living standard usually reflects the income of his or her parents. See Nolan, B. (2000). *Child Poverty in Ireland.* Oak Tree Press: Dublin; Cantillon, S. et al. *The Allocation of Resources within Households: Learning from Non-Monetary Indicators* (Forthcoming).

[5] For the tax year ended 31 December, 2001, completed P35s were due by 15 February 2002.

[6] Fitzgerald, E. and Ingoldsby, B. (1999*). Evaluation of the Employment Network and Whole-Time Job Initiative.* Dublin: The Employment Network.

[7] Further details on REACH can be found at www.reach.ie.

[8] Generous discounts for the purchase of Local Authority housing has resulted in the sale of over two thirds of Local Authority homes to their tenants since the 1920s. Effectively, most tenants in employment buy out their homes unless they are tenants of flats or of special senior citizen housing, which are not put up for sale. The particularly generous sales scheme of 1988, which provided a 40 per cent discount on price, saw about one fifth of the then stock purchased under its terms.

[9] See Nolan, B. (1991). *The Wealth of Irish Households – What Can We Learn from Survey Data?* Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

[10] See www.mabs.ie for further details.

[11] For example, Councils often assess a notional rent figure if they are not satisfied with the tenant documentation submitted. This can give rise to notional arrears, until satisfactory documentation allows the true rent to be struck.

[12] Cousins, M. (1992). *Over-Indebtedness of Consumers in Europe*: *Facts and Possible Solutions – Republic of Ireland* (memo).

[13] See National Economic and Social Forum (1997). *Unemployment Statistics – Forum Report No. 13.* Dublin: National Economic and Social Forum, p. 26.

[14] See Ballyfermot Partnership (1997). *Making Connections – Access to Education in Ballyfermot*, and McSorley, C. (1998). *School Absenteeism in Clondalkin – Causes and Responses.* Clondalkin Partnership.

[15] See Williams, J. and O'Connor, M. (1999). *Counted in – Report of the 1999 Assessment of Homelessness in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow.* Dublin: ESRI/Homeless Initiative.

[16] Government of Ireland (2000). *Integrated Strategy on Homelessness.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

[17] The Quarterly Bulletin of Housing Statistics (QBHS) presents quarterly data on house prices and the average size of approved loans, taken from the loan approval figures of lending agencies. Since 1997, the Irish Permanent Building Society, in conjunction with the ESRI, publishes a monthly index of house prices, based on their own loan records, which, unlike the QBHS figures, are corrected for housing mix.

[18] Bacon, P. et al (2000). *The Housing Market in Ireland – An Economic Evaluation of Trends and Prospects.* Dublin: Government Publications, and Bacon, P. et al (1999). *The Housing Market – An Economic Review and Assessment.* Dublin: Government Publications.

[19] Renewals of existing lettings may also be less likely to be conducted through an agent.

[20] O'Shea, E. and Kelleher, C. (2001). 'Health Inequalities in Ireland' in Cantillon et al (eds.) *Rich and Poor: Perspectives on Tackling Inequality in Ireland*. Dublin: Oak Tree Press in association with The Combat Poverty Agency.

[21] Department of Health and Children (2001). *Quality and Fairness: A Health System for You*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

[22] See, for example, South-Eastern Health Board (1997). *The Health of the South-East*. Kilkenny: Department of Public Health/South-Eastern Health Board. pp 12-20. The index is derived from DED level information on unemployment, social class, proportion of rented housing, overcrowding and car ownership. See also: Small Area Health Research Unit (1997). *Development of a National Deprivation Index – Report no. 2*. Dublin: Trinity College.

[23] See, for example, Daly, A. and Walsh, D. (2001). *Activities of Irish Psychiatric Services 2000*. Dublin: The Health Research Board.

[24] Friel, S., Nic Gabhainn, S. and Kelleher, C. (1999). *National Health and Lifestyles Surveys: The Survey of Lifestyles, Attitudes and Nutrition (SLÁN) and the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC)*. Dublin: The Department of Health and Children.

[25] Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (2000). *Review of the One-Parent Family Payment*. The full report is available in MS Word-Format at www.dscfa.ie/dept/reports/opfp/opfp.htm.

[26] O'Brien, M., Moran, R., Kelleher, T. and Cahill, P. (2000). *National Drug Treatment Reporting System, Statistical Bulletin 1997 and 1998. National Data and Data by Health Board Area.* Dublin: The Health Research Board.

[27] See www.equality.ie for more details.

[28] See Government of Ireland (2002). *Building an Inclusive Society: Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*. Dublin: Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, pp 16–18.

[29] See Government of Ireland (2002). *Building an Inclusive Society: Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*. Dublin: Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, pp 14–16.

[30] See Government of Ireland (2000). *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*. Dublin: The Stationery Office, p. 78.

[31] See Government of Ireland (2002). *Building an Inclusive Society: Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*. Dublin: Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, p. 17.

[32] Commission of the Status of People with Disabilities (1996). *A Strategy for Equality: Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities.* Dublin: The Stationery Office.

[33] See www.nda.ie.

[34] A summary of the findings of this survey can be found at www.nda.ie/Attitudes.htm.

[35] See: www.hrb.ie.

## CHAPTER 5
[1] In the UK, the JUVOS (Joint Unemployment and Vacancies Operating System) database was constructed as a longitudinal database of a sample of claims for unemployment payments. It consists of a 5 per cent sample of claims for unemployment-related benefits, covers the years from 1982 to 1996 and can be used to analyse movements into and out of unemployment. See http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/ Study No. 3721 for more details.

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