

International and historical anti-poverty strategies: evidence and policy review

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1. Introduction and summary

Aim of this report

This report aims to do two things. Firstly, it sets out how poverty in the UK compares to other countries, in Europe and elsewhere. Secondly, it compares approaches to reducing poverty across these countries, to look for evidence of strategies that work across the whole population.

This report considers the many different strategies for reducing poverty, across the UK, Europe, North America and Brazil. No single strategy has been unambiguously successful, though some have been associated with significant reductions in poverty over a long period. There are many examples of well-intentioned strategies that fail to achieve the political purchase necessary for success.

What makes a strategy more likely to succeed?

There was no single example of a strategy that addressed all the problems of poverty, but we found that several things can increase the chances of success.

- Political commitment: the most effective strategies all had commitment at a high level, from both politicians and civil servants. This gave impetus and leadership to the strategy.
- Responsibility and accountability: in some of the strategies we reviewed, the lines of accountability for delivery were not clear. These were often the less successful strategies.
- Links to economic policy: if anti-poverty strategies are to have real purchase they must be developed alongside economic policy.
- Institutional arrangements: the creation of dedicated institutions or systems of governance helps the development process. They also offer some security against changes in political leadership.
- Co-ordination (the all government approach): the multifaceted nature of poverty means that tackling it requires high levels of co-ordination across government.
- Implementation: the development of a strategy means very little if it is not put into practice. There remains a gap between what is often committed to in strategy documents and what is delivered. Often gaps emerged when moving from the national picture to local delivery.
- The involvement of external stakeholders: these are a vital source of information and should also be involved in implementing the strategy.
- An effective system of monitoring and review: measuring results is crucial to maintain momentum and ensure various parts of governments are meeting their objectives.

Long-term view of poverty trends in the UK and elsewhere

Most countries saw a rise in poverty between the 1980s and 1990s. While some countries such as Portugal and Ireland then made substantial progress to redress this, the UK stands out compared with many countries in the OECD. From around 2008, the global recession and ensuing Eurozone crisis stopped any further reduction in poverty in the EU except in the UK, where the rate has continued to fall.

This may, though, be due to the way income poverty is measured, relative to the national median income. This median has fallen substantially in real terms in the UK, reducing relative poverty. It is worth noting, though, that falling medians elsewhere in Europe have not always led to falling poverty.

It is useful, then to look at other measures of poverty, particularly the material deprivation measure which looks at whether people can afford everyday goods and services. In the UK, the proportion of people who are materially deprived has risen sharply since 2009, from 3 to 8 per cent. Around 20 per cent of people in Greece and 15 per cent in Italy cannot afford everyday items.

The UK experience

In 2012, the UK had a higher poverty rate on a range of poverty measures than most old EU member states, 'crisis' countries aside. However, the UK experience of poverty over the last 20 years could be seen as positive – a fall when many comparable countries saw a rise and a fall when many similar countries saw no such fall.

There was no strategy document for reducing poverty in the UK. There were, however, a range of policies from the late 1990s onwards that were intended to reduce poverty – e.g. the minimum wage and working tax credits. There was also high profile commitment from the Prime Minister to 'eradicate' child poverty. So embedded was the idea of reducing child poverty, that even following the economic crisis of 2008, the UK government protected payments to low-income families with children via tax credits.

Overall, though, while the UK reduced child (and pensioner) poverty considerably, child poverty was not eradicated. Working-age poverty, particularly for those without children, did not fall at all. Across the countries of the UK, progress was varied, with many strategies published but fewer signs of success.

The EU National Action Plans

The EU National Action Plans (NAPs) were developed as part of the Lisbon Strategy. The aim was to make 'a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010'. This was not achieved – poverty was higher, using the EU's own preferred measures, in the EU as a whole and in many member states at the end of the process than at the beginning.

There is little doubt the initiative did provide new opportunities in most member states to take a strategic approach to addressing poverty. Plans varied in content

and adequacy, but the fact that they existed at all was a sign of success for many organisations.

The period from the start of the economic crisis casts some doubt on the efficacy of relying on such formal external initiatives for the development of an anti-poverty strategy. When the economic crisis began the strategies and plans that had been put in place did little to prevent problems of poverty increasing. The fact that in many cases these plans were externally driven meant that there was little national commitment to them. However, it is clear from many of those involved in the development of the NAPs that the process gave many countries the opportunity to have a more focused discussion about poverty and how it should be tackled.

What does a strategy add?

One criticism of the strategies voiced by several of our participants was that they often comprised a collection of existing policies and did not add any new policy developments or approaches.

A strategy can also facilitate co-ordination and consensus building among a variety of stakeholders within and outside government. Linked to this, strategies can be an effective way to assign responsibility for poverty reduction policy. For example, before the first Belgian strategy there was widespread reluctance to take responsibility for anti-poverty policy. Following the strategies there is more clarity around where responsibility lies.

A strategy also offers the opportunity to link national targets to local activity. In one local authority area there was clear evidence of the national anti-poverty framework providing some of the impetus for the development of approaches locally.

The need for political commitment

More successful examples of poverty reduction, such as Ireland or the UK, had high level political commitment. In many countries the NAP process failed to achieve real national political commitment, although there were some notable exceptions such as Ireland and Belgium.

Often the process of developing an anti-poverty strategy remained a largely bureaucratic exercise. As a result, the commitments to develop strategies rarely manifested themselves in commitments to implement them. The majority of NAPs were never subject to any kind of parliamentary scrutiny.

Institutional change – an example from Ireland

The strategy development process in Ireland was notable in that it was one of few countries to have a government body dedicated to poverty reduction and the ongoing development of anti-poverty strategies – The Combat Poverty Agency (CPA).

It is clear that such institutions play a key role in the development of anti-poverty strategies. It had strong links to the community and voluntary sector, provided

government with invaluable advice and expertise and ensured that the experiences of people in poverty reached those developing the strategy.

The wider economic context

Almost all of the strategies reviewed took the view that work is the best route out of poverty. In doing so the assumption seemed to be that an increase in the number of people in work would lead to a decrease in poverty. This is a valid assumption and a necessary condition – we found no country that had reduced poverty without increasing the number of people in work.

But across Europe, several countries increased the number of people in work without significantly decreasing the number in poverty. For many people at the lower end of the labour market, moving into employment (particularly part-time, short-term and low-paid) does not necessarily mean moving out of poverty. A key criticism of the strategies was that they failed to acknowledge sufficiently the growth of in-work poverty, particularly following the onset of the recession, and take the necessary action to address it. Moreover, often the economic strategies for jobs growth took no account of how the type and location of these jobs could best reduce poverty.

The impact of political change

Changing governments often means a shift in social policy. In Belgium, the transition from a socialist government to a liberal one was accompanied by a focus on fixing the economy as the solution to poverty rather than spending on social assistance programmes.

Anti-poverty strategies take time to create and embed and in many cases progress made in developing and implementing a strategy is lost in the transition from one government to another. One of the biggest tests of the success of a strategy is whether it can survive a change in government. Drafting legislation to function alongside a strategy or developing a system of governance that sits outside government are some ways to ensure that a strategy will survive.

Our approach

This work was carried out between April and December 2013. It consisted largely of a review of secondary data and published anti-poverty strategies. An extensive review of international data on a range of poverty related issues was carried out. A framework for analysing anti-poverty strategies was developed and applied to those strategies identified by the research team. In addition to the review of secondary data and of published strategies, interviews were carried out with key actors in a number of countries in order to better understand the context of the development of anti-poverty strategies. These interviews were carried out with local and national government officials (some ex-officials) and representatives of NGOs. Interviews were carried out with individuals from Ireland, Belgium, Portugal, Canada and Denmark. Additional interviews were carried out with individuals from local authorities in the UK and NGOs.

One of the initial questions that we encountered as part of the review was clarifying what was meant by 'anti-poverty strategy'. For our purposes, a strategy



is a high level plan that is designed to bring together a range of resources in order to bring about change – in this case a reduction in levels of poverty. Strategies should be focused on the future (not simply reporting on past activity), and will therefore be attempting to shape unknown aspects of the future. Anti-poverty strategies should contain the following elements: the diagnosis of the problem or challenge that is being addressed; the policy or policies designed to address the challenge; and the actions and resources need to make change. In addition to these key elements a strategic approach would also include a clear time frame, a process for reporting results, and a clear articulation of how different relevant actors would be involved.

2.Data analysis

Background

In this section we analyse data available from two sources; the OECD Statistics Extracts and the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU SILC) dataset through Eurostat. OECD allows longer term comparisons across a wide range of countries, on a limited range of variables. The EU SILC dataset allows for comparable cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis of a wider range of measures with a wider range of potential cuts of the data, but only covers the years 2005 to 2012.

The OECD comparisons focus on low household incomes. The EU comparisons start with the EU 2020 targets – lower poverty and social exclusion and higher employment.

Overall findings

With an overall poverty rate of 17 per cent, the UK is roughly in the middle of the poverty distribution amongst industrialised OECD countries. The UK has a higher overall poverty rate than most Western European countries, including Belgium, Germany, Finland and Sweden. In the EU, only the “crisis” countries (Ireland, Spain, Greece, Italy and Portugal) have higher levels of poverty.

Looking beyond the EU to other developed countries in the OECD, the UK has a lower overall poverty rate than all other comparable industrialised countries, including the United States, Israel, New Zealand and Canada. While all these countries saw their poverty rates increase over the last 20 years, poverty in the UK fell over the same period.

Looking at other poverty measures, the UK again fares better than its industrialised OECD counterparts. The UK has a higher depth of poverty rate than all comparable OECD countries except New Zealand. Again, the UK performs worse than most western European countries, crisis countries aside, on a range of other poverty measures, including depth of poverty, severe material deprivation, low work intensity, in-work poverty and child poverty.

As such, given that the UK has lower poverty than many other OECD countries, and the EU has lower poverty than the UK, overall the EU does appear to be the best place to look for examples of low poverty in the industrialised world.

The global recession and ensuing Euro-zone crisis stopped any real reduction in poverty in the EU. Prior to that, however, there had been progress in countries such as Portugal and Ireland. The fall in poverty in Ireland came at the same time as the second largest rise in employment rates in the EU. Portugal’s falling poverty is less obviously driven by rising employment however, as the fall in the proportion of people not in work was more modest.

At the same time – pre-crisis poverty was rising in the Scandinavian countries. This is of interest as these are often seen as examples of countries with low

inequality and substantial welfare safety nets. This may still be true in comparison to other countries, but less so than 20 years ago.

The direction of change in the UK, however, has been one of improvement, which is not the case in the other OECD countries. While most countries saw a rise in poverty between the 1980s and 1990s, the UK stands out compared to non-EU countries in the OECD in seeing that rate then fall. Germany also saw poverty rise over the decade leading up to the crisis.

This may, though, be due to the way income poverty is measured, relative to the national median income. We know that this median has fallen substantially in the UK, bringing down poverty with it. It is worth noting, though, that falling medians elsewhere in Europe have not always led to falling poverty.

It is useful, then to look at other measures. Of most interest is the material deprivation measure, which looks at whether people can afford everyday goods and services. Although data is only available from 2005 in the EU, and no time series is available outside the EU, it tells us something quite striking about poverty following the downturn.

In the UK, the proportion of people who are materially deprived has risen sharply since 2009, from 3 per cent to 8 per cent. In other parts of the EU, the rise has been sharper still. Around 20 per cent of people in Greece cannot afford everyday items, nor can 15 per cent in Italy.

Tellingly, the EU 2020 targets include a measure of worklessness in the measure of poverty and social exclusion. This measure – low work intensity – is recorded at the household level, and includes workless households as well as those where the adults work only a small amount.

The UK again has one of the higher rates of low work intensity in the EU, lower only than Ireland, Spain, Belgium and Greece. But when we look at other measures of work, we see a different picture - the UK has a higher employment rate than the EU average. The issue in the UK is the distribution of work at the household level. In particular, lone parents in the UK have a much lower “work intensity” than in other EU countries.

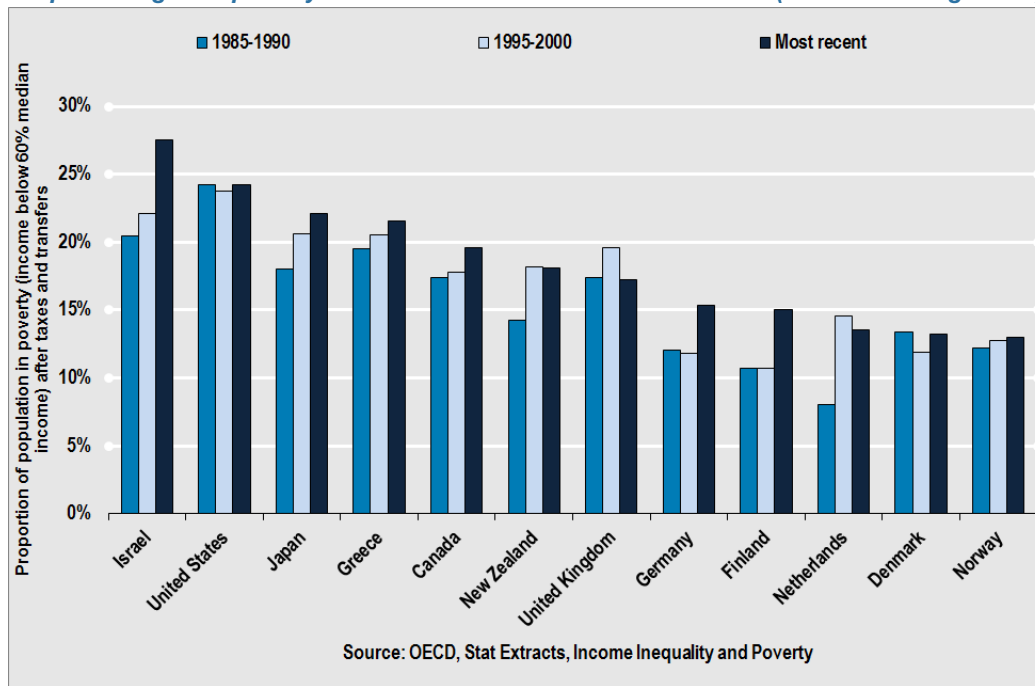
Long term comparisons of poverty from the OECD

To make long term comparisons on the rates of poverty across different countries, we need to use the OECD database. This covers all EU countries and other developed countries such as Canada, Japan and the United States.

The dataset extends back to the 1970s, but not all countries have been submitting data regularly over that period, and few countries submitted in the first decade. The UK data comes from the Family Resources Survey, with other countries submitting data from their own surveys. The possibility for different methodologies across countries giving different results needs to be borne in mind when looking at the results.

The first graph below looks at three different time periods – the late 1980s, the later 90s and the most recent data, either 2009 or 2010. The figures shown are averages of those periods and only those countries with data for each period are included. The measure used is household income below 60 per cent of the national median after taxes and transfers.

Graph1: Long term poverty levels across selected OECD countries (Before Housing Costs)



Among those countries included, the UK is roughly in the middle. Around 17 per cent of people in the UK are in poverty, a similar proportion to 20 years ago.

Almost all countries saw their poverty rates rise over the last 20 years. In some countries, these rises were substantial – Israel’s poverty rate rose by seven percentage points, the Netherlands’ by six and the rates in Finland, New Zealand and Japan rose by four.

The obvious exception is the UK. Not only is poverty in the UK no higher now than 20 years ago, it has fallen over the last decade, and this fall was the largest of any of the countries we could include in this analysis. This is worth bearing in mind when looking at other statistics and analysing strategies.

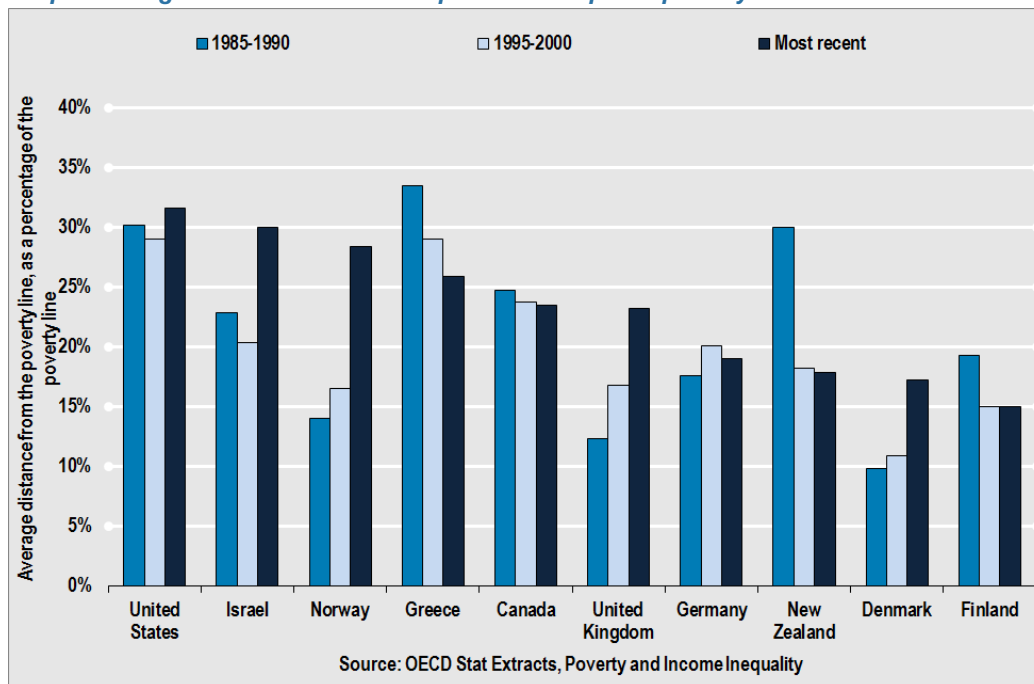
The OECD has different breakdowns of the above data, many of which focus on income inequality. Breakdowns by age group are also possible. This will be explored in greater depth in our EU-wide comparisons in the following section.

There have been occasional compilations of material deprivation across the OECD as well, but the most recent was published in 2006, using data from around 2000. No time series was available, so this analysis did not yield much of interest and is not included.

What we can look at is the depth of poverty for those in poverty. This is measured as the average distance from the poverty line, as a proportion of the

poverty line. For instance, in the UK, the average depth of poverty is 23 per cent, while in Finland it is 15 per cent. This means that people in poverty in the UK are on average further from the poverty line - or in deeper poverty - than in Finland.

Graph 2: Long term international comparison of depth of poverty in OECD countries



Again, the UK is somewhere in the middle of the (somewhat smaller) selection of countries presented here. But what is notable is that the average depth of poverty has risen substantially, almost doubling over the period. It is the second largest rise behind Norway. Most countries saw a rise, but there were notable falls in New Zealand and, to a lesser extent, Finland, Canada and Greece.

These two presentations give us a limited view of how the UK compares to other countries, and how this comparison has changed over a long period. In the UK, poverty fell, but the experience of poverty for those who are poor became harsher, more detached from the average. The next set of graphs looks at Europe only, but allows us to look at the last few years in greater depth.

EU wide comparisons

We start with the EU 2020 targets. Europe 2020 is a 10-year strategic growth and development plan for the European Union. Proposed by the European Commission in 2010, it succeeds the Lisbon Strategy for the period 2000-2010. Europe 2020 aims at "smart, sustainable, inclusive growth" with greater coordination of national and European policy (European Commission, 2010).

Of the five targets set out for member states to reach by 2020, two are related directly to poverty and social exclusion. These are:

- a reduction of the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 20 million;
- reducing the working age unemployment rate to 25 per cent or below;

The first element of this target is itself a combined measure, comprising people in income poverty after redistribution, people who are severely materially deprived, and people in households with low work intensity.

We will explore both the headline indicators that make up these targets as well as related sub-indicators (e.g. child poverty rate after redistribution). We will also analyse measures of poverty and social exclusion that are not included in the 2020 EU targets. These include: the poverty gap, persistent poverty, in-work poverty, child poverty, long-term unemployment, and housing cost burden.

The approach below is to compare the UK to the EU15 over time, then each of the EU 15 countries in 2005 and 2011 or 2012 (depending on availability of data), as well as the EU15 average for both those years. We also show the EU27 average, which includes the new accession states. These states are generally poorer than the EU average. Often, though, the EU27 and EU15 figures will be similar, as the figures are averages across the whole population. Many of the accession states were quite small, while the EU15 includes all the largest countries in the EU – Germany, Italy, France, Spain and the UK.

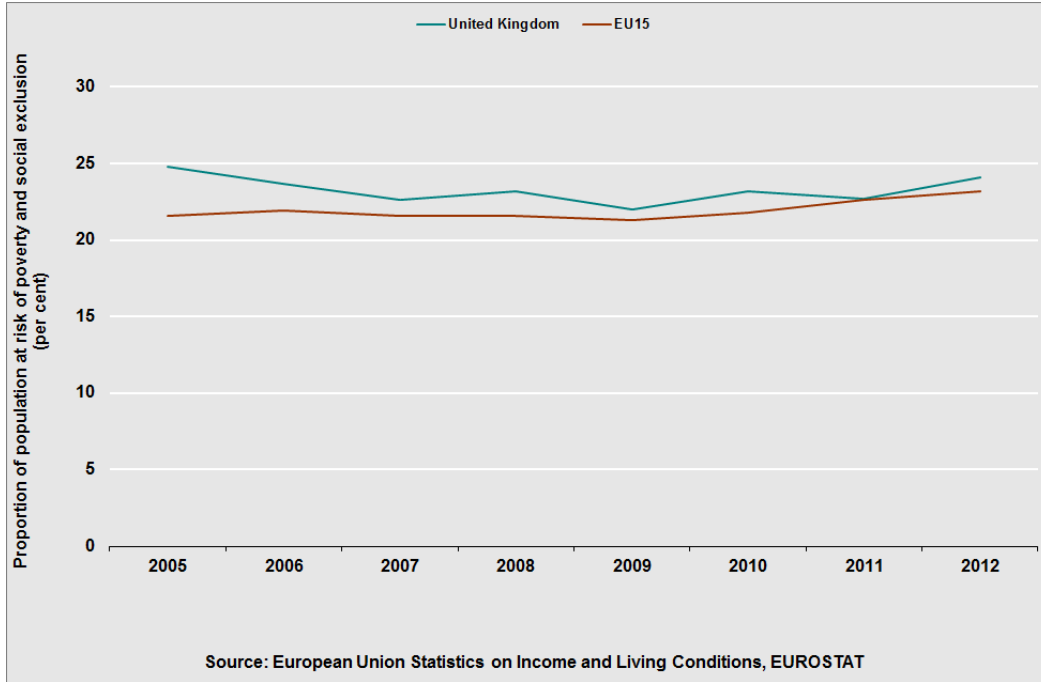
Poverty and social exclusion - combined measure

One of the key 2020 EU targets is to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 20 million people. A person is considered at risk of poverty or social exclusion if one or more of the following applies:

- Their household income is below 60 per cent of the national median after redistribution taxes and benefits (“in low income households”);
- They cannot afford at least four of nine essential everyday items (“material deprivation”);
- They live in a household with little or no paid work (“low work intensity”).

This combined measure covers the years 2005 to 2012.

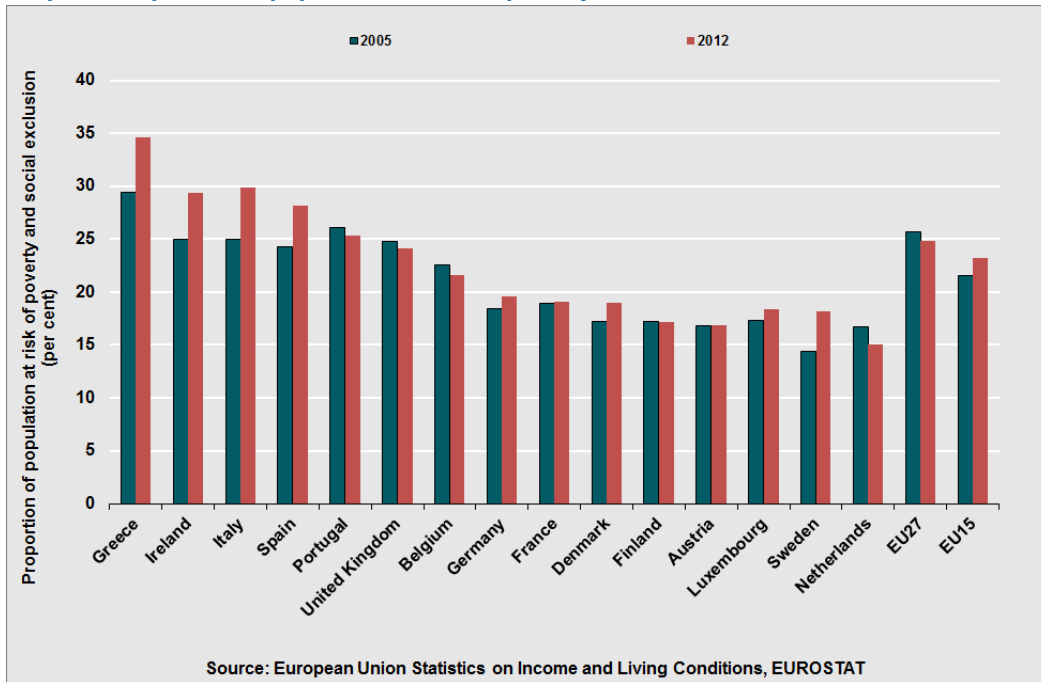
Graph 3: Proportion at risk of poverty in the UK and EU over time.



The proportion of people “at risk of poverty and social exclusion” in the UK was 24 per cent in 2012, slightly lower than the figure in 2005 (25 per cent) but slightly higher than the EU 15 (23 per cent). The UK level fell until 2009, before rising. The level in the EU was flat until 2009 then rose.

The next graph breaks the figures down by country, comparing 2005 with 2012.

Graph 4: Proportion of population at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2005 and 2012.



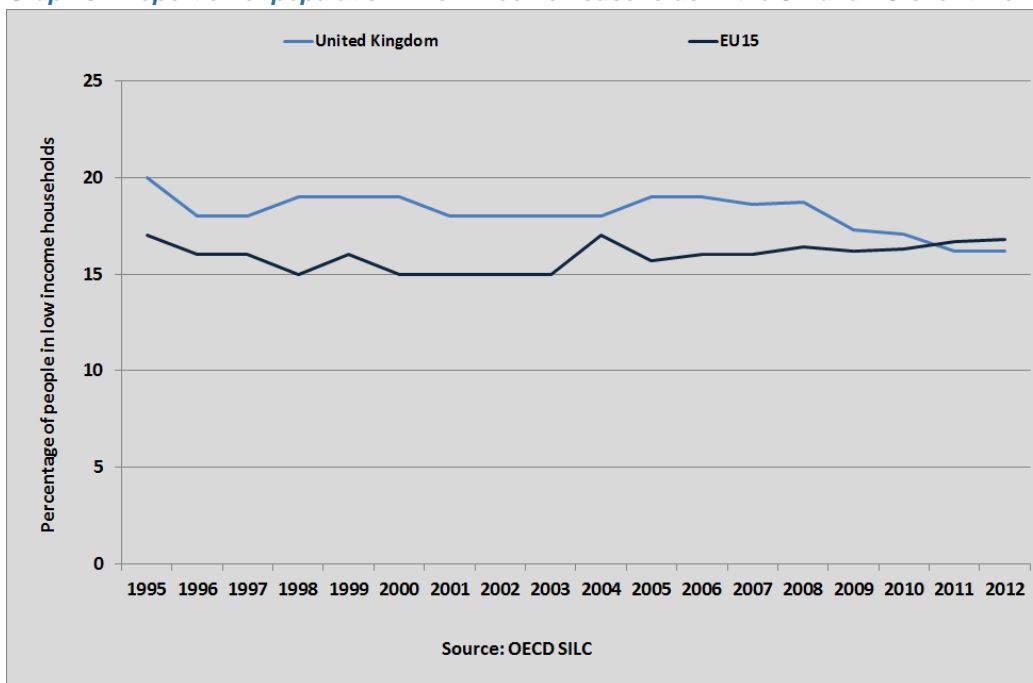
People in low income households

We can break down the overall measure into its component parts. The first component of the overall at-risk of poverty and social exclusion measure is called

“the risk of poverty after redistribution”. To distinguish this from the overall measure, we shall refer to it as “People in low income households”. This indicator is the share of people with an equivalised disposable income (after social transfers) at 60 per cent of the national median equivalised disposable income. It is measured before housing costs are deducted – it is effectively the BHC poverty measure used in the UK, but drawing on a different survey (EU SILC as opposed to Households Below Average Income).

This measure – and unfortunately, only this one – allows us to look further back, to the 1990s. Data is available for all EU 15 countries over this time scale.

Graph 5: Proportion of population in low income households in the UK and EU over time.

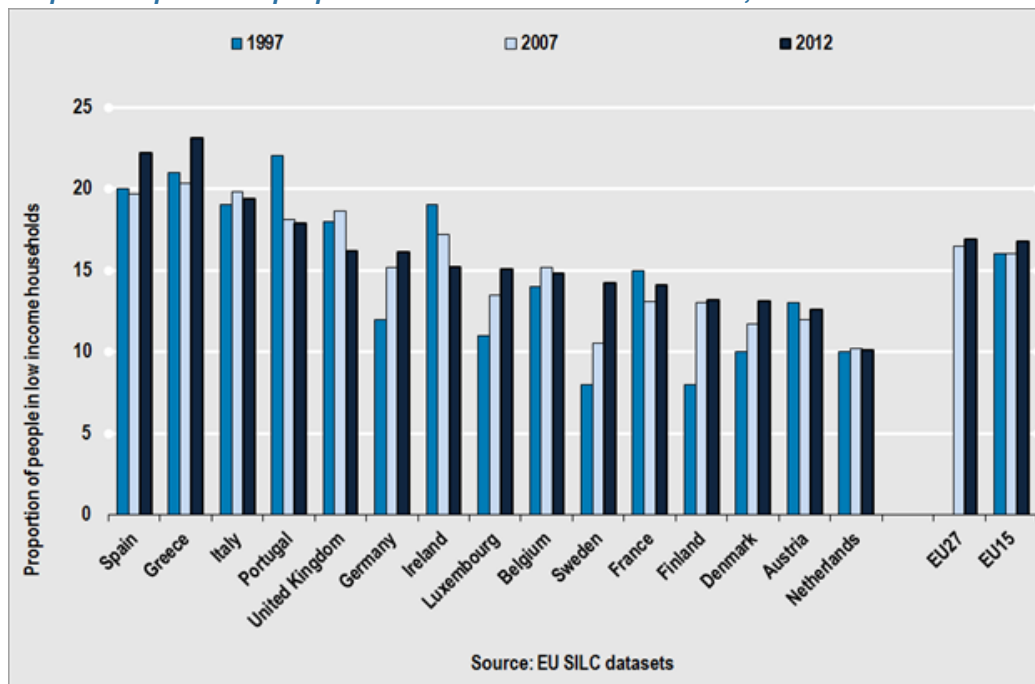


Since 1995, the proportion of people in low income households has fallen in the UK, from 20 per cent to 16 per cent. In 1995, it was higher than the EU15 average, and now it is slightly lower. But the most sustained fall on this measure has happened in the last four years, since 2008, when it has fallen from 19 per cent to 16 per cent. Given the fall in median income over that period, it is not clear that such a fall is meaningful, or should be celebrated.

Since the start of the downturn, poverty has risen across the EU15 countries, albeit only slowly. In 2008, 16 per cent of people lived in low income households, compared to 17 per cent in 2012.

The next graph looks at how this measure has changed in the different EU15 countries. Given that the graph above shows us that the downturn has had a significant effect on poverty levels, it is worth looking at progress up to that point as well as changes since. So the graph below shows three points in time – 1997, 2007 and 2012.

Graph 6: Proportion of people in low income households in 1997, 2007 and 2012.



This graph shows the UK to have one of the highest rates of poverty in the EU, lower only than the “crisis” countries of Spain, Greece, Portugal and Italy. It also puts the fall since 2007 in context. Only Ireland has seen any significant fall in poverty over that period and yet Ireland is notable in that it saw steep and successive falls in average incomes from 2008 onwards, suggesting falls in poverty rates over this period are at least in part due to falling average incomes.

But the period up to 2007 is more interesting. During that period, there were substantial falls in poverty in Portugal and Ireland. Later in the report we will analyse strategic approaches to poverty reduction in these countries and any lessons that can be learned from them.

But there were big rises in the Scandinavian countries, which are often seen as exemplars of countries with substantial welfare safety nets. We also analyse the Danish poverty reduction strategies to probe what went wrong.

At the high end of the graph, the overall order of the countries is unchanged, either since 2007 or since 1997. The exception is Ireland, which moved from fourth to seventh due to its large fall in poverty. Less remarkable are the moves of Belgium and France, who, between 1997 and 2012, moved from sixth and seventh to ninth and eleventh, respectively – mainly on account of their poverty rates remaining largely unchanged while they increased elsewhere.

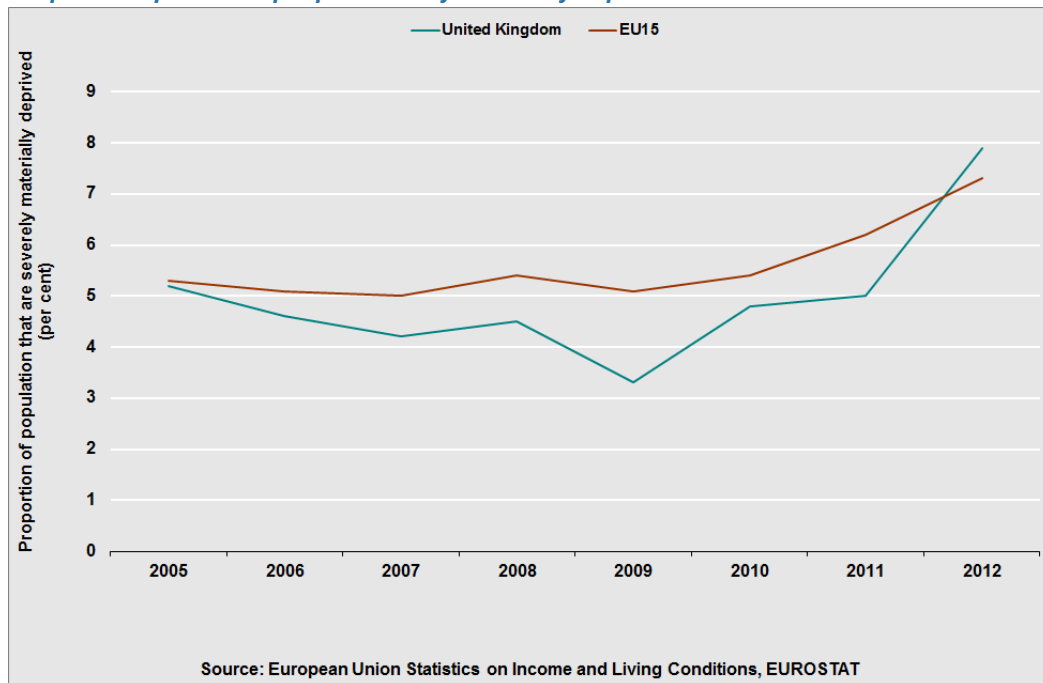
Severe material deprivation

The other components in the measure only cover the years 2005 to 2012. The second component of the EU 2020 poverty target is severe material deprivation. Severe material deprivation refers to the enforced inability to afford at least four of the following nine items:

(1) to face unexpected expenses; (2) one week annual holiday away from home; (3) to pay for arrears (mortgage or rent, utility bills or hire purchase instalments); (4) a meal with meat or proteins; (5) to keep home adequately warm; (6) to have a washing machine; (7) to have a colour TV; (8) to have a telephone; (9) to have a personal car.

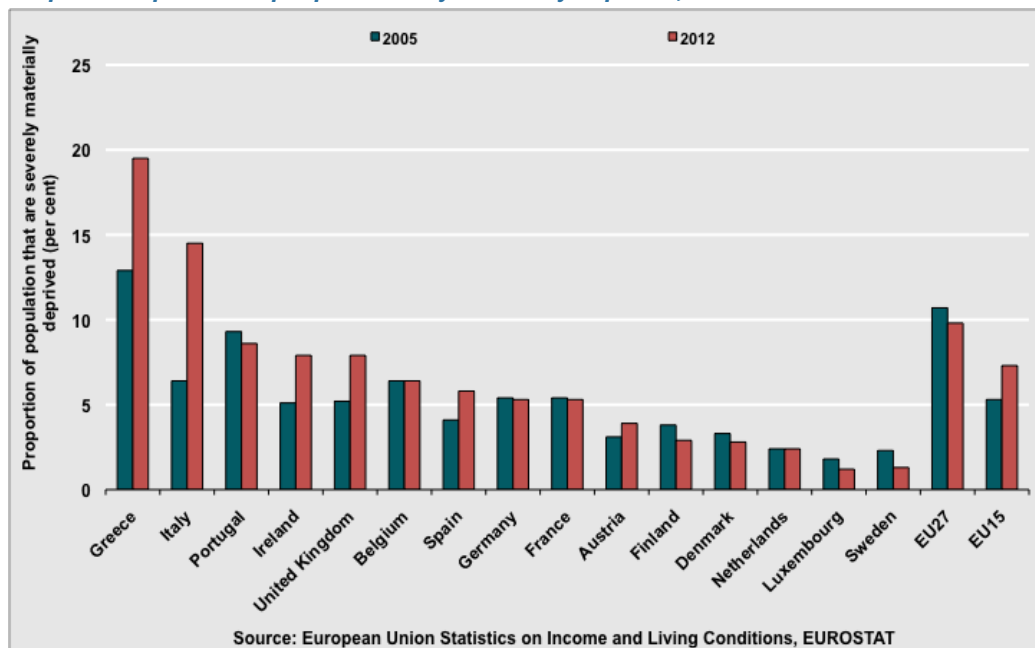
Some researchers suggest that the indicators typically used to analyse poverty – the relative income poverty measure - may not satisfactorily reflect differences in the poverty situation across the EU (Guio, 2005; Whelan, Nolan and Maitre, 2008; Nolan and Whelan 2011). For instance, relative poverty thresholds in the more affluent member states are above average income in the poorest member states, and the ‘poor’ in some countries have higher standards of living than the well-off in others (Fahey 2007). In a sense, the material deprivation measure is closer to an “absolute” poverty measure across the EU.

Graph 7: Proportion of people severely materially deprived in the UK and EU over time.



The proportion of people who are materially deprived has risen in the UK and the EU since the start of the crisis. In the years to 2009, there was little change in the measure, and possible even a small fall in the UK. Since then, there has been a rise from 3 per cent to 8 per cent in the UK and from 5 per cent to 7 per cent in the EU. This is not the pattern we saw in the low income measure.

Graph 8: Proportion of people severely materially deprived, in 2005 and 2012.



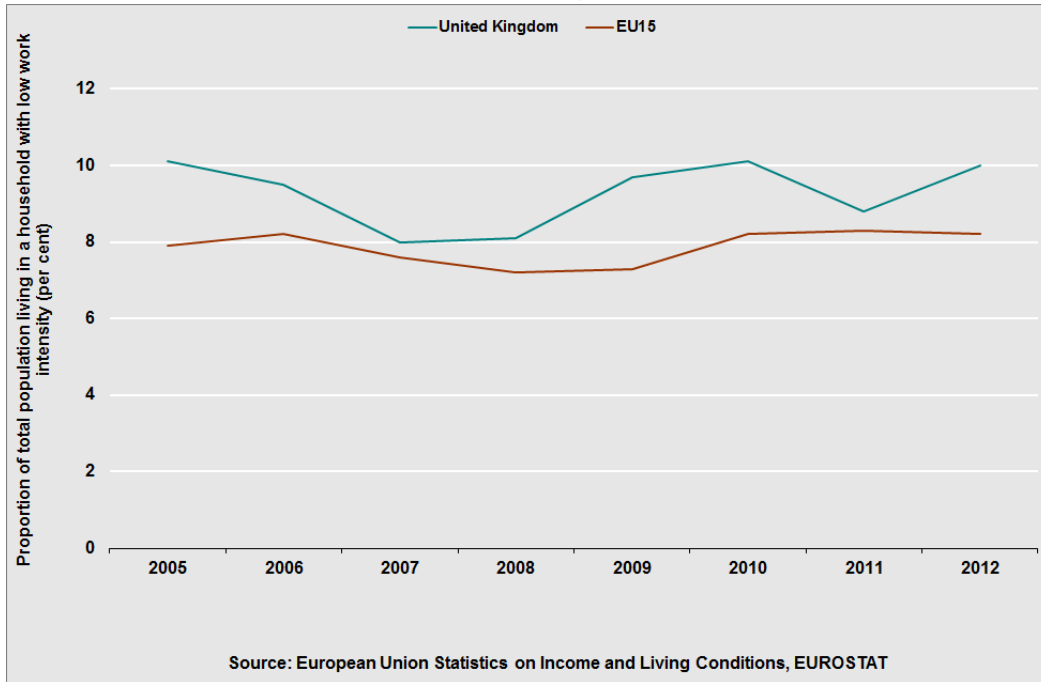
The UK has one of the higher levels of material deprivation in the EU, lower only than the crisis countries of Greece, Italy, Portugal and Ireland. There have been some big rises in material deprivation in Italy, Greece, and Ireland, much bigger than rises in income poverty, suggesting that the material deprivation measure is picking up changes following austerity that income poverty is not.

Not all countries saw a rise; those countries where severe material deprivation was low before have seen it remain low, with the possible exception of Spain. Levels fell slightly in Portugal, Finland, Denmark, Luxembourg and Sweden.

Low work intensity

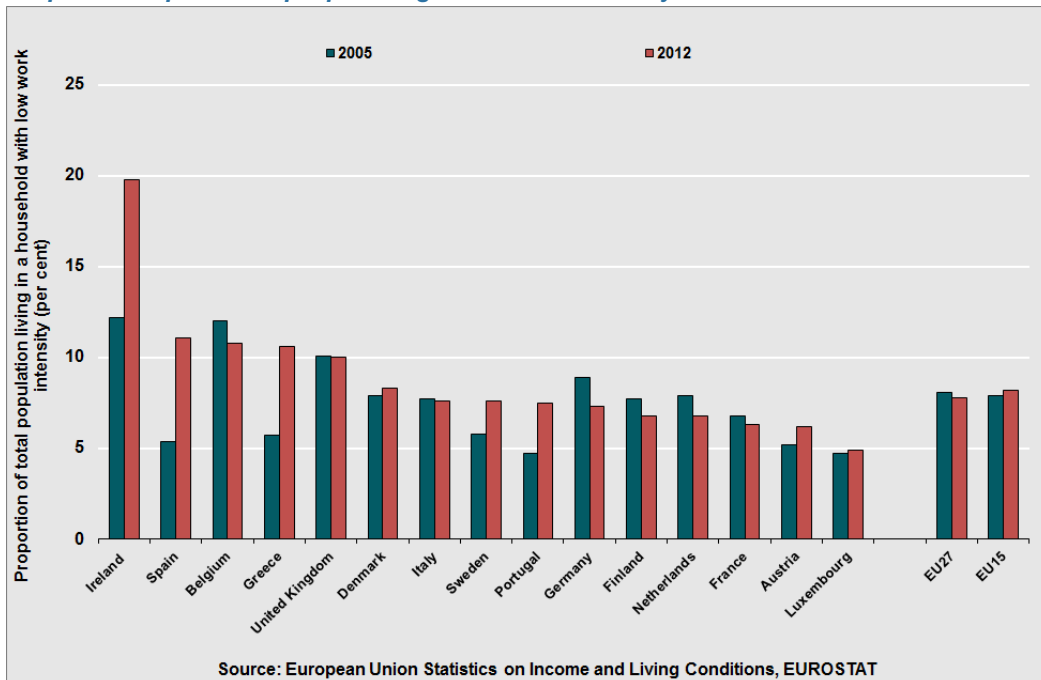
The final component of the overall risk of poverty and social exclusion is “low work intensity”. The work intensity of a household is the ratio of the total number of months that all working-age household members have worked during the income reference year and the total number of months the same household members theoretically could have worked in the same period. For the purpose of the target, a threshold of 20 per cent has been adopted to distinguish “low” work intensity; in other words those in households where working age members were in work for a fifth or less of the available time in aggregate in the year.

Graph 9: Proportion of people in low work intensity households over time.



This graph is not easy to read, or discern a pattern from, particularly for the UK, which ended the period roughly where it began. Around 10 per cent of households in the UK have a low work intensity, compared to 8 per cent in the EU15.

Graph 10: Proportion of people living in low work intensity households in 2005 and 2011.



The breakdown by country is more illuminating. Again, the crisis countries of Spain and Greece have seen large rises in this measure, but the increase in Ireland is almost incomparable to any other country. 20 per cent of households in Ireland have a “low work intensity”, up from an already-high 12 per cent in 2005. In contrast, several of the non-crisis countries, such as Germany, France and the

Netherlands, saw their already low low work intensity rates fall between 2005 and 2012.

The position of Belgium is interesting. It often turns up towards the higher end of these graphs, and has the third highest proportion of low work intensity households, although this proportion fell slightly over the period we are analysing. Belgium is one of the countries we cover in our review of EU strategies. Germany, Finland, the Netherlands and France are also notable for their low and falling proportion of households with a low work intensity.

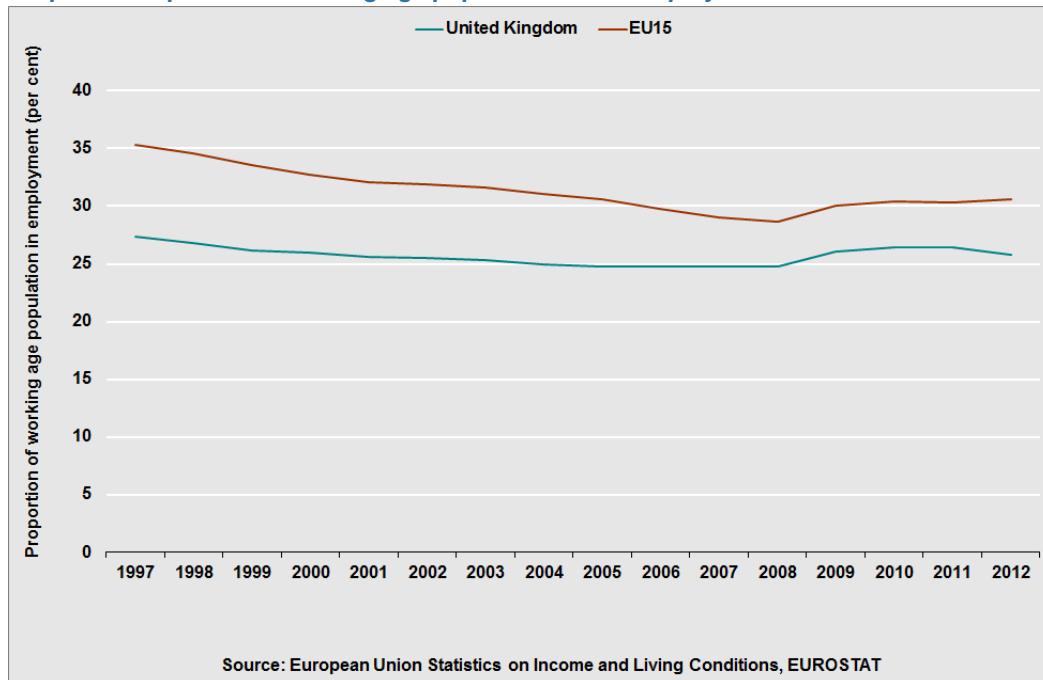
It has been suggested the high proportion of people living in low work intensity households is in part explained by the more developed nature of the social security system in some countries: this is particularly evident if we look at the low work intensity rates in the EU12 accession countries which are typically lower than the older member states (Ward and Ozdemir, 2013).

Working age worklessness

A further EU 2020 target is no more than 25 per cent of the working age population not in employment – the worklessness rate. While the UK has a relatively high proportion of households with a low work intensity its worklessness rate is lower than the EU 15 average and has been consistently so over the last 15 years. In 2012, the UK rate was 25.8 per cent, 5 percentage points lower than the EU15 average. This suggests that this is not an issue of lack of jobs, but rather the distribution of work.

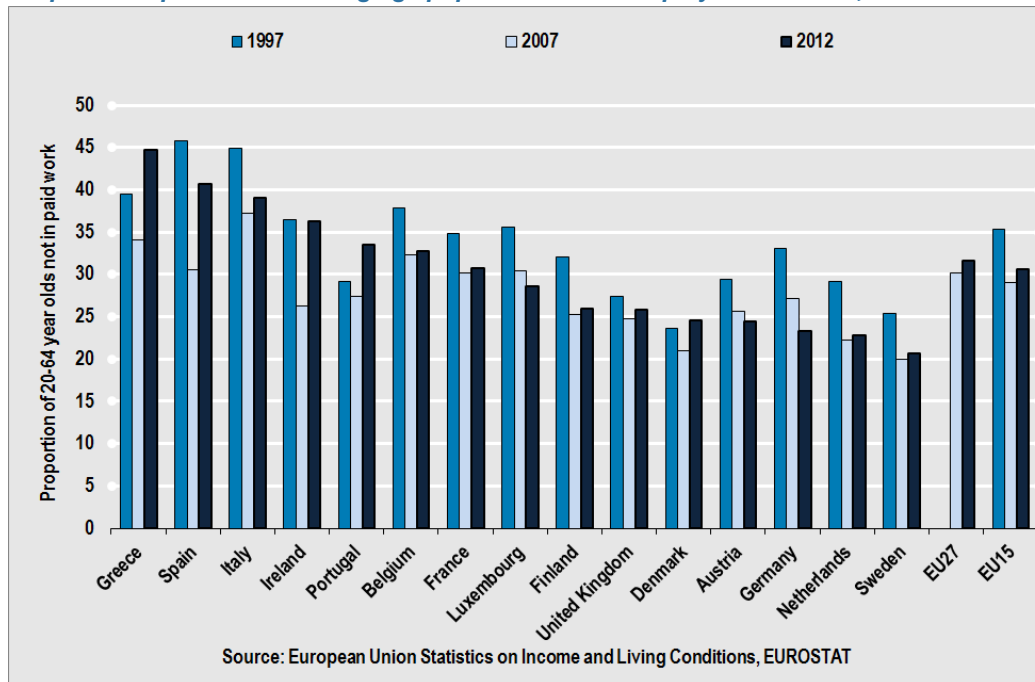
While the trend has been almost flat for both the EU and the UK post 2008, the proportion of the working age population not in employment in the UK appears to be falling again. It is currently around one percentage point above the target.

Graph 11: Proportion of working age population not in employment over time.



For this particular indicator, we are able to analyse changes over a longer period. Following the low income indicator above, we look at three points in time – 1997, 2007 and 2012.

Graph12: Proportion of working age population not in employment in 1997, 2007 and 2012.



Compared to other EU countries, the UK is towards the lower middle in terms of worklessness. Only five countries have lower rates, but before the downturn, in 2007, only three countries did – Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands. In 1997, this number was two. So while the UK’s position is on average quite good, it is less impressive in relative terms than it was in the recent past.

Some of the increases in worklessness following the start of the Euro crisis are staggering – there has been a ten percentage point rise in both Spain and Greece. In Greece, almost half of working age adults aged over 20, (44 per cent) are not in work. In Spain, the figure is 40 per cent.

We saw earlier that both Ireland and Portugal saw big falls in poverty levels in the decade before the crisis. Over the same period, Ireland saw a larger fall in worklessness than any other EU country other than Spain, from 36 per cent to 26 per cent. The fall in Portugal was more modest, from 29 per cent to 27 per cent. Both countries have seen substantial rises since, however. All the improvement in Ireland has been lost, and Portugal now has a higher rate of worklessness than it did 15 years ago.

It is worth pointing out that the Scandinavian countries saw significant falls in worklessness in the decade leading up to the crisis. We have already seen, however, that poverty rose in those countries over the same period. Germany is also worthy of note in this respect, in that it saw the biggest fall in worklessness across the EU between 1997 and 2012 alongside the 4th largest increase in the poverty rate.

So, in the sample of 15 EU countries, we have examples of falling poverty and falling worklessness, falling poverty and rising worklessness and examples of rising poverty and falling worklessness. The table below shows a simple categorisation of countries according to the change in poverty and worklessness, both in the most recent five years and over the previous ten.

Table 1: Changes in poverty and worklessness in the EU, 1997-2007 and 2007-2012.

	1997-2007	2007-2012
Falling poverty, falling worklessness	Greece, Spain, Ireland, Portugal, France, Austria	-
Falling poverty, rising worklessness	-	Italy, Ireland, Portugal, Belgium, UK, Netherlands
Rising poverty, falling worklessness	Italy, Finland, UK, Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden	Luxembourg, Austria, Germany

Relevant indicators not in EU 2020 targets

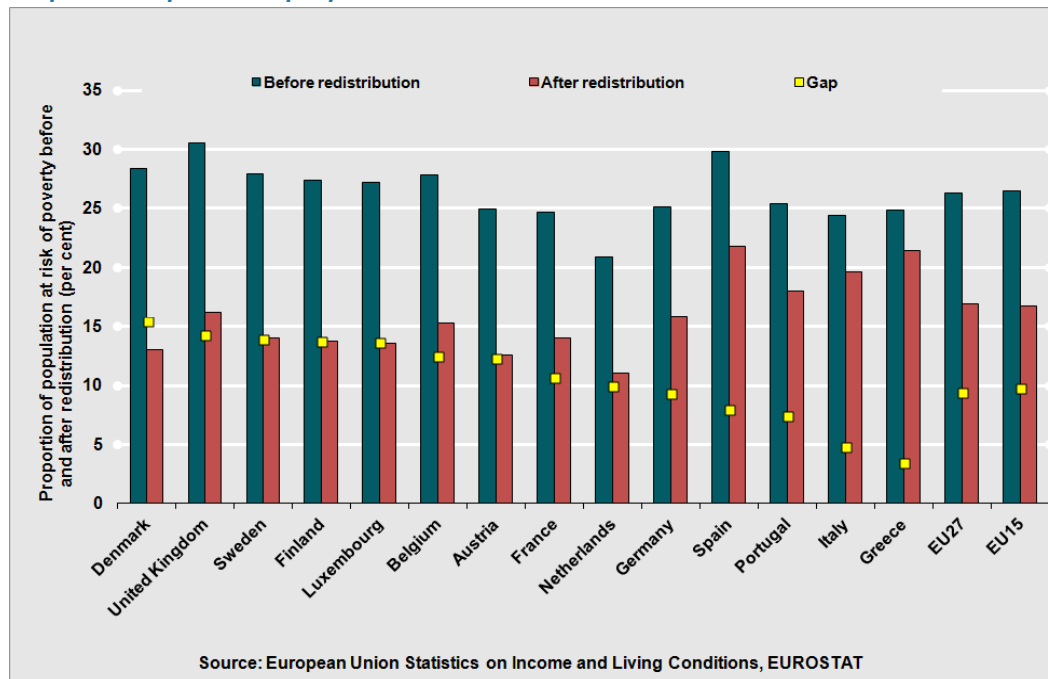
Expanding the EU 2020 target on poverty and social exclusion beyond the relative income poverty measure to include material deprivation and low work intensity was widely accepted as a favourable, more multidimensional approach to measuring poverty across the EU (Nolan and Whelan, 2011)

However, there are other measures outside the target that are worth investigating. This section looks at poverty before and after redistribution, child poverty, the depth and persistence of poverty, in-work poverty and the links between housing and poverty. We start by comparing the poverty rates of different countries before and after redistribution.

Comparison of poverty before and after redistribution

When we looked at people in low income households earlier, the measure showed the proportion after redistribution –that is, after taxes and benefits have been paid. The EU SILC dataset allows us to look at poverty before distribution as well. There are significant differences in these rates before and after redistribution as the graph below illustrates.

Graph 13: Proportion of people in low income households before and after redistribution



In terms of the absolute percentage point difference in the rate before and after redistribution, the largest gap is in Denmark (15.5 percentage points) while the smallest is in Greece (3.5 percentage points). After Denmark, the UK saw the largest difference in the rate before and after redistribution (14.5 percentage points). A possible contributing factor to the large gap in Denmark is its tax policies – Denmark has a system of progressive taxation with a high marginal tax rate of 40 per cent.

It is notable that Portugal, Spain and Italy have high proportions of people in low income households both before and after redistribution. Conversely, the Netherlands have notably low proportions of people in low income households before and after distribution.

So, while countries like Denmark and the UK have a high poverty rate both before (the UK has the highest rate of all EU countries at 30.5 per cent) and after social transfers (relative to other non-crisis countries), the gaps in poverty before and after redistribution are among the largest in the EU. These differences could, of course, either be on account of a very generous welfare system or that the pre-tax distribution is so uneven that the welfare system has more work to do (or both).

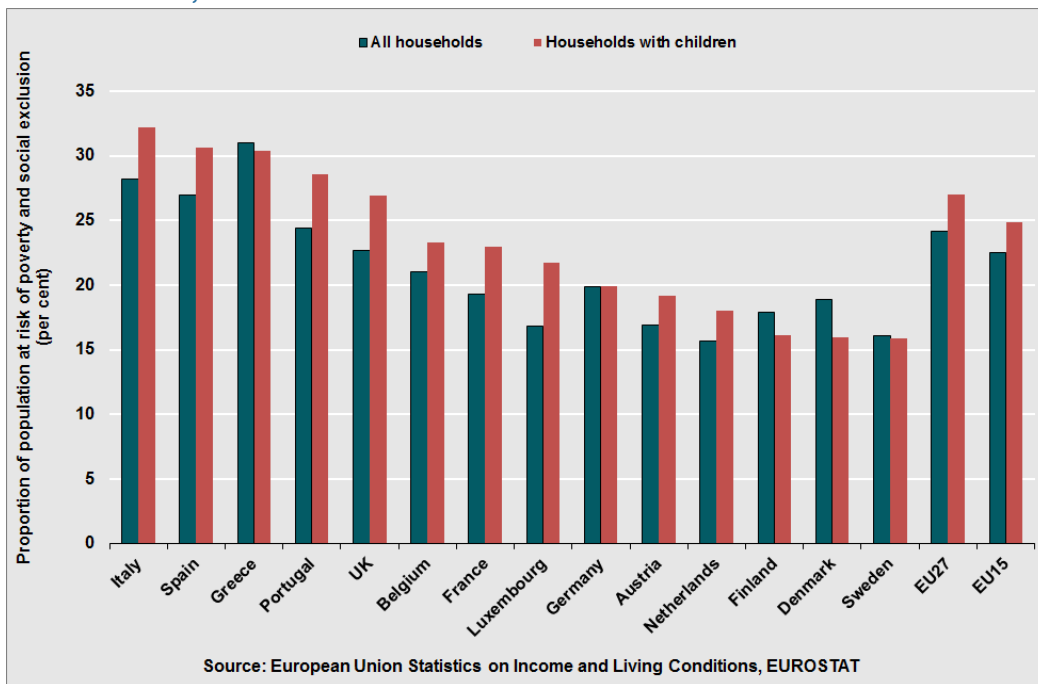
Research by Cantillon et al. (2013) suggests that it is at least in part due to the former. The research found that, while most of the ‘old’ EU member states recorded either an increase or a standstill in poverty due to less redistributive social transfers even in the years before the recession, poverty in the UK declined - partly on account of higher poverty reduction by social transfers (Cantillon et al, 2013). The capacity of taxes and benefits to reduce poverty risk in the UK has been attributed to the prevalence of means-testing which results in benefits being better targeted at low income groups (Jara and Sutherland, 2013).

Child poverty

We include child poverty as a specific analysis as it was the focus of UK efforts to reduce poverty as a whole over the last decade and more. It was also an important part of EU-wide anti-poverty policy, even if it was not itself one of the 2020 targets.

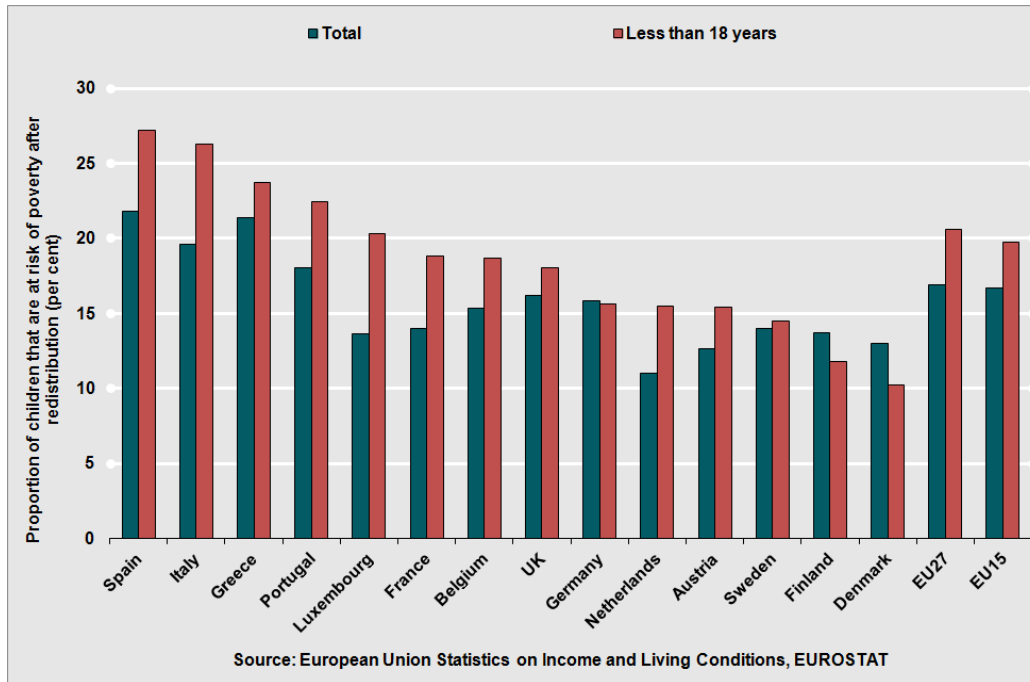
Looking at the overall rate of poverty and social exclusion (where a person is in a low income household, is materially deprived or lives in a low work intensity household) amongst children, the rate in the UK is 2 percentage points higher than the EU15. Moreover, the UK has a particularly high rate of child poverty relative to the rate for the population as a whole – this gap of 4 percentage points is the highest in the EU.

Graph 14: Proportion of all households and households with children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, 2011.



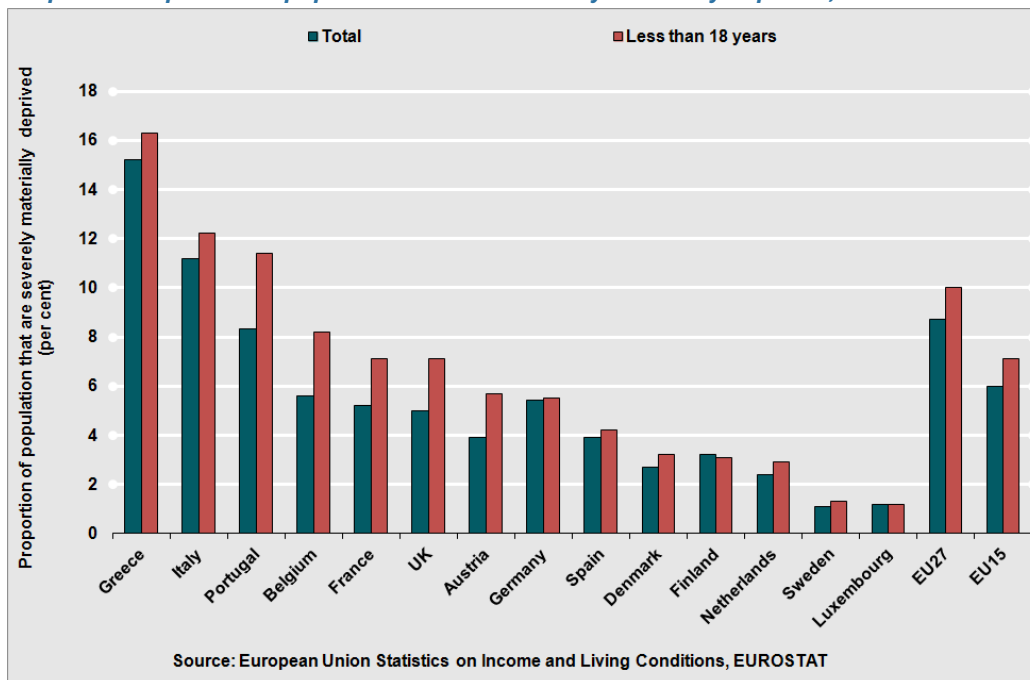
Again, we can break this measure down into its three component parts. As the proportion of children in low income households is 2 percentage points lower than the EU average, it is apparent that this measure is not contributing to the overall higher risk of poverty and social exclusion in the UK.

Graph 15: Proportion of population in low income households, 2011.



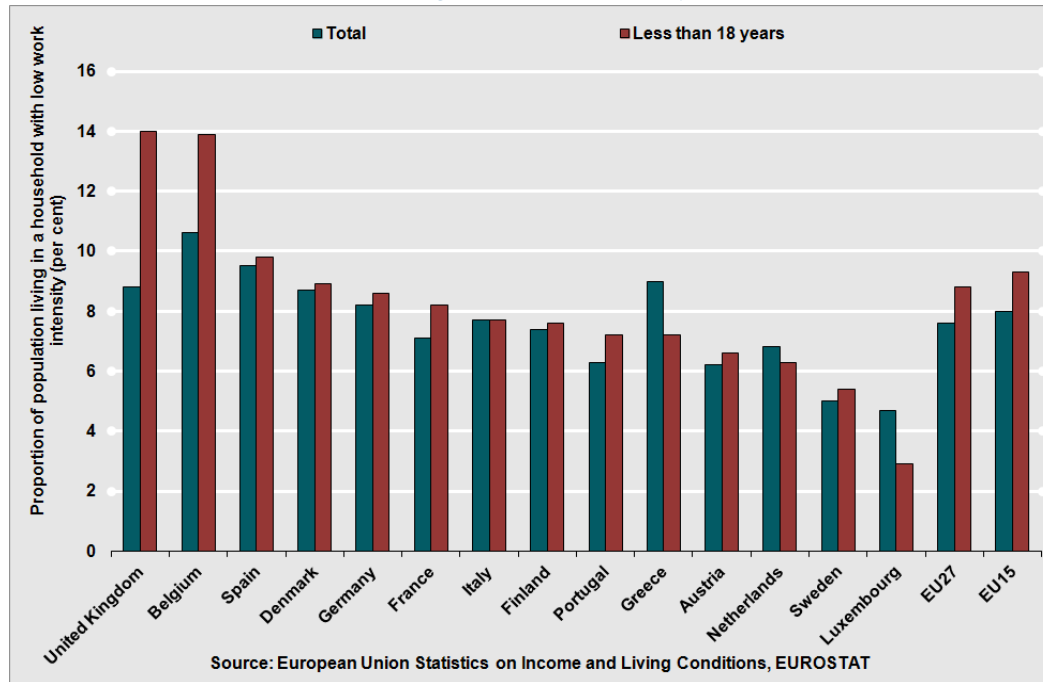
Instead we can look to the other two component parts of the overall risk of poverty and social exclusion measure to explain what is contributing to the above average risk of poverty and social exclusion rate among children in the UK. One of these is the rate of severe material deprivation. The material deprivation rate amongst children is equal to that of the EU. However, the proportion of children that are severely materially deprived in the UK is higher than all non-crisis countries except Belgium.

Graph 16: Proportion of population that are severely materially deprived, 2011.



The proportion of children in low intensity households in the UK was higher than any other EU country. In 2011, the proportion of children in low work intensity households in the UK was 14 per cent.

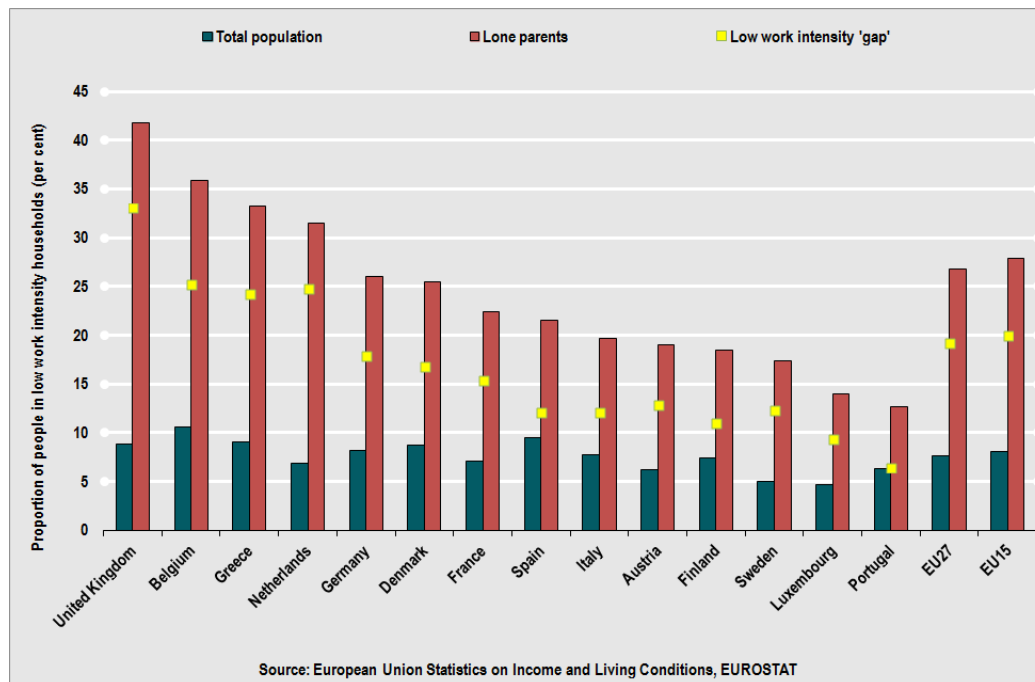
Graph 17: Proportion of children living in low work intensity households in 2005 and 2011.



So, the high proportion of children living in low work intensity households might go some way to explain the high rate of poverty and social exclusion among children. Indeed, the UK and Ireland have the highest proportion of households with poor children where no work is done or available (Bradshaw and Huby, 2012).

This, in turn, Bradshaw and Huby argue is likely to be associated with the high proportion of lone parents with low labour participation in the UK and Ireland. Indeed, the level of low work intensity among lone parents in 2011 was higher in the UK than anywhere else in Europe.

Graph 18: Proportion of lone parents living in low work intensity households in 2005 and 2011.



One suggested explanation for the high proportion of lone parents in low work intensity households in the UK is the limited access to childcare services which impedes participation in the labour market (Bell et al, 2005).

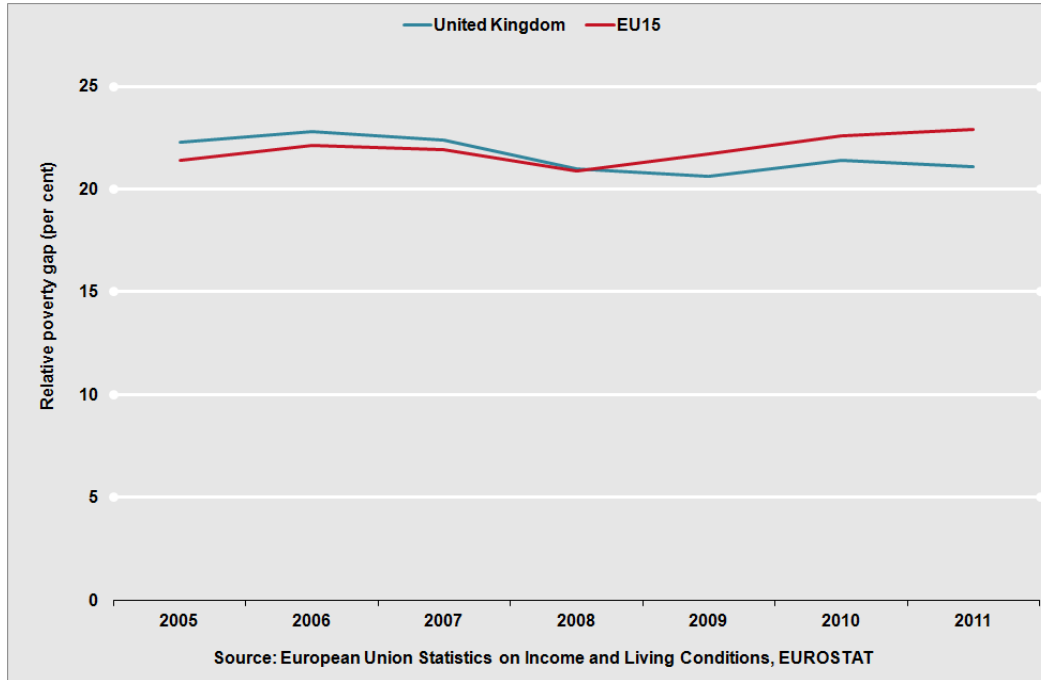
Depth of poverty and the poverty “gap” in the EU

One way to explore the depth of poverty is by looking at the poverty “gap”. This gap is the average shortfall of those in poverty from the poverty threshold (60 per cent of median income). It is expressed as a proportion of this threshold.

One of five countries to see a narrowing of the poverty gap since 2005, the UK saw its poverty gap narrow by 1.2 percentage points. This compares to a widening of the poverty gap across the EU15 of 1.5 percentage point. As such, the poverty gap across the EU15 is now 1.8 points wider than in the UK.

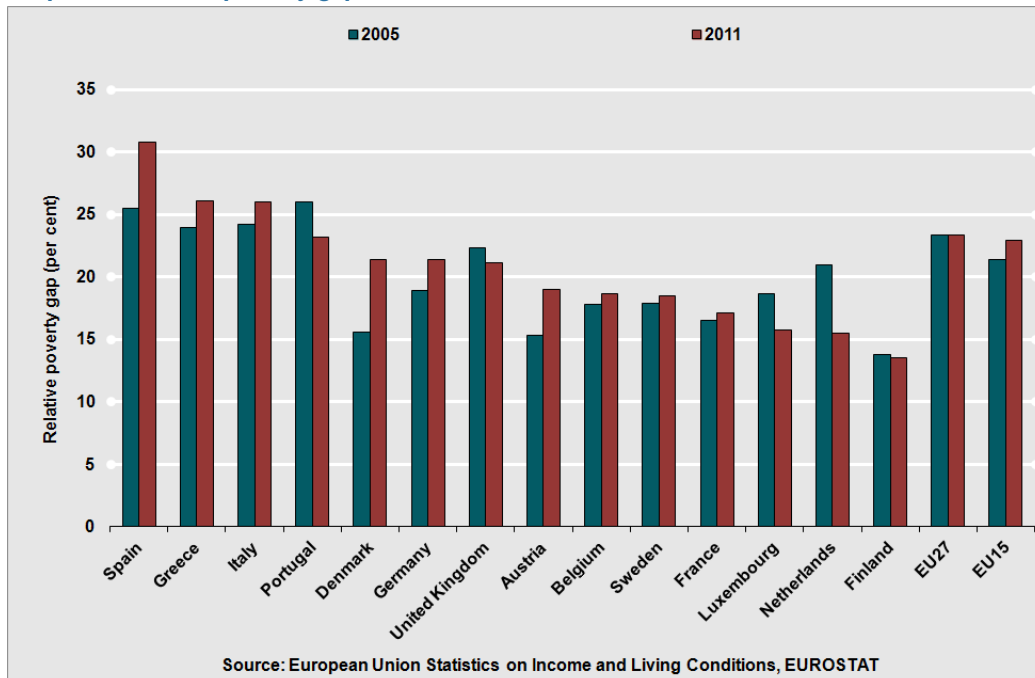
Again, it is worth pointing out the changes post 2008 in the EU15 countries, where the “poverty gap” rose notably. So income poverty has got deeper and wider across the EU since the crisis began, in a way that it has not in the UK.

Graph 19: Relative poverty gap in the UK and EU over time.



As we can see in the graph below the poverty gap is widest in the crisis countries - Spain, Greece, Italy and Portugal. Aside from this, the graph below lacks any real pattern. The poverty gap widened across nine of the fourteen old member states analysed. The biggest increases were in Denmark, followed by Spain and Austria. The gap narrowed most in the Netherlands, Portugal and Luxembourg.

Graph 20: Relative poverty gap, in 2005 and 2011.



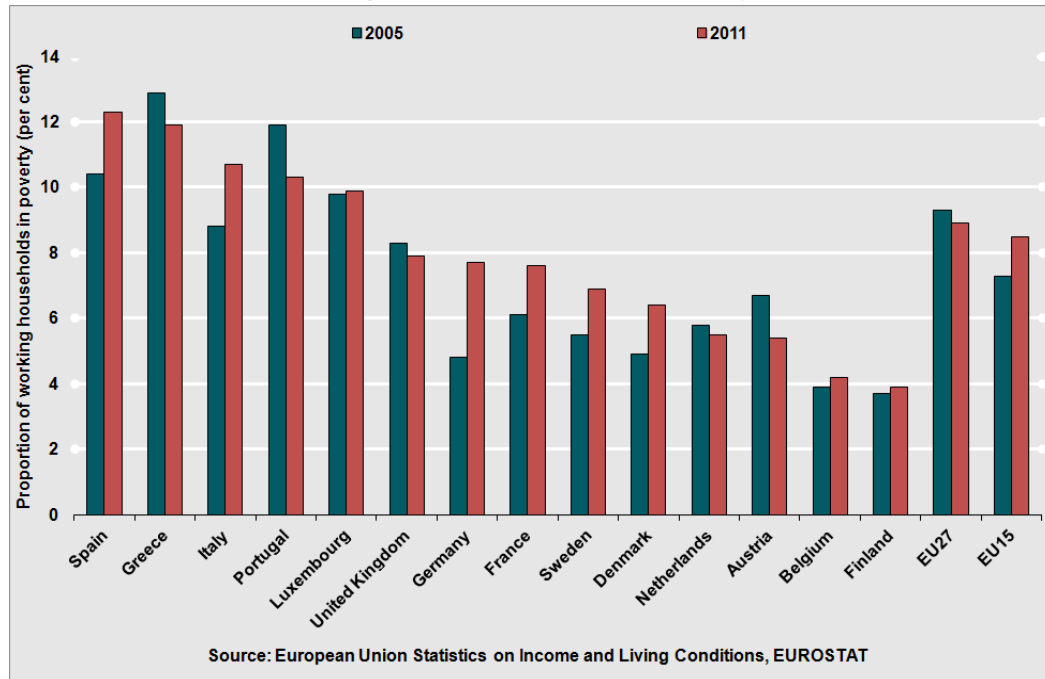
In-work poverty

This indicator refers to the proportion of employed people with an equivalised disposable income (after social transfers) below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold,

which is set at 60 per cent of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers.

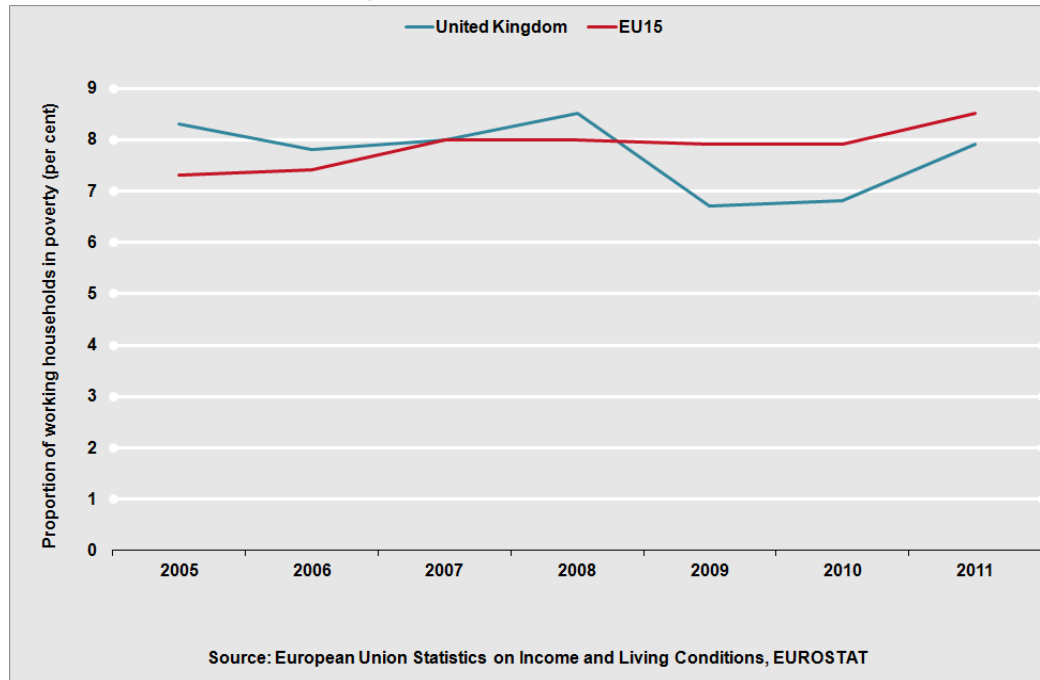
In 2011, the UK in-work poverty rate was 7.9 per cent. While again lower than the EU rate and the rates of several other EU countries, the UK rate is among the highest of the non-crisis countries. The UK is, though, one of only five countries analysed to see a decrease in the in-work poverty rate. The largest falls were in Portugal, followed by Austria. The Portuguese and Austrian anti-poverty strategies are both considered in our content review of EU strategies.

Graph 21: Proportion of working people in households in poverty, in 2005 and 2011.



As we can see in the graph below, there is little difference between the UK and EU average for in-work poverty rates. Sometimes the UK is higher, sometimes lower, but both remain within a fairly narrow band across the period in question.

Graph 22: Proportion of working households in poverty in the UK and EU over time.



According to Marx and Nolan (2013) in-work poverty is not so much a result of low hourly pay, but rather is strongly associated with single-earnership and low work intensity at the household level, and working part-time, part of the year or on temporary contract at the individual level. Following from this they suggest that in-work benefits such as working tax credits in the UK have the most potential for lifting low earning individuals out of poverty. Others point to the poverty-reducing capacity of universal benefits, such as the child benefit package, which in the UK accounts for more than 50 per cent of the poverty line. This compares to around 40 per cent in Sweden, 25 per cent in Ireland, and 5 per cent in Spain (Van Mechelen and Bradshaw, 2013).

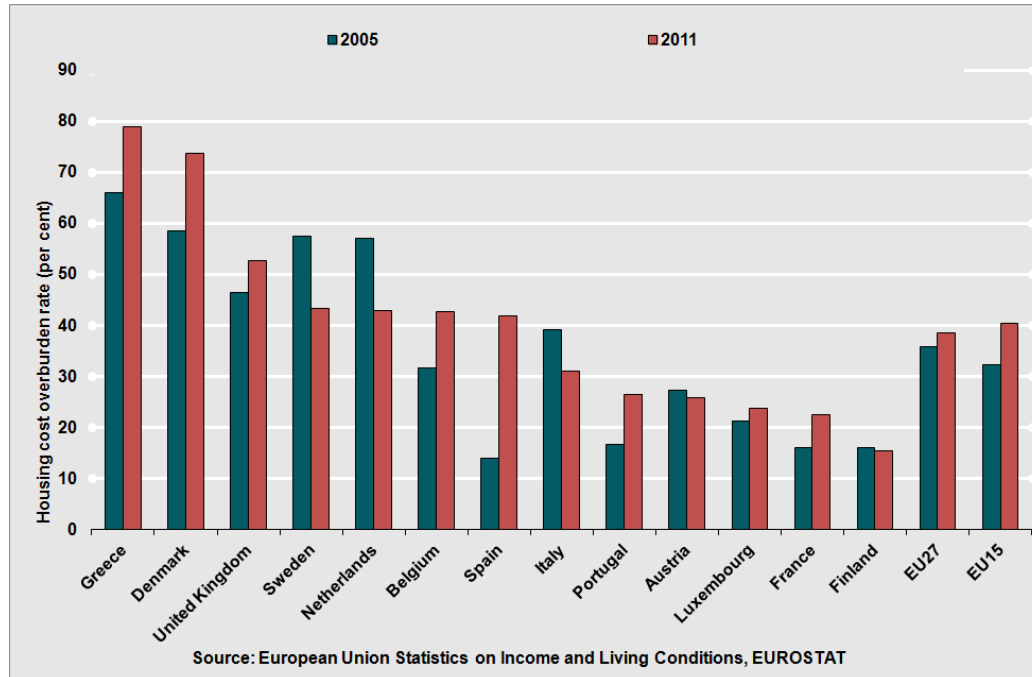
Focusing on the falls in in-work poverty in the UK from 2008 onwards, there are other factors possibly contributing to this. For instance, some of the literature on in-work poverty and the underlying forces suggest that the general tendency for in-work poverty to fall or remain constant despite the onset of the economic crisis was on account of increased unemployment. This will have pushed down median incomes so that those still in work were less likely to be below the income poverty threshold (Marx and Nolan 2013). This may go some way in explaining the sharp drop in the in-work poverty rate in the UK between 2008 and 2009.

Housing and poverty

The final poverty measure we look at is the housing cost burden. Housing is a cost that everyone faces, and for many it is their largest regular expense. As such, housing cost and the related burden placed on disposable income can tell us much about the situations of those in poverty. The housing cost burden is an EU SILC indicator defined as the percentage of the population living in a household where the total housing costs (net of housing allowances) represent more than 40 per cent of the total disposable household income (net of housing allowances).

In 2011, the housing cost burden rate in the UK was 16.4 per cent, up 1.6 percentage points since 2005. This compares to a housing cost burden rate of 11.9 per cent in the EU15 area, up 2 percentage points over the same period. In the same year, the housing cost burden rate among low income households in the UK was 52.7 per cent; the third highest in the EU15 area and 12 percentage points higher than the EU15 average.

Graph 23: Housing cost burden rate amongst low income households, in 2005 and 2011.



The trend of a rising share of household spending on housing partly reflects increased house prices and real rents over the past decade almost everywhere in Europe (Pittini 2012). Looking at those countries where there was a significant increase in housing cost burden rates (Belgium, the UK, Denmark and France) there was an increase of between 7 and 17 per cent in real terms between 2005 and the end of 2010 (The Economist). Meanwhile the Netherlands and Italy, which both saw a fall in their housing cost burden rate over this period, saw a corresponding decrease or no change in real house prices. One exception is Spain, which saw the largest increase in housing cost burden, but a decrease in real house prices of around 6 per cent. Pittini (2012) also suggests that there is some correlation between housing cost burden and tenure structure. Lack of choice between tenures and, in particular, an under-supply of social housing makes it more difficult for the poorest households to find adequate and affordable housing.

Other living costs – particularly energy costs - are also a contributory factor (Pittini 2012). Utility bill costs have become an increasingly significant part of households' expenditures over the past decade, due in part to an increase in energy consumption for domestic use, and to the increase in energy prices. Indeed, in 2011 electricity costs in Denmark were higher than anywhere else in Europe (29 cents per kilowatt), around double the electricity prices in France, Luxembourg, and Finland (Eurostat, November 2013).

3. Review of UK strategies

Background

There have been several anti-poverty strategies within the UK, but until 2011, none for the UK as a whole. The devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland do all have powers to create their own anti-poverty strategies, and each did so in the late 1990s and early 2000s. While many local authorities have child poverty strategies, few if any have a strategy for the whole population.

But while the UK had no overarching strategy document for reducing poverty, it did have a range of relevant policies and policy areas, from the minimum wage and child tax credits to Neighbourhood Renewal. Moreover, there was a target to reduce child poverty, which both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer were committed to. This target was built into the 2010 Child Poverty Act.

There was also an annual monitor of poverty and exclusion across different age groups – Opportunity for All. This was a fairly comprehensive collection of indicators, but it had no particular status and did not relate to any earlier document setting out why specific targets were chosen. Essentially, it was a monitoring report for a strategy that never existed.

In this section, we summarise the content of the strategies for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as the local strategies we reviewed.

Scotland

Since the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the Scottish Executive (then Government from 2007) has developed a range of approaches to address poverty in a strategic way. Despite the lack of some key tools, for example comprehensive tax-raising powers or full control of the welfare system, successive administrations have sought to set out clearly their approaches to tackling poverty. It is not the intention here to review the success of each of these phases of policy development, but rather to highlight some of the key features of their content and development. We can identify three distinct phases of development: the Social Justice Strategy (1999-2004); Closing the Opportunity Gap (2004-07); and Achieving Our Potential (2008 onwards). Each of these phases is instructive in considering the changing priority and approach that has been taken to addressing poverty in Scotland.

The Social Justice Strategy

When the Scottish Parliament was established in 1999 and the first Labour-Liberal Democrat administration took power, there was much talk of the Parliament being built on principles of social justice. The Scottish Executive set out its long term vision for a socially-just Scotland in the Social Justice Strategy

(SJS)¹. This strategy was underpinned by a significant consultation process which gathered hundreds of responses.

The SJS mirrored some of the developments that were taking place at the UK level, where an increasing emphasis on poverty was emerging. *Opportunities for All* was the UK Government's annual report on poverty and social exclusion, tracking a wide range of indicators and targets. The SJS adopted a similar model, with the creation of the *Social Justice Annual Report*. This annual report reported on the 10 targets and 29 'milestones' designed to track progress towards the long term goals of the strategy.

In terms of content the SJS adopted a lifecycle approach. This lifecycle approach was designed to ensure that all relevant parts of policy - people and place - were covered and included communities, children, young people, families and older people. Each of the elements of the lifecycle was accompanied by long-term targets. For example, in the relation to child poverty, the long term target was to 'end child poverty within a generation', for communities it was 'reduce inequalities between communities' while for families it was 'there will be full employment in Scotland'.

The strategy was intended to be comprehensive and to work alongside UK anti-poverty priorities. In addition to the strategy document and the annual report there was also an action plan that set out the specific actions that were intended to deliver progress in other areas. In addition to the consultation process, the Scottish Executive had also established a Scottish Social Inclusion Network (SSIN). The SSIN involved key officials from the administration, representatives from voluntary organisations, trade unions, local authorities, faith groups, the private sector and people with direct experience of poverty. The role of this group was to contribute to the on-going development of social justice policy in Scotland.

Closing the Opportunity Gap

In 2003, the Scottish Executive indicated that it wished to take a more focused approach to addressing poverty in Scotland. The SSIN had already been wound up in 2002 as it was felt that another structure for engaging such a wide range of representatives was required. The annual reports had moved to become online-only documents, and following the introduction of the Closing the Opportunity Gap (CTOG) approach, the annual reports were shelved altogether.

The CTOG approach built on the SJS, but was designed to give great focus by concentrating on fewer targets. There were three broad aims: to prevent individuals and families moving into poverty; to provide routes out of poverty; and to sustain individuals or families in lifestyles free from poverty. These were to be delivered through achieving six key objectives and ten target areas. The key objectives included increasing employment for disadvantaged people, increasing skills amongst young people, reducing financial exclusion and increasing the rate of health improvement in disadvantaged areas. The ten target areas were designed to highlight progress across the six objectives, and were focused on

¹ Scottish Executive (1999) *Social Justice: A Scotland Where Everyone Matters*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive

areas where progress could be measured and could be attributed to key actions. These targets were set at the end of 2004.

Despite attempting to provide a reduced focus to Scottish action to tackle poverty, the approach still showed the need for integrated action. Unlike the previous SJS there was less awareness about the CTOG approach. There was no stakeholder engagement mechanism, and no annual or other regular reporting on progress. The CTOG approach had in effect only been operating for a little over two years before being abandoned by the minority Scottish National Party Government in 2007.

Achieving Our Potential Framework

The incoming SNP Government in 2007 had stated its desire to develop a new approach to tackling poverty that would get to the ‘root causes’ of poverty. In advance of the development of this new strategy the SNP Government launched their Government Economic Strategy, backed up by a National Performance Framework, which stated that the purpose of the Government was to create ‘sustainable economic growth’. Included in the National Performance Framework was a ‘Solidarity Target’ which stated that the bottom three deciles of the income distribution would see their share of total income grow by 2017. In was in the context of the solidarity target that the anti-poverty framework, *Achieving Our Potential*, was developed in 2008.

There was a large-scale consultation throughout 2008 to support the development of the AoP framework. This included specific work to engage with people with direct experience of poverty, as well as the wider civil society. A limited number of external stakeholders were involved in commenting on early drafts of the framework as it was developed. AoP was launched in late 2008 as a partnership agreement between the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA). It contained four broad areas of action: to tackle income inequality; measures to address longer-term drivers of poverty; support for those at risk of poverty; and making the tax and benefits system work better for Scotland.

The approach was a move away from the detailed and linked targets and objectives that the previous Scottish approaches represented. There would be no specific reporting mechanism, but progress would be measured through the National Performance Framework. A Tackling Poverty Board, which included some limited non-government representatives, was established to oversee the development of the AoP framework. In terms of the policy content, there was a greater recognition of the role of in-work poverty, but the focus remained on getting people into employment.

Northern Ireland

New Targeting Social Need

Northern Ireland’s attempts to reduce poverty have gone through several iterations in recent decades. In 1991, the UK government launched “Targeting Social Need”, the first attempt to take a strategic approach to tackling poverty in

Northern Ireland. This was renewed in 1998, with New Targeting Social Need (New TSN), which was part of the Good Friday Agreement.

The New TSN took a broader approach than the first TSN, which had more of a focus on differences between Catholic and Protestant communities. These differences were still recognised by New TSN, but within a broader framework of Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI). The precise definition of PSI was somewhat vague, talking of “new and creative ways of helping people who are disadvantaged in several ways”.

The approach of New TSN was to target resources at areas and people in greatest need. It did not have a definition of poverty per se, and did not refer to the now common low income measure. In fact, in 1999, there was no way of reliably measuring the number of people in low income households in Northern Ireland, as the data was not collected until 2004.

The strategy ran for several years, with annual action plans and progress reports from each department individually. Given the broad definition of “need”, many of the progress milestones do not relate directly to poverty. What is worth noting is the emphasis on getting people to claim the income related benefits to which they are entitled, whether Pension Credit, Child Maintenance or out of work benefits.

Lifetime Opportunities

In 2006, Lifetime Opportunities replaced New TSN as the anti-poverty strategy for Northern Ireland. Building on what it saw as some of the successes of New TSN (reducing the differentials between Catholics and Protestants, for instance) it nonetheless recognised weaknesses around departmental coordination and reporting. It is notable, therefore, that all the NI government department logos are displayed at the start of the report.

It was much more explicit about poverty, referencing it in the subtitle (“Government’s Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland”). There is also a measure, in fact three measures, of income poverty – absolute, relative and materially deprived – which match the UK government’s measures.

Social Inclusion is also part of the strategy, and related topics such as health and educational inequalities are covered under this heading.

It is worth noting that this strategy was designed during a period when Northern Ireland was under direct rule from London – the assembly had been suspended. It was initially rejected by all parties under direct rule, with the St Andrews agreement setting out the need for a new strategy. No such strategy was developed, so Lifetime Opportunities was eventually adopted in 2008.

Child poverty strategy 2011

The existence of the 2006 Lifetime Opportunities report meant there was an existing framework of governance and monitoring for the child poverty strategy to slot into. As such, there is a lot of mention of existing programmes and policies.

As in many such strategies, there is a focus on parental employment as the route out of child poverty. But the importance of “work that pays” is noted, effectively recognising the need to reduce in-work poverty. Within this, however, is the emphasis on skills, rather than wages.

Health inequalities are cited as a reason for needing a strategy. They are already monitored by DHSSPSNI. The health of children is seen as the first priority in the 10 year strategy for young people. There are no specific actions in the child poverty strategy, but this is one of the recurring themes - there were already other strategies and monitoring processes in operations which it could attach itself to.

The equality dimension was an important part of the strategy, which itself contained an equalities impact assessment. A range of different dimensions were considered, including all the “protected groups” under equalities legislation, with a specific mention of religious differences. There are specific “differentials” outlined which the strategy intends to help reduced – for instance, between Catholic children and other children.

Delivering Social Change

Delivering Social Change is the new framework for tackling poverty in Northern Ireland. It is not really a strategy in the way that Lifetime Opportunities was – it is more of an attempt to coordinate existing programmes. There is a fund associated with the framework for particular programmes, such as childcare. Parts of the framework, including the section for children and young people, are still out for consultation.

Wales

The Welsh Government has produced two child poverty strategies – one in 2005 and its replacement in 2011. There is now an all-ages anti-poverty strategy, “Tackling Poverty”. There are annual reports on progress and a comprehensive list of indicators for monitoring progress. It contains the core aims of the child poverty strategy and builds on them.

A Fair Future for our Children

The first child poverty strategy had three main areas, income poverty, participation poverty and service poverty. The main measure used was the standard income measure, but this was supported by a wide range of indicators used for monitoring, including health inequalities, poor housing and low educational outcomes. So, from the start, there was a broad view of what constituted poverty for children.

Employment and reducing worklessness among parents was at the heart of the strategy. The strategy explicitly mentions the geography of unemployment and that people should not be excluded from the labour market because of where they live. This is very important in Wales, where unemployment and worklessness tend to be geographically clustered. There was, however, no explicit mention of in-work poverty in the strategy.

There was a section dealing with equalities issues, particularly around English- and Welsh-speaking families. There were also mentions of discrimination towards black and minority ethnic (BME) groups in the labour market and the differentials in school outcomes. Early years development was a key part of the overall strategy. There was also, in the discussion on financial inclusion, discussion of preventative measures to stop people falling into debt, as well as dealing with debts people may have.

The strategy was to have fed up to government via a cabinet subcommittee on children and young people, as well as a Children and Young People's Policy Coordination Group.

Child Poverty Strategy for Wales, 2011

The 2011 strategy had more of an explicit focus on parental employment, this time covering in-work poverty through the concept of progression to higher paying work. Health and education inequalities also formed a core part of the strategy. Broader issues around homelessness and access to services are captured in a section on reducing the burden of poverty on children.

The impetus for the new strategy was the Children and Families (Wales) Act of 2010, which brought in a duty on all public bodies to tackle child poverty. So the Welsh Government's strategy was an attempt to coordinate that work.

Tackling poverty

There is now an all ages approach to reduce poverty, called *Tackling Poverty*. It has a dedicated unit within government and, as with previous strategies, a set of outcomes that can be monitored over time. A noticeable change is the increased prominence of material deprivation as a measure of poverty, alongside low income.

In terms of governance, there are eight ministerial posts listed as accountable for ensuring delivery and even a Tackling Poverty Minister. There is also a list of partners, including employers and third sector groups, though necessarily this is less specific regarding responsibility and accountability.

There are annual progress reports published on the Tackling Poverty website, which include both the indicators and descriptions of relevant new policies. In terms of strategic direction and government activity to tackle poverty, Wales is some way ahead of other parts of the UK.

Local areas

In preparation for the interviews with local anti-poverty groups, we reviewed the anti-poverty strategies for two areas – one in Scotland and one in London.

The Scottish local authority recently produced a Fairness Strategy, developed by a partnership which includes the Local Authority, Health Board, police and fire service, representatives of the private and voluntary sectors. It was decided that the previous local anti-poverty strategy, developed in 1999, was out of date and in 2011 a consultation was launched on the new strategy.

The Fairness Strategy was launched in 2012 and had three distinct themes: ensuring a fair household income; having someone to turn to (access to advice and support services); and 'hope for the future' (developing skills and confidence to take up new opportunities). The three themes were underpinned by an action plan that outlined a wide range of actions in relation to employability and skills (including action to promote the living wage), health improvement, social inclusion (ensuring better access to services, ensuring charging policies allow access to those in need, etc.), financial inclusion (addressing fuel poverty, improving benefit take up), and improving educational outcomes.

The strategy also recognised the importance of addressing the stigma and discrimination that many people living on low incomes often experience. This was area of the strategy that needed more development, but there was an important recognition of the issue. The strategy is monitored through officers in the local authority and through the Partnership board.

The London borough has had a child poverty strategy since 2010. It includes a set of specific measures and targets around low income, employment and also housing.

The high cost of housing is an important issue for people in poverty in London, so it is worth noting the prominence of housing in the strategy. A key driver for the strategy is said to be limited options for family and affordable housing. There are specific proposals for increasing these options. While there is no overall poverty indicator specifically relating to housing deprivation, there is monitoring of the outcomes of these initiatives based on the following measures: the number of affordable homes built; and the number of families moved out of over-crowded homes.

A range of measures relating to educational attainment are included in the strategy. These include: the percentage of 11 year olds achieving the target level for their age in mathematics, English, and science; the percentage of young people achieving 5 A*-C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics; the number of young people achieving Level 2 qualifications by the age of 19, narrowing the gap from the national average; the percentage of 16-18 year olds who are not in employment, education or training (NEET); the percentage of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities registered as NEET.

The groups the council focused on in the strategy are based on those identified by the regional child poverty commission as being particularly disadvantaged.

No reference was made in the strategy to the allocation of spending/resources needed to implement particular policy proposals.

The strategy makes reference to the role of central Government and regional bodies in tackling child poverty. The strategy points to the national targets for halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020, as well as a series of initiatives at the national and regional levels that are expected to reduce child poverty at the local level (e.g. a Joint Child Poverty Unit, the London Child Poverty Commission, and the London Child Poverty Pledge). One way in which



the local strategy interacts with these is by integrating some of the activities emerging from these initiatives into the action plans.

Partners from local strategic partnerships were heavily involved in developing the strategy. These included representatives from the health sector, Job Centre Plus, schools, and the voluntary sector. They did not consult directly with people in poverty.

The strategy brings together various existing strategies and sets out the relevant actions to achieve these objectives. Among these actions are monitoring arrangements to ensure they are tracking their progress effectively. Delivery groups were set out to oversee progress towards achieving the key priorities set out in the strategy.

The strategy set out governance arrangements for monitoring the impact of the strategy. For instance, Achieve Economic Wellbeing Commissioning and Delivery Groups were tasked with monitoring the impacts of an action plan implemented by the council's Children and Families Partnership.

Summary

The process of creating devolved administrations in the UK from the period of 1999, with varying degrees of power and control over aspects of anti-poverty policy-making, clearly had a significant impact on the approaches and strategies that developed. As can be seen from the short review above, regardless of the levels of power that the administration had, all have adopted strategies to address poverty in their own contexts. There are a number of common features, for example the emphasis on employment as a route out of poverty; the need to tackle health; and educational inequalities. The creation of these strategies also played an important role (at least for the local authorities and NGOs that took part in this study) in contributing to the development of strategic approaches to addressing poverty at the local level. In the context of a multi-level governance system, with a variety of competences at different levels, there is a need for these strategic approaches if national level anti-poverty policies are to be implemented.

4. Content Review of EU strategies

Choice of strategies to review

A central focus of this review has been the strategies that were produced by European member states as part of the implementation of the ‘Lisbon Strategy’ between 2000 and 2010. The National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (later National Reports on Social Inclusion and Social Protection) were intended to support the development of coordinated responses to poverty and social exclusion across the EU. This process has been important as it has been one of the few attempts to coordinate strategic policy responses to a range of interconnected social problems across a number of territories, and over a long period of time.

It is important to note that we have not intended to review the Lisbon Strategy as a whole or the effectiveness of the strategy as a way of tackling poverty. However, the process does contain useful lessons in relation to the content of individual strategies, the factors that contribute to effective policy coordination, and the role of stakeholders beyond the state in the formation of anti-poverty strategy.

Over the course of the ten year Lisbon Strategy, there were four iterations of National Action Plans on Social inclusion (these plans were broadened following a mid-term review, and were then streamlined into broader National Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion). At the beginning of the process in 2000, there were 15 member states, which increased to 25 in 2004 and then 27 by 2007. In total then there were potentially 82 national reports that could have been included in the review of the European strategies. We have adopted the following approach to inclusion of reports in the review:

1. **Availability:** Not all of the National Action Plans have been as accessible as would have been expected for official documents. They were not initially available on the European Commission website, and tracking them down via national governments, NGOs and other contacts has proven difficult. We were also required to have plans that have been published in English, another constraint.
2. **Duration:** We considered that strategies that have been present in each iteration of the EU social inclusion process would provide greater insights than those where only one or two had been produced. This meant that we have focused on the original EU15.
3. **Relevance:** While there is a significant degree of similarity between the UK and all of the EU member states, there is also a significant degree of divergence. In recognising the practical dimensions of this project, we felt that it was more effective to consider those countries that arguably had most in common with the UK. We have focused on the EU15 for this reason.

The gaps that currently exist in the framework are largely as a result of inaccessibility. We are continuing to look for the missing reports and will add them to the analysis if and when we locate them.

Background

As mentioned above, it was not the intention of this project to provide an analysis of the Lisbon Strategy or of social policy at the European level. However, it is important to understand some of the context of the European Social Inclusion Process that developed as part of the Lisbon Strategy, in order to be able to draw out key lessons for the development of national anti-poverty strategies.

Social policy is not one of the key competencies of the EU. However, since the 1970s there has been a growing engagement with the social dimension of Europe. The three 'Poverty Programmes' were a limited expression of this interest. More significant steps were taken with the passing of the non-binding Community Charter of Basic Social Rights for Workers, known as the "Social Charter" in 1989. The resultant "Protocol on Social Policy" was part of the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, and paved the way for at least limited agenda-setting around EU social policy. Of course, the UK remained outside of the social dimension, and was the only member state at the time not to sign the protocol.

The creation of the European Monetary Union (EMU) also provided for progress in social policy areas, particularly around equalities issues. It also provided for the encouragement of the coordination of initiatives to exchange knowledge and best practices in order to combat social exclusion.

The most important step in European social policy came with the launch of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000. This strategy was designed to make Europe "the world's most competitive knowledge-based society" and was based on three pillars, namely economic growth and competitiveness, social inclusion, and the environment.

As part of the Lisbon Strategy there was a commitment to make "a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010" by launching the EU Social Inclusion Strategy. This was to be delivered through a new governance method, the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The social OMC (as it is referred to) consists of the following elements: a set of agreed common objectives and indicators on the basis of which national plans are periodically submitted by member states and evaluated by Joint Commission /Council reports. Moreover, peer reviews are used as a means of highlighting best practice and promoting mutual learning between member states.

It is important to recognise that the social inclusion OMC never created legally binding provisions, or provided legal remedies (sanctions) in case of non-compliance by member states. Rather, the social OMC was based primarily on member states' willingness to engage with it. Hence, it is referred to as 'soft law', as opposed to the 'hard law' of European Directives.

The original common objectives for the social inclusion process were:

- to facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services;
- to prevent the risks of exclusion;

- to help the most vulnerable; and
- to mobilise all relevant bodies

As these objectives reveal, the dominant narratives underlying the strategy have been the promotion of the multi-dimensional notion of social inclusion, encompassing a wide range of issues including access to health care, housing, education and the importance of targeting of certain vulnerable groups, in particular children. However, the strongest emphasis has been put on labour market ‘activation’ policies as the best route to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

The Lisbon Strategy came to an end in 2010. The impact on the strategy was, even in the European Commission’s own analysis, decidedly mixed (European Commission, 2010). The section below considers the key elements in the National Action Plans (NAPs) before looking at the response to the NAPs by NGOs operating at the European level.

Content Analysis²

Measurement of poverty

The measurement of poverty should be seen as an essential element in any anti-poverty strategy. If one of the purposes of an anti-poverty strategy is to bring coherence and focus to actions to address poverty, then it is important that at the outset there are commonly agreed definitions of what poverty is and how it is measured. Of course, questions of measurement also relate to the conceptualisation of poverty. In the analysis of the NAPs we wished to look at what measures of poverty were used, and whether novel or unexpected approaches were developed by any member states.

Across all the NAPs, income measures of poverty were used and were core to the analysis of poverty. These provided a consistent way of monitoring progress. This consistency was underpinned by the development of the so-called ‘Laeken indicators’, which allowed a common approach to measuring and monitoring poverty to be developed across Europe. The 18 original indicators covered a wide range of dimensions of poverty ‘reflecting a balanced representation of EU social concerns’ (Dennis & Guio, 2003). These indicators covered four broad areas: income poverty; employment; health; and education, and included measures of the duration of low income; income inequality; life expectancy; in-work poverty; and long-term unemployment. Of course, a wide range of other statistical information was used in the NAPs by all member states as it related to specific programmes and policies, including for example drug use; employment rates; overcrowding; crime; and domestic violence. However, the common indicators were used by all member states where they had developed the capacity to gather the relevant information.

² For details on how the content analysis was structured, see the appendix.

Member states used a variety of measures to track poverty. For example, Italy in 2003-05 had measures of income inequality and consumption. In the Netherlands in their 2006-08 strategy purchasing power was used. Netherlands also made use of a measure of long term low income.

Alongside expected measures of low income (60 per cent median income), most countries reported on the numbers of people living on minimum income schemes or the equivalent. All NAPs provided analysis by different demographic groups. For example, Portugal (2006-08) provided a breakdown of low income figures by child poverty, older people and family size/household composition.

In this way the NAPs and the social inclusion sections of the National Reports for Social Protection and Social Inclusion provided a useful means of monitoring changes in low income, both within countries and across. The long-term nature of the European social inclusion process, and the revision of plans every two to three years meant that they were an effective way of tracking poverty and appears to have been useful in terms of the transparency of monitoring of member states. This was a key strength of the social inclusion process. The strategy brought the analysis and the data together in a way that would appear did not happen previously in most countries.

The role of employment

The Dutch National Report on Social Protection and Inclusion for 2006-08 sums up the position of the vast majority of member states when they state that 'there is broad political consensus that the best medicine for poverty is work'. The UK NAP (2003-2005) also states unequivocally that 'work is the best route out of poverty', that this is necessitates a strong economy and that 'economic growth and social justice go hand in hand' (DWP, 2003). The question of the relationship between anti-poverty strategies and economic growth is an important issue which we return to below. It is not surprising that employment takes such a central role, given that one of the key objectives of the Social OMC was to facilitate the promotion of participation in the labour market.

Most NAPs summarised the key challenges and invariably these related to the need to increase employment rates, most often for key groups. Even in countries that would normally be associated with relatively high employment rates, increasing these rates was still seen as the key way of addressing poverty. The Swedish NAP (2003-2005), for example, noted that there was a goal to increase the adult employment rate from 73.5 per cent in 1997 to 80 per cent in 2004. This goal would not be met, but this illustrates the importance placed on employment as a route out of poverty.

Of course, general employment rates do not accurately describe the situation for some groups. Most NAPs highlight the differential employment rates for some groups. The Dutch NAP (2001-2003) highlights that labour market participation rates are lower for disabled people and those from minority ethnic groups (Netherlands, 2001). It also highlighted the gap between male and female labour market participation rates, and the low rates for those without qualifications.

NAPs and National Reports on Social Inclusion and Social Protection (NRSISP) highlighted a generally (although by no means uniformly) improving picture in the growth in employment at least until around 2005-06. Some NAPs would report the most favourable trends or paint them in best possible light. For example, the Spanish NAP (2003-05) reported the rate of increase in employment rather than the actual employment rate (Ministerio De Trabajo Y Asuntos Sociales, 2003).

Some countries used the plans as an opportunity to introduce new initiatives or measures. For example, France (2003) introduced a scheme lowering employer social security contributions for low and average salaries to help SME enterprises. The Dutch NRSISP also included measures to promote self-employment, particularly amongst people from minority ethnic groups.

There are questions over the implementation of actions and commitments relating to employment and unemployment (as well as other policy areas). For example, in the Spanish NAP (2003-2005) ten very clear commitments and a variety of actions were outlined. However, when looking at the National Report on Social Inclusion and Social Protection for 2006-08 it was not clear whether and how these commitments were implemented. Again, this is an issue we will return to below.

The German NAP for 2003-05 does highlight an area where commitments made in relation to employment in the previous NAP were implemented. An act providing the legal right to request part-time working was seen as being critical to expanding the number of part-time jobs, allow more flexible working patterns to be adopted. The NAP reports that there was an additional 320,000 part-time employees in Germany within one year of the act being introduced in 2001. It is not clear, however, the impact that this new law had on poverty reduction.

Employment policy is a thread that runs through all parts of the NAPs and the NRSISPs. This is to be expected when facilitating access to employment was the first objective of the Social OMC, and when so many member states clearly stated that 'work was the best route out of poverty'. In particular, education was an area identified by many member states as crucial in improving employment rates. The Danish NRSISP (2006-2008) refers to the 'welfare agreement' for young people, designed to ensure that disadvantaged young people should complete educational programmes, and that local authorities took responsibility for ensuring that young people could access these programmes. The rationale was clear: 'a good education will enhance the individual's chances of getting a good job and of being more closely attached to the labour market' (Danish Ministry for Social Affairs, 2006).

The Dutch NRSISP (2006-2008) also placed a strong emphasis on the need to improve the employment rates of people from ethnic minorities, particularly new migrants and refugees. This increased emphasis on increasing employment opportunities for minority ethnic groups was also presented as a means of increasing participation in wider Dutch society.

Not surprisingly, a number of NAPs and NRSISPs linked access to childcare to improving employment rates (e.g. the Dutch NRSISP 2006-2008 and the UK NAP 2003). Again, given the centrality of the belief stated by most member states that work is the best route of poverty, it is perhaps not surprising that many policy areas that could be seen as addressing discrimination, accessing services and preventing poverty were presented as actions designed to increase the labour supply.

Addressing unemployment

Discussions regarding employment in many NAP documents almost always took place alongside those addressing unemployment and the reform of social protection or welfare systems. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that in many members states, for example in Germany, the UK, and Denmark, moves were well underway to introduce significant changes to the welfare system. Below we highlight some of the specific approaches that different member states included in their NAPs to address unemployment.

The Danish NAP (2006-08) reported on a separate strategy to address long term unemployment, aimed at increasing the proportion of people able to access support to move into education or return to employment. It also referred to the introduction of wage subsidies for companies employing people who were aged over 55 and had been unemployed for more than 12 months.

The Dutch NAP (2006-08) established a youth unemployment task force, with the aim of bringing together a number of agencies, to more effectively coordinate services and to create an additional 40,000 jobs for young people. Again the emphasis in this programme was on improving educational outcomes for young people, particularly for those who had left school without qualifications.

France (2003-2005) outlined a range of structures designed to support people back into employment. These essentially focused on intermediate labour market approaches, emphasising training but also employment opportunities. The France NAP (2003-2005) also referred to 'experimental measures' that were focused on those most at risk of exclusion from the labour market, including ex-offenders, refugees and prostitutes. This plan also identified the need to expand the social economy sector as a source of employment for people at risk of social exclusion.

The German NAPs for the period 2001-03 and 2003-05 had a strong emphasis on addressing unemployment and was said to be the 'central concern of the Federal Government'. A key part of the approach was the integration of 'social assistance offices and employment exchanges, with the aim of establishing single points of contact for all unemployed people. As with the emphasis in most other NAPs, the desire was to streamline the services provided to unemployed people and at the same time make the system more active. Much like the approach taken in the UK around the same time, the German NAPs for both periods emphasised the importance of personal advisors. The NAP (2003-05) reports on the success of model projects that brought together services for unemployed people, highlighting the increased placement of clients in

employment or training, compared to those who had not been involved in the project. The NAPs also highlighted the targeted approach that was being taken, with an emphasis on providing support to young people, people with disabilities and migrants.

Combinations of structural welfare reforms were designed to increase the proportion of those unemployed that were part of an active labour programmes, targeted training and educational opportunities (often focused on young people, the long term unemployed or older people) and a variety of approaches to job subsidies, tax credits and tax cuts for employers. The overwhelming emphasis with regard to addressing unemployment in this period was to address supply-side factors, with little reference made in any of the NAP documents to industrial policies aimed at creating employment in areas or in occupations that would help address poverty.

Housing deprivation

Housing and tackling homelessness were clear priorities in the NAPs of member states. This reflects the emphasis on the multi-dimensional nature of poverty that is written into objectives for the Social OMC. Some NAPs made reference to other homelessness strategies. For instance, the Irish NAP (2001) makes reference to a three year homelessness strategy that included the development of local actions plans.

The UK NAP made reference to housing strategies at the sub national level. Again, in this way, the development of the NAP could be seen as an important vehicle to bring together strategies at various levels. Given the devolution of a number of important social policy areas in the UK, the NAP provided the only opportunity to compare different approaches to the same policy priorities.

Approaches to housing issues tended to look at services and the needs of the most vulnerable. For instance, some NAPs looked at homeless people, social housing and neighbourhood renewal. Denmark (2006) looked at these a broader way again analysing measures in place for owner occupiers.

The French NAP (2003-05) referred to a wide range of actions designed to improve housing issues, including a programme of urban renewal (house holding), which also included action to address substandard housing (covering a range of issues from eradication of lead poisoning, ending unsanitary conditions and addressing debt). It also proposed further action to provide housing for women who had been victims of domestic violence.

Health inequalities

Health inequalities were a key objective of the Social OMC and were seen as a key dimension of poverty for NAPs to address. The process of 'streamlining' resulted in the policy around health and long term care being integrated, alongside social inclusion, into the National Reports on Social Inclusion and Social Protection. From 2005 onwards, the NAPs therefore had less of a focus on health inequalities.

The Irish NAP (2003-05) set targets to reduce health inequalities. For instance, to reduce the gap in premature mortality and low birth weights between the highest and lowest socio-economic groups by at least 10 per cent.

The Finish NAP (2003-05) highlighted its National Health Project which was focused on reducing waiting times and increasing and improving access to healthcare. There was some reference to ensuring that there was better integration between different parts of system of healthcare and of guaranteeing reductions in waiting times.

In-work poverty

In-work poverty has been an issue that has moved up the political agenda in many countries over the last 10 years. This increasing prominence as an issue is reflected in the development of the NAPs over time. Examples of policies within NAPs to tackle in work poverty were more focused around measures such as reducing childcare costs (as was the case in the German NAP of 2006).

Some countries had more targeted approaches. For instance, Italy (2002-05) referenced good practice in terms of minimum pay for care workers. A number of member states made reference to a minimum wage system. These included Ireland, Portugal and the UK. These were pre-existing policies and the NAP provided an opportunity to see them as part of a wider anti-poverty strategy.

The UK NAP for 2006-08 (Working Together, DWP, 2006) highlights one important role for the process around the development of the anti-poverty strategy. In this NAP under the challenges section, there was a very clear statement around in-work poverty. This was in part raised by people with direct experience of low income who took part in an extensive consultation process in preparation of this NAP. The issue of in-work poverty is now rightly recognised as one of the key challenges that the UK faces in terms of its approach to addressing poverty and inequality. Had the NAP process been more central to policy making in the UK, more robust plans to deal with in-work may have developed. The UK NAP 2006-08 merely repeats the existing commitments in relation to the National Minimum Wage and Tax Credits.

Urban/Rural differences

Across almost all strategies there was an 'urban' centred approach to anti-poverty policies. Almost no strategies referred to rural communities or island communities. Although some countries referred to local projects that delivered outreach, it was unclear if these were targeted at rural communities or just at more specific groups within urban communities. With the wider policies in mind, it appears that these were targeted mainly at urban areas.

Given the importance of rural populations it is surprising that issues specific to rural areas do not feature more widely within the NAPs. This, in turn, raises questions around who was involved in developing the NAPs both inside and outside government. Italy (2008-10) was one country that seemed to recognise the different geography across the country making references to differences in employment levels and referring to the 'North-South divide'.

Community assets

Recognition of asset based approaches, such as volunteering and community development, as a means of tackling poverty seemed limited.

Asset based approaches were most apparent in the Irish NAP, and to a lesser extent in the Italian NAP (2008-10) which made reference to community welfare. This raises interesting questions about the conception of objectives that were set for the Social OMC. So while the Social OMC refers to the involvement of “all relevant stakeholders” and most plans make reference to the need for participation, the majority of policies contained within the NAPs appear to be very “traditional” approaches to poverty alleviation, where the state does things *to* and *for* poor people, rather than with them. Notions of co-production or empowerment are largely absent from all the plans.

Equalities

All strategies made reference to issues of equalities and at-risk groups. A significant focus of this was on barriers to accessing and maintaining employment.

Some strategies adopted a broader approach to addressing issues of equalities. For example, the Austrian NAP (2008-10) included actions to address stigmas experienced by disabled people. There was also reference across several NAPs to gender mainstreaming of policies. For instance, the UK NAP (2006) had extensive sections on tackling discrimination. This highlighted policy measures around disabled people and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, with those relating to disabled people being linked to new legislation and to resources. This was not something all plans did consistently.

The German NAP (2003-05) made reference to a wide variety of groups that are differentially impacted by poverty. This included women (with detailed sections highlighting the positive impact of improved childcare provision, the need to increase women’s participation in the labour market and the efforts to tackle domestic abuse), disabled people, migrants

The main categories of ‘at risk’ groups occurring across the strategies were women, young people, disabled people, older people and migrant groups. Who are included in these groups, however, varies considerably across countries. For example, while throughout the NAPs there is a widespread recognition of people with disabilities, some concentrated solely on physical rather than mental illness. In addition, only some countries considered carers to be an at risk group within this category.

Some countries made reference to a more diverse range of groups at risk of experiencing poverty. These included people who had been trafficked, those with experience of substance misuse, ex-offenders, members of the Roma community and traveller communities.

Evaluation and monitoring

There was significant variation in the approach taken to evaluation and monitoring across countries. Some focused on all levels of evaluation and

monitoring - including the local levels. Others simply referred to already existing national strategies and indicators. Some strategies, such as Denmark (2006), referenced commissioning of additional research. The presence of coordination groups and how third sector NGO partners were involved varied.

One issue in relation to monitoring and evaluation was the connection between different iterations of a given country's NAP. There seemed to be no consistent approach to recording progress from a previous NAP. All countries published statistical annexes which allowed trends to be monitored for each year. However, it is important to note that the mere publication of a statistic does not equate to an effective approach to monitoring and evaluation. Some NAPs did go beyond this, however. For instance, the Portuguese NAP (2006-08) included a table that included the name of each policy, whether it was existing or new policy, what the target of the policy was, the initiatives that were being used and financial resources applied to the policy.

Preventative measures

Preventative measures tended to be focused around housing, health and the labour market. Within housing this broadly focused on minimising or reducing the risk of homelessness among population groups such as those with disabilities and experiences of substance misuse.

The German NAP (2003-05) presented its plans regarding childcare as part of a preventative strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion. It stated that a 'high-quality offer of care creates equity in starting opportunities and equal education opportunities.' The same NAP also highlighted the preventative dimension of a variety of aspects of drugs and addictions policy.

Some highlighted prevention with regards to income maintenance schemes, from the basic benefits system to the state pension.

It is important to note that one of the original objectives of the NAP process was the prevention of the risk of exclusion. So while prevention has moved up the policy agenda over the last few years in the UK, there was a focus on this issue from the start of the Lisbon process.

Governance

Some NAPs, such as the Italian NAP (2008), highlighted the challenges that the government had faced during the institutional reform of 2001 that redistributed and reorganised responsibilities across local, central and national government. This led to implementation challenges and issues relating to direction.

Germany's NAPs (2003-05, 2006) also referred to wider institutional challenges with regards to their system of federal government, the Länder and local authorities. This led to regional and locally pursued strategies across Germany and policy areas and implementation split across different institutional layers. However, there appeared to be a significant degree of autonomy given to local level structures.

In the UK, over the Lisbon Strategy period, there was a clear development of institutional structures in relation to governance. This moved from informal meetings of NGOs with key civil servants to formalised governance structures involving representatives of NGOs, people experiencing poverty and representatives from local, devolved and national government. This governance structure did not survive the end of the Lisbon strategy period in 2010.

The Irish NAP (2003) outlined a clear process of consultation and engagement that was overseen by a steering group of government partners and social partners. A formal consultation was carried out and a national social inclusion forum was established. The Portuguese NAP (2008-10) set up an inter-ministerial commission to oversee the design of the NAP and also involved input from NGOs. Few NAPs were discussed in national parliaments, despite sometimes extensive governance arrangements.

Most NAPs make reference to some governance structures that involve a range of stakeholders and many developed ways to involve people with direct experience of poverty in their design. The NAPs provided an opportunity for more structured engagement of some parts of civil society in anti-poverty policy development. However there were clear gaps for example around the engagement of private sector and of trade unions.

5.NGO reviews of EU strategies

Background

This part of the review summarises the analysis of several European level NGO critiques of national level NAP Inclusion documents. The original analysis was produced by the European Anti-Poverty Network, Euro child, Eurohealthnet, FEANTSA (European Homeless Network), and the European Network Against Racism.

Content analysis

Poverty as multi-dimensional

A key element of any anti-poverty strategy is to develop a coherent and clear understanding of the scale and the nature of the problem.

One of the benefits of the NAP process for participating EU member states was the coherence that it brought to the way that poverty was measured and reported. A common set of indicators were developed (the so-called Laeken indicators) and member states were able to draw on these when reporting on developments in poverty. Measures of low income using the 60 per cent median of household income measure were used in all NAPs which were then broken down to different demographic groups (predominantly adults, children, and older people). One exception was Greece which had not adopted an official definition of poverty.

Measures of absolute poverty were also used in the majority of NAP documents, and some also used measures of persistent poverty. As stated above, one of the features of the NAP process was that there was a consistency of approach across member states in order to allow comparisons to be made.

Beyond measures of low income, a wide variety of indicators were also used in NAPs and in other anti-poverty strategies that were consulted. These included employment rates, unemployment rates, long-term unemployment, fuel poverty, health inequality indicators, in-work poverty and educational outcomes.

In terms of a multi-dimensional understanding and approach to tackling poverty there were several key points highlighted about the NAPs process. EAPN emphasised the value and success of the fact the NAPs assumed a broader approach than that of addressing only income poverty and recognised wider issues such as health care, employment and housing.

This was often strengthened as the NAP process continued. For example, in the field of housing and homelessness, it was highlighted by FEANTSA (2005) that through the process of the NAPs there was a changing emphasis placed upon this area as a key social policy issues in tackling poverty. In 2001, housing and homelessness were seen as a priority issue for some member states. However, by the time of the reporting of the NAPs in 2005 this had become a key priority for all member states.

The importance of a multi-dimensional understanding and approach to tackling poverty was emphasised across much NGO analysis. EAPN discussed that within later years of the NAP process although there was a focus on addressing child poverty across the NAP's this was grounded within a labour market rather than universal preventative rights based approach. The issue of prevention was highlighted by other NGOs. Eurohealth argued that, within the round of 2006 NAPs, tackling health inequalities were addressed through policies focussed on access to treatment and on care of people who are already ill.

Overall across the NAPs there was a strong focus on labour market performance and labour market integration as an approach to tackling poverty. The key aim across member states was to increase employment. A key focus was policies outlining tackling unemployment for different demographic groups such as young adults. Access to work was seen as a priority although barriers to work such as childcare were not always adequately addressed.

Specific policy agendas began to emerge through the later NAPs process and some demographic groups and issues received greater focus than others.

Child poverty and social exclusion were broadly addressed within the context of family situation and family characteristics (for example lone parent families or unemployed parent families). Clarity of objectives, comprehensiveness and simplicity of approaches differ across member states. Finland is an example of one country that sought to tackle child poverty with a universal approach. Analysis by Eurochild within a review of period of 2006-2008 highlighted that most NAPs identify child poverty as priority. Spain does not prioritise child poverty despite high levels of child poverty within the country.

Age Europe when considering the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion produced in 2006 found that there was a consistent lack of focus on the issues facing older people.

Other issues were highlighted on the scope of policy areas. EAPN, in its analysis of the 2002 NAPs, critiqued that there was a lack of recognition of rights and access to services. In addition, they criticised the lack of focus on inequality.

With regards to integration of different areas of poverty, such as housing and employment, many plans were criticised in terms of being standalone policies as opposed to being brought together in an integrated approach.

Wider influential factors played a part in the policy remit of the plans. EAPN discussed contextual issues impacting on the plans at their midpoint, such as the decreased political focus and priority of poverty within individual member states. Other factors seen as having a key influence on the plans included the institutional makeup of the country. For example, Germany's remit and responsibility for social exclusion is divided between federal, Lander and local government. It was highlighted that this influenced the plan development due to the complexity of the consultation process. Eurohealth also critiqued that drawing up a national action plan within member states is tasked to small numbers of civil

servants within governments and so this turns it into a 'largely theoretical exercise rather than a process rooted in practice'.

Equalities

At risk groups varied across the member states. The European Network against Racism (ENAR) highlighted that across many NAPs were integration programmes for securing social inclusion for people from migrant backgrounds. However, there was a lack of detail on migrants within the NAPs in explaining how they were beneficiaries of social inclusion policies. Non-EU nationals were also not prioritised. In addition, there was a lack of attention paid to refugee and asylum-seeker issues. Some NAPs did identify specific minority groups (e.g. the Roma community), but this was not universal across all plans.

Gender issues within the NAPs are not concretely focused. The targeting of NAPs towards women was often seen as falling short of what was needed. Some NGOs highlighted the specific targeting of policies towards women however these were seen as standalone policies as opposed to attempts to gender proof the NAPs.

Specific at risk groups identified included: long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, those with experience of substance misuse and the homeless.

Funding the plans

How plans were funded varied and was largely dependent on the policy area being discussed. Analysis conducted by EAPN reported that the NAPs only report on general government resources and most did not provide new resources.

Some policy plans within the NAPs were outlined with no rationale as to how they would be funded or supported whilst others highlighted specific funding sources or attached figures on the monetary spending of the policy. EAPN raised that there appeared to be no new funding for the implementation of the NAPs. Again points raised about lack of implementation plans for the NAPs may also contribute to this in terms of transparency and accountability over funding.

Links to 'local' level

Eurohealth discussed the lack of information on the implementation of NAPs. They highlighted that without this information it was difficult for them to understand public health impacts that and that this was partly due to the complexity and responsibilities of health policy between different levels of governance such as federal and regional and how different areas of health were addressed.

EAPN highlight that through the NAPs process both early and later in the process there is a lack of integration between regional and local perspectives with Spain being the only example of a member state that provides clear regional plans.

Civil Society participation

The involvement of different actors varied within different member states. It was recognised that the engagement of participation of NGO organisation improved over the social inclusion process.

However, the engagement process of civil society actors for certain demographic groups, such as older people, was limited and in some countries mobilising all actors would be problematic. In some countries limited cross department consultation discussion within drawing up of NAPs, with one NGO noting that there was discussion of the need for better institutional arrangements for this to take place.

There were very few references to private sector or trade union engagement within NAPs process. On the whole, it appeared that only NGOs (at national level primarily coalitions of voluntary organisations) attempted to engage with the process.

Evaluation and review

A clear message emerging from the NGO analysis related to the ineffectiveness of the monitoring processes in the NAPs.

The integration between member states' own internal data and the NAPs was often limited. FEANTSA raised that many of the countries involved in the NAPs process had good internal data on elements of homelessness such as unfit housing, but that this had not been integrated into the NAPs making it problematic to understand the impact of policies addressing these issues within the NAPs process.

There was a lack of clear and focused evaluation measures. EAPN, within their analysis, discussed the lack of implementation plans produced by member states within the early years of the social inclusion process. Very few produced evaluation plans. It was argued that the social inclusion process 'was seen as a report to Europe rather than a policy integration tool'. Discussion was also raised on the clarity of the objectives they were measuring within plans. In the policy area of public health, Eurohealth discussed the complexity of measuring public health outcomes and the need for effective processes to enable that to be captured. They criticised the limitations of NAPs to do this effectively.

Lack of cross departmental implementation within the plan was highlighted as a barrier to effective monitoring.

Due to inconsistencies in the process the value of the NAPs in cross country learning was limited. In addition some NGO partners highlighted the lack of gender equality assessment of policies within the NAPs.

On a wider level the NAPs were viewed by the EAPN at their midpoint as an important tool for information collection and gathering of information and practice in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

6. Non EU strategies

Choice of strategies

As part of this study, we reviewed anti-poverty strategies from other parts of the world. The focus was initially on Anglophone, more economically developed countries – The United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. Finding actual strategies, rather than individual policies that might reduce poverty, was not easy. There are a range of strategies and World Bank progress reports for low income countries, but far fewer for more developed countries. We found no strategies to review from the latter two countries and only state-wide rather than national strategies for the former two. Given, though, the size of the states in question – comparable to EU countries included above – and range of powers those states have to reduce poverty among their populations, we have reviewed their content. We have also included a review of the Brazilian government's strategy to address poverty, the *Brasil Sem Miséria* Plan (Brazil without Extreme Poverty Plan).

Below is a summary of the content. Many of the approaches and so many of the lessons, of the strategies from North America are similar to those from the UK and Europe. The key difference of the Brazilian approach was the use of cash transfers to encourage certain behaviours, such as breastfeeding and childhood vaccination.

Content analysis

Poverty measure (income poverty)

An income measure of poverty was used in all of the strategies analysed. All Canadian provinces used a relative income measure. This relative income measure typically used is Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-off (LICO). Produced by Statistics Canada on a yearly basis, the LICO represents the income level at which a family may struggle because it has to spend a greater proportion of its income on necessities than the average family of similar size. The approach is essentially to estimate an income threshold at which families are expected to spend 20 percentage points more than the average family on food, shelter and clothing. As such, the LICO measure differs from the low income measure (based strictly on low income and family composition) used in the UK in that it estimates a spending model and then derives the income needed for a given level of spending on food, shelter and clothing. The LICO measure is an effective way to capture the cost of living burden amongst different populations as the cut offs vary by 7 family sizes and 5 different populations. However, the LICO measure in being specific to Canada may present issues around international comparison.

Additional income measures included in the strategies are the Market Basket Measure (MBM). The MBM is an absolute measure of low income based on the cost of a specific basket of goods and services representing a modest, basic standard of living. The MBM, including its definition of disposable income, was

designed by a working group of Federal, Provincial and Territorial officials. The depth of poverty and persistence of poverty are also considered, although infrequently. All of these additional measures, when included in strategies, are used to supplement the main relative income measure.

Conversely, the US poverty threshold, included in the US federal strategy analysed (Minnesota) is based on an absolute poverty standard, which remains fixed over time in real terms. The U.S. official measure of poverty is typically in the form of the cost of a basket of goods and services required to assure minimum living conditions and indexed for price changes over time.

All strategies provided analysis by different demographic groups. For example, the Minnesota strategy provides breakdowns of the proportions in poverty by children, families with children, and families with a member aged 65 or over.

The Brazilian plan is focused on 'extreme poverty' and is therefore very different in its focus than the other approaches that have been identified. However, its key measure of poverty is an income measure of extreme poverty, that is with a monthly income of less than R\$70 per month. The overall focus of the plan is on children and much of the first report on the plan focuses on the experience of lifting children out of poverty.

Unemployment/employment

Facilitating increased participation in the labour market is clearly a key objective of most of the strategies analysed. Many discuss in depth the links between unemployment and poverty and most include actions/initiatives intended to boost employment rates. These typically centre on education and training, creating employment opportunities, and removing disincentives to work. Despite this, only one of the strategies includes indicators on employment. One of the progress indicators in the Minnesota strategy looks at the proportion of people in employment earning a living wage.

The Brazilian plan is focused around three key 'axes': raising per capital household income; expanding access to public goods and services; and improving access to employment and income through productive inclusion initiatives. The latter includes providing opportunities for training for work through a wide range of initiatives.

Housing deprivation

A measure of housing deprivation was included in the Ontario strategy, among the list of eight key indicators of poverty and social exclusion. This was a measure designed specifically for the strategy measures the percentage of Ontarians with access to stable and affordable housing.

Similarly, in the Minnesota strategy a lot of emphasis is placed on affordable housing. The progress indicators included in the strategy that relate to housing deprivation/affordability are: the numbers of long-term homeless, the time spent in housing shelters and the number of households that spend more than 50 per cent of their net income on housing (housing cost burden).

Health inequalities

In the Ontario strategy one of the eight poverty indicators is healthy birth weights. The Minnesotan strategy goes into some detail about the health care crisis and the impacts of lack of affordable healthcare on low income groups. However, indicators related to health are not included.

A central element of the Brazilian Plan is the *Bolsa Familia*; a well-established conditional income transfer programme. It seeks to reinforce certain behaviours through receipt of the benefit, particularly in the areas of education and health. The programme has been used to ensure that breastfeeding is encouraged amongst low income women, and that children are vaccinated at the right times.

In-work poverty

Most of the strategies make reference, directly or indirectly to in-work poverty, though this does not always translate into an indicator with which to measure it. The Newfoundland and Labrador strategy provides a breakdown of people in poverty by work status. Similarly, one of the key objectives of the Minnesota strategy is to ‘restore work as a route out of poverty’. To achieve this goal the strategy includes progress indicators on the poverty rate among working families as well as the number of people in work earning below the living wage.

Urban/ rural typology

The Newfoundland strategy includes a section on rural/urban differences noting that the province has ‘the highest percentage of individuals in rural areas falling below the LICO compared with other provinces’. It is said that both the LICO measure and Market Basket Measure (MBM) are useful for assessing the differences in living costs/poverty thresholds in urban and rural areas.

Similarly, the Minnesota strategy acknowledges the difference in poverty levels in urban and rural areas. One of the progress indicators set out in the report, linked to community and labour market participation, is the availability of transit services in all regions in the state.

The Brazilian plan has a significant urban focus, but has also brought together actions to address poverty in rural situations. The *Bolsa Verde* programme makes cash transfers to those living in low income rural communities to undertake activities such as sustainable use of natural resources and environmental conservation. A transfer of R\$300 per quarter is made to those who reduce activities such as burning forests and deforestation. In this way it is intended to allow people to develop alternative ways of generating income.

Other measures

Other measures of poverty and social exclusion included in the strategies were: the impact of benefits on poverty reduction (Minnesota), educational attainment (Ontario), high school graduation rate (Ontario, Minnesota), early childhood development or “school readiness” (Ontario), benefit take up rate (Ontario), the depth of poverty (Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador), persistent poverty – or the percentage of the population that remained in poverty over a six year period - (Newfoundland and Labrador) and material deprivation (Ontario).

Equalities groups

All strategies analysed the whole population, although the focus tended to be overwhelmingly on children. All strategies identified key at risk groups. All strategies included women (particularly single mothers), older people and people with disabilities as particularly vulnerable. Aboriginal peoples were included as a key at risk group in all Canadian strategies. Migrants (especially recent immigrants) were identified in all Canadian strategies except Newfoundland and Labrador. Although reference is often made to young adults, they are not typically identified as a key at-risk group.

Some countries made reference to a more diverse range of groups at risk of experiencing poverty. These included homeless people, people lacking qualifications, unattached people, and people of African descent.

Budgeting and resources

Most strategies made reference to the allocation of spending/resources needed to implement particular policy proposals. Only one strategy considered included a complete costed budget (Newfoundland and Labrador) which documents spending for all the poverty related policies in the three years up to the publishing of the report.

Extent of links to local level activity

Most strategies emphasised the importance of activity at the local level. The Canadian strategies all call on the input of municipal governments, as well as community level non-government organisations and service providers. As the Ontario strategy outlines links with local level bodies are necessary as they are 'closest to their communities and have tools to respond to the needs of communities'. Similarly, the Minnesotan strategy called on the assistance of local 'experts' and officials.

It is clear that the Brasil Sem Meseria Plan relies on the engagement of a range of local authorities to deliver the programmes that make up the plan. For example, the *Busca Ativa*, the method for identifying and registering all extremely poor families was developed at the municipal level and is implemented by local teams. This programme is supported by the federal government working with city governments.

Preventative measures

The importance of preventative measures is highlighted in all of the strategies analysed. The preventative measures tend to be focused around education, health and the labour market. Across the strategies education is highlighted as the most effective way of preventing poverty. For instance, it is stated in the Ontario strategy that 'the best goal to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty is education'. Linked to this, all but one of the strategies included progress indicators on education attainment – e.g. high school graduation rates or school readiness.

Access to affordable and quality healthcare is also identified as a key preventative measure. This is given considerable attention in the Minnesota strategy where the cost of healthcare is particularly high:

“the high rates of poverty for people with physical, mental, or mobility issues and for people with serious mental or physical illness can be partly attributed to the high cost of health care. Health limitations can make it difficult for some people to perform even basic chores, let alone holding down a full-time job. Further to this, illness or disability usually results in significant healthcare expenditure’.

Although the language of ‘prevention’ is not typically used, the creation of employment opportunities and supporting the movement of people into work is implicitly suggested as a broad-based preventative approach.

The Minnesota strategy is noteworthy in its focus on prevention. Other preventative measures included in this strategy are increasing financial literacy so that people are better able to manage their finances, limiting predatory financial practices and building community assets. The Nova Scotia strategy also provides a breakdown of poverty related investments in terms of whether they have the capacity to reduce, alleviate, and/or prevent poverty.

The engagement of external stakeholders

All the strategies were based on engagement with actors outside of government. Strategies generally are also quite explicit that their successful implementation is contingent on the support and engagement of actors beyond government. For instance, the Ontario strategy calls on the federal government, municipal government as well as businesses, non-government organisations and individuals to play a role. It provides detail on how each group of actors can get involved. For instance, the strategy mentions that businesses might get involved by offering employment experience to those in poverty or at risk groups while individuals might engage with the poverty reduction efforts via mentoring and tutoring.

Two of the strategies analysed made reference to engagement with individuals experiencing poverty (Minnesota, and Newfoundland and Labrador). The Minnesota strategy is particularly noteworthy in this respect – the strategy among other things was based on ten ‘listening tours’ covering all major regions of the state to study poverty first-hand.

Little reference is made to the involvement of external stakeholders in the development of the plan.

Evaluation and monitoring

All strategies make some reference to evaluation and monitoring. Indeed many of the strategies have been succeeded by progress reports. There is, however, some variation in comprehensiveness of the review process. For instance, some monitoring processes are based on reviewing the key indicators outlined strategy (e.g. in Ontario progress will be measured against a set of 8 clearly defined indicators), while others mention reviewing the impacts of individual

actions/initiatives (e.g. Nova Scotia). Some strategies discussed the need to improve capacity to measure and track progress; for instance, by developing further indicators that allow for robust monitoring or setting up working groups or committees that would be responsible for overseeing the monitoring and review process.

Governance

All strategies included elements on governance. All strategies mentioned the need for working groups and committees (typically interdepartmental) charged with the implementation and monitoring of the strategy provisions. Some strategies were able to refer to committees already in existence, while others required their establishment. In this sense, the remits of committees linked to these strategies varied. Some, having been set up early in the process would have been involved in the development of the strategy as well as its implementation, while others, created following the strategy, were responsible for overseeing its implementation only.

The process of consultation and engagement was mentioned in all of the strategies. Most documented this stage of the process in detail, including information on which groups participated in the exercise, the duration of the consultation phase and methods used.

Some strategies mentioned a lead Minister or Ministry. For instance, in Newfoundland and Labrador the Minister for Human Resources, Labour and Employment also holds the role as strategy lead while Quebec has a designated Minister for the Elimination of Poverty and Exclusion.

The first report on the progress of the Brazilian anti-poverty plan makes little reference to the governance of the plan. The plan is coordinated by the Social development and Fight against Hunger Ministry, which coordinates 10 other Ministries.

All strategies made reference to legislation. Typically strategies issued calls for anti-poverty legislation to be introduced. None of the strategies emerged as a result of existing legislation.

Summary

The strategies reviewed typically included some kind of relative income measure. In some cases measures of absolute poverty (e.g. the Market Basket Measure in Canadian strategies and measures of extreme poverty in the Brazilian strategy), persistent poverty or depth of poverty were included. Other poverty measures that extent beyond income featuring in the strategies were employment/unemployment, housing deprivation, in-work poverty, educational attainment, health inequality, school readiness and benefit take-up rates. All strategies identified key 'at risk' groups. The same is true of engagement with external stakeholders, the inclusion of preventative measures, and the incorporation of elements on governance, evaluation and monitoring. The importance of preventative measures was also highlighted across the strategies.

7. Experience of anti-poverty strategies: identifying what works

UK strategies

Key drivers for the development of the strategy

All participants identified a similar range of drivers for the development of strategies. All clearly identified the changing political context as being the most important element. Within local authorities, both senior staff and elected members were important in providing the drive for new approaches. However, the importance of changing political and policy priorities at the national level were also noted. As poverty moved up the political agenda in the early 2000s at the national level, it also moved up the agenda, to some extent, at the local level. There was a clear interaction between the local and national levels in terms of policy development.

Perhaps the most obvious factor, at the local level, was the continuing existence of relatively high levels of poverty in some areas. There were longstanding commitments to address these problems by both officials and politicians. The key challenge appeared to be attempting to address these long standing problems in a more consistent and strategic manner.

We discussed the importance of the existence of an 'external' driver for strategy development. In most cases this was not the case, there was no official body or piece of legislation compelling local authorities, regional government or national government to produce a strategy. However, where an external driver (such as the Child Poverty Act) was removed, this could have a damaging impact on the momentum behind the desire for an anti-poverty strategy. So external drivers were important, but in the case of those individuals and organisations involved in the case studies, existing political commitments and changing political priorities appeared to be the greatest drivers for change.

Impact of the changing political context

Changing political priorities have been central to the development of anti-poverty strategies at the local and national level. In the local authorities involved, there has always been an importance attached to addressing poverty. The political commitment has always existed, what has changed has been the opportunity to take more strategic approaches to addressing poverty. These may arise in response to changes in the national political or policy context. For example, in one local authority in Scotland, the change in direction at the national (Scottish) level provided an opportunity for a local authority to revise its own approach to addressing poverty, adopting a more strategic approach. This meant that the creation of new and revised priorities at the national level helped refocus activity at the local level. It was an opportunity to develop new processes, involve new actors in new ways and build momentum for change.

The changed political context is therefore important, even where there is an existing commitment to addressing poverty.

How strategies interacted with existing poverty reduction policies

It was acknowledged that the development of new anti-poverty strategies never started from scratch – they always built on what was already being done. The point was to add to what was being done and to attempt to do more preventative activity. Some saw the development of new strategies as an effective way of focusing attention on poverty reduction. New ideas and insights did emerge, often through the consultation or engagement processes, but providing better coordination of existing policies and departments was one of the main benefits of developing new strategies.

Priority actions

The priorities set in a variety of anti-poverty strategies over a roughly 10 year period showed a significant degree of consistence. All participants talked of the importance of employment and employability, of removing barriers to employment, ensuring that people had access to benefits, and could access key services such as childcare, education, health care. All of the respondents also talked about the importance of supporting the voluntary sector and community organisations in effort to reduce and prevent poverty.

The changing economic context was a key factor in identifying changing priorities. As the recession began in 2008 an increasing emphasis was placed on income maximisation and access to advice, particularly with the impact of welfare changes from 2010 onwards. At the different levels, it was clear that the strategic priorities that were highlighted also needed to be flexible in order to respond to changing context.

Involvement of External Stakeholders

All of the strategies were developed with the involvement of external stakeholders. This included other local authorities, other public sector bodies, national government stakeholders (e.g. DWP) and the voluntary sector. The involvement of people with direct experience varied. Some strategies did not involve people with direct experience in a meaningful way; others deployed quite extensive processes to involve direct beneficiaries. One of the key and consistent gaps was the involvement of representatives from the private sector, particularly at the national level. While at local levels, representatives of bodies such as Chambers of Commerce or the Federation of Small Business was not uncommon (particularly through their existing involvement in community planning structures), engagement at the national level seemed to be less consistent. There was an appreciation by policy-makers of the need to involve representatives from the private sector, but it seemed a challenge to involve them in a consistent way. This may be as a result of issues of poverty and social exclusion being lower down the private sector agenda.

It is clear that consultations, and particularly consultations involving civil society organisations and people with direct experience of poverty, are becoming more common place. However, it is also clear that these consultations rarely develop into more on-going processes of dialogue around the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of strategies.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring was seen as important, but the implementation of monitoring plans appears to have been patchy. For some, the plans were still relatively new and therefore monitoring plans were not yet in place. For some of the strategies, the outcomes were already set (for example in National Performance Frameworks) and the means of monitoring them were carried out through national data sets.

One of the key problems with the monitoring plans that were in place was their sensitivity to the actions that were outlined in strategies. It was not always clear how the actions that were being taken contributed to the desired outcomes. This is clearly an issue that has occupied policy makers for some time.

Aspects of the strategy process which were successful

Some of the aspects that were successful in the strategies that were discussed included the development of new and stronger partnerships, new methods or approaches to engaging external stakeholders. Some of the participants also spoke of the ways that in the process of developing strategies more emphasis was placed on prevention or on taking more holistic approaches to addressing poverty.

Clearly, the success of strategies is ultimately assessed on the reductions in poverty levels. However, it is questionable whether, at least in the strategies that were included in the case studies, this was a reasonable expectation. One of the key challenges for the Scottish Social Justice Strategy (2000-2003) was that it included commitment to reduce overall poverty rates. With some key economic levers such as taxation and welfare, this was arguably a big challenge. However, it is also questionable that all the resources available to the then Scottish Executive were deployed in efforts to address poverty.

One of the main functions of anti-poverty strategies at these times seems to be to ensure that all the relevant stakeholders remain focused on addressing poverty, even when the context is not favourable. Keeping the partnerships and processes associated with anti-poverty strategies in place seems to be considered a significant outcome in itself.

Reflections – what might have been done differently?

The NGO stakeholders felt that strategies, in general, could have been more ambitious. Ensuring genuine commitment and leadership for the various processes was also seen as vital and an area where more should have been done.

Reporting on progress and general monitoring was areas that were identified as weaknesses. Without regular reporting there was a difficulty in ensuring that commitments were being implemented. This was also linked to wider stakeholder engagement. This tended to diminish when the initial consultation phase was over. This was a weakness as maintaining this engagement could have helped ensure that pressure was maintained, even when economic and political conditions were not favourable.

At a time of austerity there will always be a challenge in finding adequate resources. However, it was important for some of the participants in the case studies to recognise the limitations of only revising current activities without new resources. Much can be achieved and there is a need for a greater focus still on prevention, but such an approach is inherently limited.

The legacy of the strategies

A key legacy of the strategies appeared to be the increased profile of the issue of poverty, particularly at the local level. Strategies bring a range of activities together and giving them a renewed focus, energy and purpose. They can help ensure (at least for public agencies) that tackling poverty should be a mainstream activity.

However, it was also noted that there are potentially negative impacts of anti-poverty strategy development where there is a failure to implement. Where this occurs much of the ambition and enthusiasm dissipates, being replaced by a sense of cynicism, particularly amongst external stakeholders, about agencies ability to implement strategic change.

Experience of other countries

Key drivers for the development of the strategy

Visibility of the problem of poverty, either on account of a growth in poverty or increased awareness thereof, was often a key factor creating the need for stronger action. For instance, in the case of the first Irish anti-poverty strategy in 1997, Ireland was emerging from a recession, unemployment was high and emigration was growing. As a result, there was wide awareness of the problem of poverty in Ireland and support for efforts to address it.

Linked to this the presence of civil society organizations, lobbying and advocating for the development of an anti-poverty strategy, play an important role in creating public awareness and placing pressure on government.

However, according to an interviewee speaking about the Danish National Action Plan, pressure from external stakeholders is unlikely to have an impact unless there is some degree of political commitment. Interviewees indicated that political will to develop a strategy is often higher around election time.

A further key internal driver was the presence of a poverty champion – someone in a key position within government who demonstrated the necessary enthusiasm and competence to move the strategy onto the government agenda (e.g. the Social Welfare Minister Proinsias de Rossa in Ireland).

Finally, external or international pressure to create a strategy played an important role. The Lisbon Strategy required that all EU member states develop National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion. However, an important question in this respect is whether the European Commission drove the member states or vice versa. There is evidence to suggest that international influences spurred the development of strategies even before the Lisbon Process. For instance, the UN World Summit on Social Development as an important event in

the evolution of anti-poverty strategy development – it was in advance of this summit that the strategy was conceived and where it was announced.

Impact of the changing political context

Political change impacts heavily on the development of an anti-poverty strategy. One of our interviewees remarked that one of the biggest tests of the success of a strategy is whether it can survive a change in government. Political change can impact on the development of strategies in several ways.

Changing governments often entail shifts in the dominant political ideology and government approaches to social policy. For instance, in Belgium, the transition from a socialist government to a liberal one was accompanied by an increasing belief that poverty was an individual's "fault" rather than a result of society-wide structures and with this a focus on fixing the economy as the solution to poverty rather than spending on social assistance programmes.

The opposite shift occurred in Denmark, where a Social Democratic led government replaced a Liberal government, bringing with it a greater focus on poverty reduction. This shift in economic ideology is not always tied to political ideology; in Ireland, the neo-liberal economic model had been embraced across most of the major political parties (although the differences between political parties are relatively small - all are centre-left or centre-right).

Anti-poverty strategies take time to create and embed and in many cases progress made in developing and implementing a strategy is lost in the transition from one government to another. This was particularly apparent in the case of Portugal which has had 19 governments since the establishment of democracy in 1974. This high level of political instability made the development of long term strategies to tackle poverty very difficult to create. Similarly, in the case of Ireland, the process of poverty proofing policies in Ireland which emerged from the strategy, adopted by the government at the time for the most part, did not form part of the policy-making approach of successive governments. This lack of continuity in approach is closely linked to changes in civil servants (particularly those charged with anti-poverty policy) that accompany changing governments.

How strategies interacted with existing poverty reduction policies

In most cases, the measures or policies included in the strategies were already in place or were a variation of these. In this sense the strategy served mainly to coordinate and focus attention rather than generate new policies.

Where existing policies were piecemeal and lacked a specific focus on poverty (e.g. policies sought to address unemployment, educational disadvantage etc.) new measures needed to be developed. This was the case with the first Irish anti-poverty strategy in 1997. One criticism of the Irish strategy in this respect was that it failed to draw on evidence of success from previous pilots and other poverty-related programmes within Ireland.

Main objectives of the strategies

The key objectives of the strategies discussed included increasing access to the labour market, reducing unemployment, fighting homelessness and other

housing issues, improving access to services, reducing child poverty, reducing educational disadvantage, tackling poverty and disadvantage in urban areas and reducing rural poverty. The Ontario strategy had a notably comprehensive list of objectives.

Objectives were typically identified via a combination of internal discussions within government and consultations with key stakeholders (e.g. the community and voluntary sector, trade unions, social partners and the business community, and government officials). In the case of the National Action Plans (NAPs) emerging from the Lisbon process, the objectives were guided by the common priorities set out in the Lisbon Strategy. These priorities were ambiguous enough to allow countries to tailor their objectives, thus creating a space for the involvement of external stakeholders. Indeed, the Lisbon Strategy explicitly acknowledged the role that civil society organizations and those with experience of poverty had to play in the development of anti-poverty strategies and pushed for the mobilisation of all relevant actors in the drawing up of strategies. For instance, in the case of the Portuguese NAP, non-government organizations working at the European level played a key role in selecting the objectives.

Priority actions

All strategies set out actions and initiatives to realise the objectives included in the strategy. In most cases these featured in the main strategy document. However, sometimes these were specified in a separate action plan developed later in the process.

When outlined in the strategies, it seems that the priority actions were identified in a very similar manner to the objectives – through consultation with internal (government) and external stakeholders. There seems to be a degree of consensus that the actions included in the final strategy did not fully reflect the suggestions of stakeholders - in setting out the actions in the final strategy governments were overly cautious. This caution manifested itself in the limited number of proposed actions making their way into final strategy as well as the targets set by government. Some of the potential reasons for this were cost, political self-preservation and lack of agreement across government (as was the case in Denmark). In the case of Ireland, because of pressure from external stakeholders, a poverty reduction target was added quite late in the process. However, government opted for a target that lacked ambition. Ultimately, because of a lag in when the latest poverty data became available this target had been met before the strategy was finalised.

Involvement of External Stakeholders

External stakeholders were heavily involved in the consultation phases of the strategies. Most of the input seems to have come from the community and voluntary sector. However, representatives from trade unions, social partners, and the business community also appear to have been heavily involved in developing the strategies. Direct engagement with people in poverty appears to have been infrequent. On the whole, those interviewed who were involved in the development of the strategy in an external capacity seem to have been satisfied that their views had been taken on board.

Generally, external stakeholders were less involved in the delivery or implementation of the strategy or elements of it. The Belgian case is a notable exception. Following the General Report on Poverty in 1994, the Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service was created with the aim of maintaining dialogue between different parts of government and external stakeholders. So while external stakeholders were not involved in the delivery aspects of the strategy per se, they worked closely with the Belgian government to advise on implementation and monitor the impacts of the strategy.

Monitoring and evaluation

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation was seen as key to the success of a strategy but there was significant variation in the degree of monitoring and evaluation of the strategies.

Generally, it appeared that monitoring was most comprehensive where a strategy was specific about targets and measures. Reliance on pre-existing statistical sources, not tailored to the measures set out in the strategy, was typically deemed as inadequate.

Monitoring seemed to be more apparent where there was clarity about where responsibility fell. For instance, in the case of Belgium, those responsible are required to produce a plan which is checked against progress made every six months, the details of which are compiled in a progress report that then goes to the relevant ministry.

The creation of institutions and working groups also seemed to have a positive impact on monitoring. For instance, in the case of Belgium, several monitoring mechanisms were set up. These included a federal anti-poverty barometer, working groups on poverty indicators and the Belgian Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

The frequency of monitoring was also considered important. Without frequent reporting the monitoring process is at risk of becoming superficial. In Ireland, with the beginning of the NAPs process, annual monitoring reports gave way to biennial reports, with much of the momentum and detail being lost as a result.

Monitoring and evaluation seemed to be weaker in the absence of a dedicated anti-poverty strategy. The National Reform Programme which saw the inclusion of a range of other issues within the strategies meant that these strategies were less focused on poverty and as a result monitoring of the impact of the strategy on poverty was weaker than previous strategies.

Where legislation was in place, setting out requirements to monitor and evaluate the strategies, governments were more likely to fulfil their requirements to monitor and evaluate. This was the case in Ontario where legislation emerging from the strategy requires that government publishes an annual monitoring and evaluation report and carries out a five year review of the strategy.

On the whole, evaluation and review of the strategies was minimal. This was seen as particularly problematic given the changing nature of poverty following

the economic downturn. Without such evaluation and review strategies risk becoming outdated and disconnected from how people are experiencing poverty on the ground.

Aspects of the strategy which were successful

The involvement of a range of stakeholders in the development process was seen as crucial to the creation of a comprehensive strategy. Most strategies engaged with a range of external stakeholders - at least in the early development stages - bringing a lot of useful information to the fore. In the UK, NGO representatives involved in the contributing to the development of the NAP, were clear that their involvement had helped push some issues up the agenda of the UK Government in the drafting of the 2006-08 NAP. They cited the evidence that was produced on in-work poverty.

While there seemed to be some degree of consensus that strategies would have benefited from additional detail around targets and priority actions, most strategies did provide some kind of targets or specific actions either in the strategy or action plans that followed the strategy. This was important to ensure that the strategy was put into practice and to generate a sense of political accountability.

Similarly, a system of monitoring through which efforts to reduce poverty can be measured is crucial to maintain momentum and ensure various parts of governments are fulfilling their responsibilities. Some strategies were successful in creating and embedding a system of monitoring and review. For instance, Belgium has a system in place that ensures that every 6 months there is a review of the various actions set out in the strategy.

Given the multi-faceted nature of the problem of poverty, it was important that different parts of government were involved. High levels of coordination across government were apparent in some of the strategies.

The development of legislation alongside or out of the strategy seemed to be effective in keeping the focus on poverty and ensuring that government remains accountable.

The creation of dedicated institutions or systems of governance tasked with overseeing the development of anti-poverty strategy seems to contribute to the success of a strategy. The Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) in Ireland is a notable example. The CPA advised government throughout the development process and acting as an intermediary between government and the community and voluntary sectors ensured that the real experiences of people in poverty reached those tasked with developing the strategy.

Reflections – what might have been done differently?

Strategies may indicate a commitment to the idea or rhetoric of poverty reduction, but not necessarily to practice or the implementation thereof. In many cases, the energy behind the strategy dissipated once the strategy had been drawn up and there needed to be a stronger focus on implementation.

Anti-poverty strategies need to be specific. A key criticism of strategies was that the targets, actions, or next steps were too vague. Where this was the case it was very difficult to hold individual persons or departments to account. Measurable outcomes and the clear assignation of responsibility are both important in this respect.

Sustainable social policies require that they are linked to economic policies, in particular those relating to taxation. For instance, in Ireland much of the progress made in the early 2000s was superficial, based on the “Celtic Tiger” boom, which itself was heavily reliant on inward investment. Once this boom period had ended so did much of the progress made. One suggested reason for this is that the strategy did not manage to develop a sustainable tax base for developing strong long-term social policies, relying instead on artificial income from the property boom. Ireland still has a very low proportion of tax to GDP by European standards.

In several cases, it was claimed that better coordination across all levels of government was needed in the development and delivery of the strategy. This, in particular, extends to various government departments and local government or local public services.

The strategy development process needs to be headed by someone at the centre of government to ensure that it properly cuts across government departments and gets comprehensive buy-in. For instance, the success of the Irish strategy was undermined by the fact that the process was led by the Social Welfare Minister whose department did not have strong links with several departments crucial to poverty reduction (e.g. Department for Finance). Similarly, in the case of Portugal, poverty reduction was seen as the remit of the Ministry for Social Affairs and having little to do with those responsible for Finance. To ensure cross-government support, the process needed to be led by someone with powers across these departments.

Effective anti-poverty strategy making requires a balance between ambition and realism. External stakeholders need to be realistic in their expectations for anti-poverty strategies. If their priorities are not to some extent aligned with those of government it is unlikely that they will make their way into the strategy. Conversely, if not pushed further, governments may commit only to measures that are achievable so as to avoid any situations where they are seen to have failed in their efforts.

Developing and implementing a strategy takes time. Working against a tight schedule can result in cutting corners. For instance, development process for the Belgian strategy was quite rushed as the government was in power for 3 years and wanted to complete the strategy before the end of its term. As a result, stakeholder involvement was not as comprehensive as it might have been.

Developing and implementing a strategy also requires dedicated resources. For instance, one of the key criticisms of the first Irish anti-poverty strategy was that there were no links between the strategy and the budget. Similarly, many of the

measures set out in the strategy have not been achieved due to budget restrictions imposed by the EU in recent years.

Monitoring processes are key to the success of a strategy. Yet, most interviewees believed the monitoring of the impacts of the strategies to be inadequate. Monitoring seems to have been most comprehensive where legislation setting out the obligations of government to monitor the impacts of the strategy was in place (e.g. Ontario) or where there were institutions or mechanisms specifically established for monitoring purposes (e.g. Belgium)

Strategies need regular evaluation and updating. For instance, many strategies have not been updated since the recession hit and thus do not address many of the problems that emerged during this time. Without review, strategies are at risk of becoming disconnected from how poverty manifests itself on the ground.

The legacy of the strategies

The strategies were seen to have played a crucial role in focusing the attention of the public and government on the problem of poverty. In Ireland, for instance, prior to the first anti-poverty strategy, measures to address poverty were limited to a number of policies focused on disparate elements. The anti-poverty strategy set the stage for future anti-poverty policy making.

Strategies were crucial for consensus building and establishing an agreed set of priorities. They were also important for assigning responsibility for achieving these. For instance, prior to the creation of the first Belgian strategy there was widespread reluctance to take responsibility for anti-poverty policy. Following the strategies there is more clarity around where responsibility lies.

Tackling the various dimensions of poverty demanded a high level of coordination across government departments. As a result, several interviewees pointed to improvements in coordination between government departments or at least recognition of the importance of cross-government coordination as a result of the development of anti-poverty strategies.

The extent to which the structures and policies emerging from the strategies became embedded varied. In the case of Belgium many of the structures or processes that came out of the strategies are still functional despite poverty reduction no longer being at the top of the government agenda. In Portugal, however, the outcome has been very different. The end of the NAP process, the economic crisis and the austerity programme that Portugal has been subjected to has meant that many of the structures and approaches that were developed have been lost.

Finally, while it is not possible to say to what extent, it is thought that having a strategy in place mitigated some of the adverse consequences of the economic downturn. For instance, Ireland which had adopted a relatively comprehensive approach to poverty reduction has managed to protect people better than other European countries facing similar situations.

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Appendix: A framework for content analysis

In section 4, we outlined the findings of our content analysis of the EU National Action Plans for Social Inclusion. When carrying out the analysis, we needed a way of comparing these different documents to see what they had in common and how they differed.

Our approach was to create a framework of the kind of content a good strategy might have. This was based on early analysis of a handful of strategies then applied to the remainder. In total, we analysed 26 national action plans from 13 different EU member states, including the UK.

The framework was also applied in later chapters when looking at non EU strategies. Below is an example of how the framework was used based on the Portuguese NAP of 2005.

	Answer	Notes
Poverty Measures:		
Income Measures used: Yes/No	Yes	
Was relative measure used: Yes/No	Yes	
Was an 'absolute' measure used: Yes/No	Yes	
Was an a measure of material deprivation used: Yes/No	Yes	
Beyond Income		
Housing deprivation	Yes	
Health inequalities	Yes	
Unemployment	Yes	
In work poverty	Yes	
Urban / rural typology	No	
Community Assets	No	
Is the whole population covered (yes/no)	Yes	
Which at risk groups are included?		
women	Yes	
older people	Yes	
disabled people	Yes	
young people		
migrants	Yes	
additional groups	No	

<p>The extent to which issues of equalities are addressed (traffic light)</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The strategy includes extensive references to other Portuguese equalities legislation</p>
<p>Funding Considerations</p>		
<p>Is the strategy linked to the budget? (yes/no)</p>	<p>Yes</p>	
<p>Is there dedicated resources? (yes/no)</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>There were references throughout the document to what was being spent</p>
<p>Extent of links to local level activity (traffic lights)</p>	<p>Partly</p>	<p>Some references to local projects, but no great deal of evidence of a consistent approach</p>
<p>The recognition of preventative anti-poverty measures (traffic light)</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>The strategy does not talk the language of prevention, but many of the measures are 'preventative' e.g. youth training programmes</p>
<p>The recognition of mitigation (traffic lights)</p>	<p>No</p>	
<p>The engagement of private sector, the third sector, civil society actors, and people with experience of poverty (traffic light)</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Good engagement with some parts of the 3rd sector and PEP, less engagement with private sector</p>
<p>Evidence of clear approaches to evaluation and review (traffic lights)</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>This was an evaluation update report, a lot of work appeared to have gone into it</p>
<p>Institutional Arrangements (Governance) Traffic lights</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>No mention of Ministerial committees, Parliamentary processes etc.</p>
<p>Plan for implementation (yes/no)</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>There was no separate plan for implementation</p>
<p>Any new initiatives within plan?</p>	<p>No</p>	