

Developing the Welfare State
Notes from EAPN Roundtable discussion
7th April, 2005, Carmichael Centre, Dublin

Attendance: John Sweeney (NESC), Camille Loftus (OPEN), Eric Conroy (INOUE), Orla O'Connor (NWC), Philip O'Connor (Dublin Employment Pact), Kathleen McCann (Congress Centres Network), Candy Murphy (One Family), Audrey Deane (St VdeP) Thomas Erbsloh (ITM), David Stratton (AAI), Sheila Simmons (Irish Association of Older People), Carole Sullivan (Equality Authority), Jennifer Murphy (Tallaght Partnership), Barbara Walshe (CPA) Paul Ginnell, Robin Hanan, Alex McMahan and Janice Ransom (EAPN Ireland).

General

There were a number of general positive points made by different participants in relation to the Developmental Welfare State model as presented in the NESC report:

- it provides an important opportunity for a debate on the balance between social and economic policy.
- the report itself is readable which means more people may engage with it.

Service Provision

It was agreed that the report correctly points to huge weaknesses of the current situation in terms of service provision e.g. health, childcare, education, training, employment supports etc. It was clearly felt that the model proposed in the report envisages a great improvement in terms of service delivery and that this would be a challenge requiring major action and change. This is at the heart of the new model. There were a number of questions about whether or not there was a commitment or capacity to deliver this level of improvement in services that was required. Integrated service delivery was also highlighted as a challenge

The question was raised a number of times as to the capacity of local government to deliver the services as envisaged by the NESC Report. Currently this is not happening and Ireland is very centralised. One contribution highlighted that in terms of the public service, the Strategic Management Initiative had no penalties or incentives in relation to equality in Quality Customer Services and that targets overall were very weak. This meant that this area was then not a priority in service delivery. Currently in the local government system there is a row back in delivering on Section 5 housing. Change requires institutional change with investment and sanctions. There is need for change in the way we work.

There were a number of comments on the Nordic system throughout. It was stated by one participant that the Nordic model is not now self contained. In the 1930's the models were similar with greater universalism but now there are disparate models. However, all had a greater focus on services than our model. People will pay more in taxes in order to get good quality services. Would the resources be provided for the level of services required to implement the DWS model? There is a blockage in terms of increasing taxes and on re-distribution generally. Lack of funding is the reason we are where we are now in terms of a major deficit in services. An efficient and effective use of revenue is required.

There is a need for balance between good service provision and having an integrated society e.g. in terms of housing provision. This is an issue for Nordic States. Care has to be taken that high levels of service provision does not lead to social isolation especially in terms of care e.g. old people in Sweden looked after in institutions and not with the family.

Role of Community and Voluntary Sector

The expectation of the community and voluntary sector as service providers is highlighted in the report. A number of those who spoke agreed with the concern presented by Camille Loftus of 'creeping managerialism' whereby C+V groups would be expected to be brokers between communities and the state e.g. Traveller support groups and their role as advocates or representatives of these communities through a community work approach would not be respected or supported. Where the sector is involved in service delivery there is a worry about sufficient levels of funding which impacts on delivery.

The question was raised if in some cases this could lead to unnecessarily investing in another layer of bureaucracy.

Lifecycle approach and Individualised approach

A participant felt that the lifecycle approach presented in the report is attractive. Some people felt that people are fed up being categorised and the lifecycle approach takes account of differing stages/needs. However, there were different point of view in terms of the individualised approach versus an approach which took account of the needs and identities of different social groups. One participant felt that there were positive aspects to what was outlined in terms of individualisation but there was a danger of the focus and value of community being lost e.g. the US model with a loss of the 'social' dimension. Another felt that the individualised approach moves away from stigmatising the group for not participating to stigmatising the individual.

The majority of the people who spoke on this issue however expressed a major concern that the approach lacks a group analysis and fails to address the issue of common identities, cultures and the structural inequalities experienced by some groups in society e.g. women, people with disabilities, members of ethnic minority groups including Travellers etc. It was stated that there was a need for positive and targeted approaches for those with a history of discrimination to address current inequality.

Gender Dimension

There were a number of comments on the lack of recognition of gender issues in the report. This was summarised in a brief presentation by **Orla O'Connor (NWCI)**:

- She was concerned at the presumptions that underpinned the model.
- It doesn't analyse the system from the perspective of a male bread-winner model and therefore this is not addressed. Most services are based on this model.
- The NWCI, EAPN Ireland, OPEN and the Equality Authority are about to undertake a gender analysis of the report.
- The current Government lone-parent review also does not address this.
- There is a broader equality perspective which is not addressed. There is a need for a structural equality analysis to be carried out on the report e.g. test out the model re. Travellers etc. Equality proofing is needed.

- How we define work and participation in services in and outside work needs gender analysis.
- The sharing of caring responsibilities effects outcomes and choices especially for women.
- There is a need for a wider debate within a rights framework.
- The social insurance model also needs to be looked at regarding participation in work.
- The review of lone-parent supports asks major questions in terms of service provision and the commitment in terms of childcare. How will the strategy be implemented?

In terms of the lone-parent review other participants also raised similar issue and asked if extra supports were going to FAS and what was their capacity to adequately meet needs of lone-parents. Currently courses started at 8:30am and were not accessible.

There are questions over the current approaches in the area of childcare, which has a great impact on women e.g. there are greater supports being put into children under 5 but what about after-school care especially if parents are supposed to be working.

Equality Focus

Many of the comments from participants outlined in the above two areas relating to the need for an approach which addressed structural inequality including gender inequality. It was stated that the drafting of the Report missed an important opportunity for equality proofing which should be part of the process for developing the report. The fact that there was still no legal requirement to proof was still a weakness in policy making that needs to be addressed.

Participation

There was a strong feeling that the views of the Community and Voluntary sector is not properly addressed in the current partnership structure and that this is reflected in Participation in NESC. There is an imbalance away from C+V sector and the current partnership talks are impoverished by the lack of voice of people experiencing poverty. One participant highlighted the broader issue of democracy and participation is central and part of the discussion on a 'developmental state'. Partnership needs to be widened beyond that which currently exists.

Ownership and Governance

There was a major question over who owns the content of the NESC Report? Will there be any real debate on it? Will it filter down into change or sink into bureaucracy? Who is driving it?

One participant highlighted that there were general problems of governance with lack of serious public debate on policy development. The report provides a useful template for discussion but there is nowhere to have the debate. There was a fear of moving too quickly from producing the document to implementing parts of it without any debate. There is a need for wider debate on the report and on government policy in general. The relationship between the state and NGOs needs to improve for it to progress. It was stated that backbench TDs would not understand or care about the Developmental Welfare State. The Report is the product of the pillars and NESC but not the Government.

Relationship between Social and Economic Policy and values

There was a concern expressed that the social was to be the servant of the economic and that it is economic reductionism. Migrants are discussed as migrant workers with no recognition of other migrant groups and how it impact on them. The question was raised as to how we put the social element at the top of the agenda. How will the social inclusion aspects outside the labour market be addressed, e.g. in relation to education literacy is an issue, etc?

Ireland is going through a fundamental change and there is a need to ask what sort of a society we want. People are valued as economic units. In relation to the caring role and how we value it. Is it only addressed in terms of employment and releasing someone from a caring role to access a job? What about those who chose to stay at home to care for someone?

A number of people highlighted the need to address structural inequalities. A key question/indicator is will the strategy reduce poverty?

European Situation

Paul Ginnell (EAPN) gave a brief summary of the European situation.

Currently there are similar changes and debates taking place across the EU with more of a focus on the labour market and pressure for social welfare to support labour market participation. 'Flexicurity' is a term which is more commonly used across EU Member States to refer to an economic situation where the type of jobs that are available are more insecure and employees are required to be more flexibility but that the social protection system is more developed which provides greater security and supports to help people re-enter employment without experiencing any great disadvantage.

One of the recent developments which mirrors the discussion in Ireland on the Developmental Welfare State and similar discussion in other Member States is the Commission Communication "*Concerning a consultation on action at EU level to promote active inclusion of the people furthest from the labour market*". This Communication was promised as a Communication on the area of 'Minimum Income' in the Social Agenda 2005-2010. This was to follow on from the Council Recommendations in 1992 for Minimum Income measures to be developed in Member States social protection systems. The focus in 1992 was on the provision of sufficient levels and supports for people to live with dignity and to avoid social exclusion but since 2002, and particularly since the revision of the Lisbon Strategy in 2005 with an increased focus on competitiveness, there has been pressure from some Member States that minimum income levels should not be a disincentive to labour market participation and should support this participation. Therefore the Communication now has more of a labour market focus.

The Communication aims to initiate debate on the link between social and economic policy and looks for answers to questions related to the role of the EU in this area. Submissions are due in soon and EAPN Ireland is preparing a response which other organisations can contribute to. There is more information on the EAPN web-site www.eapn.ie.

General

- The DWS model would only deliver positive change if all 3 elements of it were implemented together and services not left behind.
- Another participant highlighted that the quality of employment was also addressed.
- Concern was expressed as to the intersection between NAPIncl, NDP and the DWS model.
- The link between national and local policy development is currently very weak with massive discontinuity.
- Are there elements that relate to the labour market that are being implemented e.g. review of the lone parent family payment; renaming the social welfare payments to being 'participation payments' with out any improvement in the area of services?

Responses from those who made presentations

John Sweeney

- John clarified that this is not a green paper. If it was there would be 2-3 years of debate followed by a White paper which would take other views into account.
- The longer in gestation the more interaction in the report with – wider participation of actors. This prepares the ground.
- The way our system – strengths and weaknesses.
- Agree gender analysis is mission but believes it is gender neutral and is not underpinned by a male breadwinner model
- There is a clear link between economic policy and social policy and the report is based on this reality. There is a benefit in aligning economic/social policy.
- The 'Participation package' is about wider participation in society and not just in the labour market.
- There is a rise in women's education level and it is women themselves who want to enter the workforce. It is not being forced on them. Paid employment is the main route that people want.
- Respect for the individual does not mean lack of recognition for the group. There is a need to look at the issue of targeted and individual approaches.

Camille Loftus

- 'Participation payment' may not be about the labour market but as wider participation requires resources the only way to get this is through a job.
- Women's participation in the labour market brings an increased workload. Women have to balance work / care responsibilities.
- Until we begin to look through male breadwinner model will not identify women additional issues – wages, childcare, etc
- Women are outperforming men but are still not achieving equality in employment.
- Pro employment focus has left the issue of child poverty unaddressed. The Child Dependency Allowance which targets children in low income families has not increased in over 12 years. Economic policy constrains progress and the economic argument outweighs social need.
- Institutional change – still geographic and social stigma/discrimination, no real flexible options for people from some communities e.g. people in Ballymun shut out of employment despite accessing training and knowing the system.
- The National Employment Action Plan was implemented in part.

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