

According to the Monitoring Poverty & Social Exclusion Report 2006 (MOPSE) Northern Ireland has:

- High numbers of people receiving out of work benefits (19%)
- High numbers of people with a disability
- High low pay rates among full-time employees (22%)
- High numbers without paid work
- Very high fuel poverty rate (24% NI v 9% England)

The invisible poor

There are gaps in the data we have on groups experiencing poverty in Northern Ireland. NI local ethnic and new immigrant populations do not tend to feature in quantitative research studies. Their experience of poverty tends to remain invisible and unaccounted for, though none the less real. The groups identified at greatest risk of poverty by people experiencing poverty attending NIAPN consultative events are: ethnic minorities - migrant workers particularly Asylum Seekers; travellers; young people especially those aged 16-18, lone parent families; families of ex-prisoners; people with low or no educational qualifications; long term unemployed; people living in disadvantaged communities; people living in border areas.

How does poverty affect people?

People living with poverty and social exclusion live daily with food poverty, fuel poverty, low wage employment and low benefit levels. All these result in poor health and a lower life expectancy. Social isolation is common, alongside educational failure. It is a stark fact that People Experiencing Poverty (PEP) also face a much higher cost of living as they cannot access the credit or payment benefits more affluent people take for granted.

Long term experience of poverty often results in people feeling excluded and powerless. This affects the hopes and dreams they enjoy and contributes to high levels of anxiety just trying to make ends meet. The grinding worry associated with long term poverty can also make the future look bleak, as the cost of living keeps on rising but wages and benefits stay the same. This can lead to depression and health problems and in the long term greater dependency on essential services. It costs our society more in the long run not to deal with poverty now.

How do we address poverty?

- Talk to the experts! Involve PEP in discussing what works and what does not. Support the capacity of disadvantaged groups and communities through sustained long term resourcing to identify and develop local and regional solutions.
- Provide most for those people and groups at greatest risk of poverty.
- Work towards providing better quality jobs, not just more jobs.
- Ensure the welfare 'safety net' protects families & individuals against poverty.
- Reduce the disproportionate burden of taxation on poorer families.
- Improve the quality of delivery of services and gear them towards the needs of the poorest families.
- Provide benefit entitlements to all UK residents equally, irrespective of immigration status.
- Pay housing benefit for working people living on low incomes and make work pay.
- Build more affordable rent controlled social housing.
- Encourage healthy living by paying people a realistic wage or benefit level.

Remember poverty and social exclusion are not acceptable in one of the wealthiest countries in the world AND

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of oneself and one's family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, education..." (UN Declaration of Human Rights 1948)

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Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network



What is poverty?

'Poverty is the drip, drip erosion of your soul'

(NIAPN & JRF Consultation on Family & Child Poverty, The Real Story 2006)

Article 25, United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, 1948 talks about poverty in terms of 'rights' it says that:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of oneself and one's family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, education..."

Defining poverty

How we define poverty is important because it determines how we deal with it. Peter Townsend talks about 'relative poverty'. Relative poverty takes different circumstances into account, as poverty means different things to different people. He defines poverty as:

'Individuals, families and groups can be said to be living in poverty if they lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved in the societies to which they belong' (Townsend, Peter 1979).

Our understanding of poverty is so important because it directly influences the type of policies and actions developed to do something about it. Some people think poverty is a personal choice but many are of the opinion that: 'Poverty is not accidental, it's social, structural and economic decisions that cause it.' (Participant at North Belfast workshop, on the Way Forward document June 2004)

How is poverty measured?

The poverty line

Poverty is normally measured by using relative income poverty lines. This involves working out average household incomes in a country. A poverty line is then set which is a percentage of that average income. Commonly these poverty lines range from 40-70% of household income. This gives an overall picture of the risk of poverty but the figures can also be broken down by age, gender, household type and employment status to give a more detailed picture of who is at greatest risk. People falling below 60% of median income are said to be "at risk of poverty".

The amount of money that this 60% income threshold represents varies according to the number of adults and children the household contains. In 2005/06, the threshold was worth:

- £102 per week for single adult (£108 UK)
- £171 per week for a couple with no children (£186 UK)
- £205 per week for a single adult with two dependent children (aged 5 & 14) (£223 UK)
- £277 per week for a couple with two dependent children (aged 5 & 14) (£301 UK)

These sums of money are measured after income tax, rates, and housing costs have been deducted. The sum of money left over is therefore what is available to pay for food, clothing, travel, heating, lighting and so on. (Households below Average Incomes 2005/06)

Measurement

There have been moves away from measuring poverty on the basis of income alone. Northern Ireland now measures poverty in terms of relative income [60% of the national average] and deprivation. Deprivation indicators are now included in the annual Family Resources Survey (FRS), carried out by Government in Northern Ireland and across the UK. These are based on families' ability to afford:

- Enough money to keep home in decent décor
- Hobby or Leisure Activity
- Holidays away from home one week a year (not staying with relatives)
- Household contents Insurance
- Have friends / family round for drink/meal at least once a month
- Save £10+ a month
- 2 pairs of all weather shoes per adult in household
- Replace any worn out furniture
- Replace/repair broken electrical goods
- Money to spend on yourself each week (not on your family)
- Able to keep accommodation warm enough
- Behind in one or more household bills (Bills asked about in FRS include Electricity, Gas, Other Fuels e.g. Coal / Oil, Insurance Policies, Telephone, Television/Video Rental, HP payments, Rates)

Area based multiple deprivation

It is also possible to measure poverty on the basis of the area in which you live (NIMDM 2005). These measurements can then be used to objectively identify the areas of greatest need. This approach uses existing administrative data: (such as registered unemployed, people in receipt of means tested benefits etc). It analyses data across 7 domains of deprivation (Income, Employment, Health, Education, Access to Services, Social Environment & Housing) and forms a multiple deprivation index. This can be ranked according to each domain and on the basis of all domains taken together; the latter results in a Multiple Deprivation Index. These area measurements can then be compared at a variety of levels: from the largest Local Government Districts to Parliamentary Constituencies and to neighbourhood level statistics.

The lived experience of poverty

The NI Anti-Poverty Network believes more work needs to be done to capture the reality of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas, and from the perspective of those 'invisible' groups who do not 'register' in traditional research findings.

What causes poverty?

There is a general lack of understanding that forces beyond a person's control cause poverty such as:

- Lack of decently paid employment to cover the costs of living
- Lack of affordable social housing
- Benefit traps e.g. gaining Working Families Credit (WTC) or Child Tax Credit (CTC) but as a result losing housing benefit payments
- Overpayments of WTC or CTC credits resulting in repayment hardship
- Lack of access to education and training

- Caring responsibilities for children, older relatives and sick or disabled family members
- Lack of access to appropriate healthcare & community supports
- Lack of access to affordable reliable public transport
- Lack of affordable local childcare
- The widening gap between housing benefit payments and private & social property rents
- Falling into the poverty trap with a resulting loss of personal confidence & 'employability'
- Lack of family support
- Accident or ill health
- Loss of employment through redundancy, or 'lay offs'
- Loss of housing through intimidation, ill health or relationship breakdown
- Employment options limited to local low pay, part-time employment opportunities

Who lives in poverty in Northern Ireland?

- Over half of Northern Ireland's population have incomes of less than £300 per week after housing costs.
- Before housing costs 43% of Northern Ireland's population have incomes of less than £300 per week.
- 2% of Northern Ireland households live on less than £100 per week before housing costs and 5% after housing costs.
- 16% of Northern Ireland households live on less than £200 per week before housing costs and 25% after housing costs.
- Of all the Local Government Districts (LGDs) individuals living in Derry/Londonderry are most at risk of being in low income.
- Individuals living in the West of the Region are most at risk of being in low income. Those living in the East of the Region are least at risk.
- Working-age adults living in workless households are much more likely to have low incomes, with more than half falling into the bottom fifth.
- Working-age adults with children are more likely to have incomes at the bottom of the income distribution than those without children.
- Female working-age adults are more likely than males to have low-incomes, with 42% having fallen into the bottom two fifths of the distribution. (Before Housing Costs).
- Students and those with no qualifications are more at risk of low-income, than those who had any educational qualification above or below degree level.

- In 2005/06, more than half of children in NI lived in households with incomes in the bottom two fifths of the income distribution. The greater the number of children in a family, the increased likelihood of low-income. Children living in Dungannon were most at risk of low income.

- Pensioners are more likely to be in the bottom two fifths and Single pensioners are more at risk of low-income than pensioner couples.
- Pensioners living in NIHE or Housing Association properties are least at risk of low-income, compared to pensioners living in accommodation they owned outright who had the highest risk. (Before Housing Costs)

All above references from, DSD Households Below Average Incomes NI, 2005/06

- Households that have experienced relationship separation have the highest rate of poverty 54%, followed by divorced households 46% & then single people 39%. (Bare Necessities, Poverty & Social Exclusion Survey, 2003)
- Of all persons in poor households 57% were female. Half of all poor households are characterised by long-term limiting illness, health problems or disability. Carers have higher than average poverty rates. (Bare Necessities, Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey, 2003)
- 'NI not only has higher poverty levels but considerably higher levels of income inequality than Britain.' (Bare Necessities, Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey, 2003)
- 'Northern Ireland also has lower income levels and higher deprivation than the rest of Britain.' (Hillyard et al, 2003)
- 'Northern Ireland is one of the most unequal societies in the developed world.' (Hillyard et al, 2003)