

Social Inclusion in Cork: Building co-ordination around communities and local needs



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IRELAND IN SOCIAL EUROPE

CHALLENGING PERCEPTIONS CHANGING REALITIES

THE EUROPEAN ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK

in association with

COMMUNITY WORKERS' CO-OPERATIVE
CORK CITY COUNCIL, SOCIAL INCLUSION UNIT
IRISH NATIONAL ORGANISATION OF THE UNEMPLOYED
NORTHERN IRELAND ANTI POVERTY NETWORK
VINCENTIAN PARTNERSHIP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Why this research?

- The geography of inequality in Cork reflects both distinctive aspects of development in the city and common features of urban Ireland. Several studies have shown that in many Irish cities there are concentrations of social disadvantage in areas characterised by physical decline and disinvestment. In these areas, higher proportions of people live in social housing, there are higher levels of unemployment, a higher than average number of lone parent families, higher rates of disability and lower levels of educational achievement.
- Cork City is the most disadvantaged local authority area within the South West region and is identified as being the fifth most disadvantaged local authority area in Ireland as a whole (GAMMA report).
- The Deprivation Index data shows that there has been a general slight shift, with the northside of the city improving and the southside disimproving. Despite this shift, the pattern of affluence and deprivation within Cork City itself remains largely unchanged. With the economic crisis this pattern is stronger.
- Local Authorities, the Irish Government and Europe face big challenges in tackling social exclusion and poverty, particularly the role of co-ordinating services. Questions have been raised at local level around the effectiveness and the impact of structures and initiatives.

Nature of the research

- This report takes a holistic approach to all the aspects that influence social, cultural and economic deprivation, and how these are intertwined.
- This research is based on consulting with communities and service providers:
- It presents the experiences of different groups of people who face social, economic and cultural barriers and deprivation and also analyses their experiences of accessing social services. The groups include carers, the unemployed, the gay and lesbian community, Travellers, young people, Roma, lone parents, migrants, asylum seekers, older people, people with disabilities, and families. This research aims to explore the commonalities between the barriers faced by the different communities, and the most important issues that link their experiences.
- The research also explores the views of people providing services and examines organisations involved in the co-ordinating structures at local level. People interviewed were from Cork City Council, Cork City Partnership, City of Cork VEC, Cork City Development Board, City Monitoring Group, Community Development Projects, Cork City Childcare Company, the Department of Social Protection, FÁS, Health Service Executive, IDA, City Councillors, Community Representatives, NASC, An Garda Síochána, Cork City Enterprise Board, Family Resource Centres, and Community based Services.

Structure of Report

- An analysis of EU Policy on Social Inclusion.
- An analysis of National Policy on Social Inclusion and co-ordination of services.
- Cork City co-ordinating structures and initiatives.
- Experience of Social Exclusion in Cork City.
- Experience of Access to services.
- Unemployment experiences .
- Social Integration experiences.
- Local co-ordinating structures (City Development Board, City Monitoring Group, RAPID Programme).
- Best practice case studies in Cork city.
- European and international case studies on: early childhood education, co-ordination of services, labour activation measures.
- Conclusions with recommendations

European and National policies on Social Inclusion and co-ordination

- EU Policy has been driven by targets to reduce poverty levels through development of national action plans on social inclusion.
- The policies of the EU on Social Inclusion have been to issue guidelines and monitor and evaluate action plans.
- The responsibility of continuing and strengthening social inclusion policies and also of providing cohesive services has been left to each country. This Open Method of Co-ordination creates a gap between the recommendations of the EU and what each country implements.
- EU recommends the need to monitor and evaluate Social Inclusion and Services at local level and stresses the need for closer integration and cohesiveness of service delivery. These recommendations have also been raised at national level by numerous reviews, evaluations and research studies. The gap is therefore being felt at local level.

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- All the reviews and evaluations carried out about local co-ordinating structures were carried out in individual structures, either by analysing the CDB's, or the CMG or the RAPID Programme. To date no evaluation has been carried out in relation to the cohesiveness and overall approach to co-ordination of services at local level. This research report highlights again, some of the key recommendations of these documents, and reiterates their importance.
- Key recommendations of national reviews/evaluations: CDBs to be given a stronger role and mandate, budgets allocated, influence at national level, key roles within each Government Departments and Agencies, more flexibility of funding at local level, further supporting RAPID Programme.

Experience of Social Exclusion in Cork

- Many people and families in disadvantaged areas are just surviving in the current economic climate.
- Intergenerational social exclusion and poverty has resulted in a dependency culture, which has fostered limited empowerment and ownership, and has created in many cases a sense of helplessness, with health problems, addictions, and the loss of communication, parenting, and cooking skills.
- Problems of alcohol, drugs, gambling, and debt is rising in these areas. Giving people money to support their children therefore is not necessarily providing an education and a good quality of life for young people in these areas.
- Extreme anti-social behaviour tends to happen in disadvantaged areas and it is very stressful for communities.
- Education needs to be further prioritised in these areas, in order to create a cultural shift which can lead to an increase in better paid employment and a means to escape the poverty trap. Any cuts on welfare and needed supports will only make these areas more dysfunctional if there is no big investment in education and well thought out policies, leading to a sense of empowerment and ownership.

Experience of access to services

- There needs to be efforts by government at all levels to invest in outreach work and build ownership of services to make sure there's access to mainstream services by people whom experience social exclusion.
- Provision of services for people with disabilities, carers and older people need to continue to be improved.
- Budgetary cuts are affecting front line services at local level, while fragmentation and possible duplication are still existent at government and community level.
- Efforts should be focused toward providing access to youth services at weekends and summer school holiday months.
- Family support services at local level should be delivered through formal structures and be led by government.
- The need to fund community groups through one source (possibly local authorities), and also the need to join community groups at local level.

Experience of unemployment

- Unemployment and access to employment are major challenges affecting Ireland. Throughout the process of this research, both in focus groups and interviews, this emerged as a major concern. Two different aspects were stressed. One was the difficulty in accessing employment experienced by people because of their citizenship status, sexual orientation, disability, age, or level of education. That problem existed before, during and after Ireland's economic boom. The other issue raised was the increase in unemployment levels in Cork, particularly in areas where there are already high levels of unemployment and low levels of educational attainment. These areas would have seen an increase of employment in construction, trades and general operatives and the services sector.
- Economic development initiatives should be introduced within areas that experience disadvantage.

Experiences of Social Integration

- Discrimination and social and cultural isolation are common experiences for a range of people experiencing social exclusion.
- The elimination of discrimination and dealing with social and cultural isolation should be highlighted when developing any recommendations and strategies to tackle disadvantage in the city.
- From community to national level there should be an awareness that simple things like networking, socialising, being part of a cultural event, in other words social capital, are key to tackling social exclusion.

Local co-ordinating structures (City Development Board, City Monitoring Group, RAPID Programme).

There are very clear outcomes in relation to the co-ordinating structures already in place:

- 1- Co-ordination is strongest at ground level, where services have a direct link with communities.
- 2- The links between work on the ground and overarching co-ordinating structures need to be stronger.
- 3- Monitoring the overall outcomes of the provision of services in a geographical area needs to be put in place by all stakeholders involved in co-ordinating structures.
- 4 – Citywide strategic thinking and leadership from all stakeholders in a co-ordinated way needs to be strengthened.

Best practice case studies: Cork City.

The potential that certain initiatives could achieve if they were replicated in other areas of the city, in other organisations, agencies, and departments, needs to be supported at strategic levels:

- Age Link.
- Gardai community policing, working structures and policies.
- Community representation toolkits.
- Knocknaheeney Music Project.
- Lifelong Learning Festival.
- Discovery.
- Youth Work Travellers initiative.
- Adult Education Networks.
- Project Refocus.

European and International Best Practice

- Early Childhood education: The Home Interaction Programme for Parents and Youngsters
 - Support foundations for learning in the home
 - Supports parents towards employment and local level community leadership.
- Co-ordination of services: Total Place – England
 - The Total Place Initiative was a pilot programme run from 2009-2010. It explored how a 'whole area' approach to public services can lead to better services at less cost. It was set up by the Department of Communities and Local Government, as part of the Treasury's Operational Efficiency Programme (OEP).
 - Key government departments (including Treasury, Health, Work and Pensions, the Home Office) worked closely with the Leadership Centre for Local Government, the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs), the Government Office (GO) network and the Improvement and Development Agency (IdeA), ensuring that Total Place was successful.
 - Examples of potential savings that could be generated by avoiding overlap and duplication between organisations included Lewisham's findings that it could save up to £15m through more collaborative procurement. Also, Gateshead, South Tyneside and Sunderland said they could save up to £12m jointly by delivering integrated targeted services.

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- Labour activation measures (Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland):
 - Investment in Youth supports once they fall out of college or labour.
 - Focus on apprenticeships.
 - Norway and Sweden: target early college and secondary school drop outs and also invests in necessary basic skills.
 - Norway and Sweden both focus on readings, writing and mathematics in schools.
 - Denmark and Iceland: Alternative education, practical training (Schools of production).
 - Denmark: Activation Centres (long term unemployed).

Conclusion:

- Focus initiatives that support parents for early childhood education with family supports and employment.
- Focus on the knowledge at local level to drive co-ordination of services, which needs to be supported at national level to achieve results.
- Labour activation measures need to consider the school system and colleges. These sectors need to be involved in such initiatives.

Recommendations

- Stronger outreach approach to service provision.
- Stronger role, supports, flexibility, budgetary control and mandates at local level to drive co-ordination of services with support at national level to overcome barriers.
- EU to take more practical steps toward making co-ordination of services at local level in each state a priority: introduce processes that value co-ordination at local level, such as funding requirements or direct funding to co-ordinating structures.
- City/County Development Boards, SIMs and RAPID Programme have stronger influence at national level.

At local level:

- Develop high level core team as a sub group of CDB and CMG.
- CDB strategy to develop collaborative priorities.
- Carry out a basic mapping of co-ordinating structures in the city and do a review and tightening exercise to link them and minimise the number of structures/initiatives.

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- Setting clear roles and responsibilities by each stakeholders with national government commitment.
- Setting monitoring procedures within each stakeholder's internal structures that would also link to the national level.
- Further strengthening the links between the RAPID Programme and city wide inter-agency initiatives, the City Development Board and the City Monitoring Group, and develop clear measures and procedures that would allow barriers to be tackled from ground level to the City Monitoring Group, further to City Development Board Level and finally to national level.
- Setting up a mechanism with the Department of Education in relation to the need for it to have an active role at local level that would support the children and youth initiatives of the CDB, City Monitoring Group and RAPID Programme.

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- The overall consensus of interviewees was that there is a need to focus on a geographical area or topic and work on it at a strategic level. There is a need to expand the role of city wide inter-agency groups making them more strategic and linking them to ground initiatives, for example RAPID AITs and their initiatives. The following are the suggested sub-groups that could be developed out of the City Monitoring Group and City Development Board. These issues were considered important by interviewees:

Community Empowerment and Participation

Unemployment and Training

Economic Development

Equality

Access to Services

Fragmentation of Services and possible duplication (all stakeholders)

Innovative initiatives that promote social inclusion (all stakeholders)

Promoting Integration in all areas of activity and service provision