



**Redressing Inequality –
Getting the Strategy Right**

The Sinn Féin Submission on:

**Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy
New TSN – the Way Forward**

**A Consultation Document
Phase Two**

ANTI-POVERTY

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Redressing Inequality - Getting the Strategy Right

Tackling poverty and inequality in the north of Ireland is essential in building a peaceful future for all the people on the island of Ireland. Extra resources and fairer taxation and distribution systems are key elements that must be applied alongside other measures to ensure that government has the necessary means to do this.

Above all, what is required is political will, the key ingredient that has been lacking to date.

It is both frustrating and disturbing that again in this second consultation document the government has shied away from any kind of meaningful, radical solution, preferring to tinker around the edges and, perhaps more worryingly, to manipulate and misrepresent the true nature of poverty and the legacy of discrimination in the Six Counties.

The study carried out by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in Britain does not provide an applicable template to develop an analysis of poverty in the Six Counties as it ignores the impact of conflict and the sectarian reality of the state.

Sinn Féin's view, shared by many organisations and individuals working in this area, is that the issues of poverty and inequality are inextricably linked; one cannot be tackled without the other.

It is therefore a matter of huge concern that, despite the rhetoric, equality issues are relegated to the end of the document instead of being a central thread throughout. It is not acceptable that the document continues to ignore a rights based approaches to tackling and eliminating poverty. It is crucial that equality and human rights are the cornerstones of any anti-poverty strategy.

Our response is grounded in the equality and human rights agenda, and Sinn Féin will be closely studying the EQIA on the new anti-poverty strategy.

It is extremely worrying that the document continues the trend of draft one in not properly addressing the issue of child poverty, and in making unsubstantiated claims about the narrowing of the socio-economic gap between the Catholic and Protestant populations despite all of the recent independent evidence showing that, after more than 30 years of fair employment legislation and 13 years of TSN and NTSN, there is no significant change in the unemployment differential. Neither is it clear how the proposed strategy will integrate with other regeneration strategies such as Neighbourhood Renewal.

There is no budget for the strategy. The high-level framework will not seek to identify specific initiatives or actions by individual departments. This is not acceptable. This process happens under NAPS/incl and there is no reason why this should not happen under the proposed anti-poverty strategy for the Six Counties. All of the above issues need to be addressed in an unambiguous manner. The Strategy must also:

- Retain TSN within the title of the documents, underscoring the continuing need to eliminate inequality and discrimination in the Six Counties.

- Add two new priorities to the “Clear Strategic Framework”:
 - (1) Tackling Inequality and Discrimination
 - (2) Building on the All-Ireland Dimension
- The Strategy needs to be grounded in a human rights based approach.
- There is need for joined up policy development, i.e. clear mechanisms for interdepartmentalism and integration with other anti-poverty/equality initiatives and economic/spatial development policies.
- Aims and objectives need to be targeted and time-framed.
- The Ministerial led Anti-Poverty Forum must be inclusive of those who suffer poverty and social exclusion and those who advocate on their behalf
- Greater emphasis must be placed on the need for increased welfare provision, and the nature of ‘financial hardship’ should be categorised as follows: benefit levels, low pay, ill-health, indebtedness, pensions, levels of redistributive tax rates, and access to services (especially in rural areas).
- Build in the All-Ireland Dimension and integrate human and financial resources. See below.

Partition, Poverty and Conflict - Living up to the Equality Commitments in the Joint Declaration

The continued existence of the border is an impediment to the social and economic development of communities throughout Ireland. This is articulated in the EU Community Initiative Programme – INTERREG, which states:

“The Northern Ireland/Ireland Border remains a social and psychological barrier which is an impediment to the exchange of ideas and information and is a barrier to the effective co-operation and development of effective strategies”^[1]

It is also a barrier to effective anti-poverty strategies. Sinn Féin advocates social, economic and cultural equality throughout Ireland.

Where there exists inequality arising from politically or religiously motivated discrimination, there is the potential for violent conflict. We need to invest in the peace process, and the proposed anti-poverty strategy for the north of Ireland is part of that investment.^[2]

There is, therefore, an urgent need for the governments to formulate and implement an effective anti-poverty strategy for the Six Counties.

It is worth noting that the proposed anti-poverty strategy was part of the closing paragraphs of the British and Irish Governments’ Joint Declaration.

There is a direct correlation between poverty and conflict in the north of Ireland and this proposed Anti-Poverty Strategy is essential to the building of the peace process. The British and Irish governments have an obligation to genuinely commit to eliminating poverty on the island.

Such a strategy must not be solely based within the Six Counties. This strategy must seek to capitalise on the opportunities afforded by the Common Objectives of the EU National Action Plan process (NAPS/incl) and the precedent set by the implementation of the ‘Common Chapter’ and the outworking of Strand Two of the Good Friday Agreement.

The two documents produced to this point are unambitious and contain only the potential to build an effective strategy.

Developing a ‘Common Chapter’ on Poverty for the island of Ireland

The all-Ireland approach is not the sole prerogative of the governments. Increasingly, all groups that seek to end poverty - including the EU, business, NGO’s, advocate groups, local government, community partnerships and other sections of civil society - are advocating co-ordinated all-Ireland approaches to policy development.

A framework and precedent for such development has been set by the ‘Common Chapter’.

The Combat Poverty Agency have called for the development of a Common Chapter on Poverty^[3] while ADM/CPA have called for a clear cross-border dimension to the proposed anti-poverty strategy for the 6 Counties. Sinn Féin supports this idea but it must be robust.

During the public consultations on Phase II, one of the points made by OFMDFM was that the linkage between the British and EU National Action Plan’s on Poverty and Social Inclusion (NAPS/incl) was not clear. The EU National Action Plan initiative was a directive to facilitate the development of more joined up and interregional approaches to tackling poverty and social exclusion across the ‘national’ territories of the EU. This was to be further enhanced by the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC)

However, while the Phase II consultation document has many shortfalls and represents a work in progress, one of the most serious omissions is the lack of a significant all-Ireland dimension.

This opportunity to promote an all-Ireland approach is set against the backdrop of the institutionalisation of the all-Ireland agenda under Strand Two and its programmatic outworkings as illustrated by the development and implementation of the ‘Common Chapter’, and shared in the regional development plans north and south. The ‘Common Chapter’ has set a precedent, and there is no reason why this initiative should not be extended to other areas of policy development.

Sinn Féin wants to see the full integration of all areas of policy development on the island. Only co-ordinated integration that creates common systems, shared infrastructure and services will deliver the balanced development required.

Deprived communities across Ireland share common experiences of exclusion and marginalisation. Poverty and social exclusion in Ireland is inter-regional and cross-border. Indeed, the border corridor represents the largest single geographical concentration of socio-economic deprivation and under development on the island.

The policy context and socio-economic imperatives are clear.

The development of a **specific** ‘Common Chapter’ to tackle poverty and social exclusion on the island of Ireland makes sense and should be a composite part of the proposed anti-poverty strategy for the Six Counties and the NAPS/incl in the 26 Counties.

This all-Ireland integrated approach should constructively link spatial differentials and economic, social and physical development to break patterns of social exclusion and poverty. Connecting prosperous areas and less prosperous areas in a mutually beneficial framework will contribute to creating equality on the island.

The rationale is premised on the following facts:

- People who live in the Border Corridor Area suffer from similar and interdependent types of deprivation because of the border ^[4]
- The border has a negative impact social, economic and spatial development and life opportunities of the people who live there ^[5]
- The Border Corridor Area is one most deprived areas on the island of Ireland because of the dislocating effect of the border. This has been formally asserted in the ‘Common Chapter’, which states:

“Within the overall context of North South Co-operation, it is generally recognised that the areas immediately adjacent to the border are some of the most disadvantaged areas of the North and South” ^[6]

- The areas within the border corridor are socially and economically interdependent
- The ‘Common Chapter’ provides scope for joint action on Poverty, stating:

“This Framework [the Common Chapter] must be sufficiently flexible to take account of all dimensions of co-operation” also “It [the Common Chapter] considers in particular the potential for building on past experience to create new opportunities for co-operation in the future”^[7]

- The ‘Common Chapter’ highlights the central role of NTSN and NAPs to allow for “appropriate priority to be given to such disadvantaged area [Border Corridor] and there is a commitment to strengthen these policies”^[8]
- This can only happen if a specific strategy is produced that integrates dedicated funds such as IINTERREG [henceforth Cohesion Fund 2007], Peace II+ and potentially Peace III, Neighbourhood Renewal etc into a dedicated framework with clear targets, outcomes and interdepartmental/intersectoral support.
- Strand Two of the Good Friday Agreement and the commitment and acknowledgement of the ‘Common Chapter’^[9] confer on the governments a statutory obligation to promote all-Ireland structures and programmes of works.

The Common Chapter on Poverty for the island of Ireland should be based on the four common objectives of the NAPS/incl process, which are:

1. Facilitating participation in employment and access by all to resources;
2. To prevent the risk of exclusion;
3. To help the most vulnerable;
4. To mobilise all relevant bodies and actors.

These objectives are underpinned by the following principles:

1. **Empowering:** Developing the relative skills base through the provision of resources, timescales and appropriate structures that enable deprived and marginalised communities to confidently engage with others in the decision making processes that affect them^[10]
2. **Participative:** Ensuring that all of the key stakeholders, including the target constituencies have a direct input into the drafting, implementation and reviewing of the strategy.

3. **Needs Based:** Focusing the strategy, through genuine participative engagement to articulate of the needs of each area – locally, regionally and inter-regionally

4. **Spatially Interdependent:** Mapping spatial inequalities in Ireland North and South that cause and compound deprivation and social exclusion, linking the border corridor with adjacent regions in an integrative and mutually beneficial community development framework for the whole of the island.

5. **Multi-Agency:** Reflecting local urban and rural deprivation and social exclusion as part of a wider regional, national socio-economic and systemic problem and as such requires a sustained and considered input from all key sectors and stakeholders, locally, regionally and nationally.

6. **Social Economy:** Recognising the importance and significant contribution of local economic activity that promotes social objectives and sustainable community development

7. **All-Ireland:** Urban and rural community development in deprived areas are sustainable in the long term if they coexist within the overarching context of all-Ireland anti-poverty policies that are co-ordinated, supportive and inclusive.

Structural Outputs

To Promote All-Ireland Participation in the Ministerial led Anti-Poverty Forum

EU NAPS/incl Action Point: To mobilise all relevant bodies and actors

The Draft Strategy States:

“The revised strategy will be co-ordinated through a Ministerially-led Interdepartmental/Intersectoral Anti-Poverty Forum comprising of representatives of key public authorities and other stakeholders including local Government, Trade Unions and the Private, Voluntary and Community Sectors”^[11]

This is an excellent idea, and while the Forum must be effective and efficient, care must be taken to ensure that it is truly representative and inclusive^[12]. As previously stated there is an

obvious all-Ireland dimension to poverty caused specifically by the dislocating impact of the border on the social and economic networks of the island.

Therefore from a functional perspective:

- The Ministerial led Anti-Poverty Forum needs to have an all-Ireland profile, and be Ministerial, Interdepartmental and Intersectoral.
- This could be accomplished by developing a common platform and policy agenda between the Ministerial led Anti-Poverty Forum in the 6 Counties and the NAPS Social Inclusion Forum in the 26 Counties
- The Function of the all-Ireland Anti-Poverty Forum should be to provide leadership, co-ordination and monitoring – the Forum would also need to meet on a biannual basis.
- The Forum must be inclusive and guided by robust human rights and equality protocols.

Developing a All-Ireland Interdepartmental Working Group and Resourcing an Agreed Plan of Action

EU NAPS/incl Action Point: To mobilise all relevant bodies and actors

Poverty and Social exclusion on the island of Ireland are complex, inter-jurisdictional problems. Previous and current anti-poverty strategies have failed because they have been severely inhibited by the lack of focused inter-departmental guidelines and support mechanisms. In order to facilitate dynamic inter-departmental co-operation within the context of the emergence of a Common Chapter on Poverty for the island of Ireland, an Inter-departmental Working Group should be created. The role of the working group should be:

- To facilitate co-operation on an inter-departmental government level, in the 6 Counties and 26 Counties and to assist the all-Ireland Ministerial led Anti-Poverty Forum in the drafting and the implementation of a ‘Common Chapter’ on Poverty
- To assist the all-Ireland Ministerial Council in the drafting, actioning and reporting of its anti-poverty strategies within each area of competence

- To oversee the development of the training programmes for personnel regarding the implementation of the Common Chapter on Poverty to assist in the delivery of cross-border/inter-departmentalism
- To collate departmental reports on the implementation of the Common Chapter on Poverty
- To draft accessible documentation which highlights similarities and differences with recommendations for symmetry, co-operation and improvement
- To commission and oversee research into exploring potential areas of co-operation on Poverty and Social Exclusion
- To compile an all-Ireland Common Chapter report for the EU Commission on tackling Poverty

Creating a All-Ireland Anti-Poverty Research Group

EU NAPS/incl Action Point: To mobilise all relevant bodies and actors

Since the experience of poverty on the island of Ireland is similar across regions, we need to co-operate on research that recognises the comparability of experiences. There are currently major flaws and gaps in the data in relation to poverty and those need to be addressed. If an anti-poverty policy is to make an appreciable difference to the lives of those who find themselves in poverty, accurate data must inform the policy. The primary roles of the Research Group should be:

- To develop an all-Ireland definition of poverty
- To promote and fund research into poverty and the elimination of poverty and social exclusion on a cross-border basis
- To include all relevant factors and academic fields, and to facilitate networks of researchers in the development of innovative ideas

- The development of new methodologies to eliminate poverty and social exclusion on the island of Ireland

Strengthening Anti-Poverty Strategies with Human Rights and Equality Frameworks on a regional and all-Ireland basis

Sinn Féin is committed to the development of robust all-Ireland human rights and equality safeguards.

International models have shown that the presence of comprehensive human rights obligations (including socio-economic rights), exercisable in domestic law, serve to act as regulatory points of reference in the crafting of public policy, especially policies aimed at tackling poverty and social exclusion.

Due regard must be given to the allocation of funds to ensure integral human rights are upheld.

The human rights and equality agenda to date has been consistently compromised by those opposed to change in Ireland. Both the British and Irish Government have consciously failed to implement the equality and human rights agenda. They remain unconcerned about addressing poverty from a human rights perspective or the implementation of comprehensive human rights protections.^[13] Sinn Féin wants to see the human rights and equality agenda fully implemented. In this regard the proposed anti-poverty strategy must be linked into and regulated by a robust human rights framework on an all-Ireland basis:

- Human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent. Therefore, the Bill of rights for the 6 Counties and the All-Ireland Charter of Fundamental Rights should include enforceable political, civic, social, economic and cultural rights.
- The Equality Commission in the 6 Counties should have powers of direction to public and private bodies
- Section 75 Equality Duty should be enforceable on private bodies and include all constituencies that experience discrimination (for example, former political prisoners)
- Section 75 Equality Duty should be used as it was intended - a mechanism to eliminate inequality in society – rather than as a device to promote community relations

- The introduction of a comprehensive All-Ireland Single Equality Act enforceable for both public and private bodies.

Programmatic Outputs

Priority 1. The Development of a ‘Joint’ Regional Poverty Action Plan for the Border Corridor Area premised upon the Four Common objectives of NAPS/incl

EU NAPS/incl Action Points: 1. Facilitating participation in employment and access by all to resources, 2. To prevent the risk of exclusion, 3. To help the most vulnerable, 4. To mobilise all relevant bodies and actors

The current ‘Common Chapter’ in the regional development plans on either side of the border specifically states that:

“within the overall context of North South co-operation, it is generally recognised that the areas immediately adjacent to the border are some of the most disadvantaged areas of the North and South”^[14]

Therefore, the ‘Common Chapter’ on Poverty for the island of Ireland should be underpinned by a ‘Joint’ Regional Poverty Action Plan for Border Corridor as a priority. The Action plan should:

- Be underpinned by all four of the EU NAPS/incl Common Objectives
- Highlight how dedicated funds such as IINTERREG [Cohesion Fund from 2007], Peace II+ and potentially Peace III, Neighbourhood Renewal etc, are integrated into a dedicated delivery framework with clear targets, outcomes and interdepartmental co-operation
- Synchronise parallel anti-poverty strategies on each side of the border.

Priority 2. Development of Anti-Poverty Strategies within each Area of Competence of the All-Ireland Ministerial Council

The all-Ireland Ministerial Council was established to bring together those with executive responsibilities in the 6 counties and the 26 counties to facilitate functional co-operation and All-Ireland policies within each designated area. The all-Ireland Implementation Bodies

were given a clear operational remit to implement the All-Ireland policies agreed by the council.

The six areas of all-Ireland co-operation agreed were: agriculture, education, environment, health, transport, tourism and EU structural funds. This represents a tangible step forward towards all-Ireland institutional harmonisation.

Poverty and Social Exclusion are pervasive and complex problems that need to be addressed in all sections of public, social and economic policy. In this regard, the all-Ireland Ministerial Council has a clear role to play in the elimination of poverty and social exclusion within its present areas of competence. Sinn Féin believes that the all-Ireland Ministerial Council has an obligation to develop policy for the elimination of poverty and social exclusion within and between each area of competence as a priority

The all-Ireland Ministerial Council should develop explicit all-Ireland strategies to eliminate poverty and social exclusion within each area of competence. Furthermore, all strategies should be subject to rigorous human rights based poverty proofing.

The anti-poverty and social inclusion strategies within and between each area of competence should have sufficient ring-fenced budgets, clear implementation frameworks, baseline indicators, and incremental targets for the achievement of strategic goals.

The anti-poverty and social inclusion strategies within and between each area of competence should be complementary to, and symbiotic with, regional anti-poverty strategies and the proposed Common Chapter on Poverty for the Border Corridor Area

Priority 3. Redressing the legacy of Discrimination – Developing and Resourcing measures to create equality

There is a need to develop across departments, and in consultation with communities, strategies to redress the inequality which has been the norm in the six counties since its inception. There is an imperative on the British Government to move beyond the rhetoric of Targeting Social Need and NTSN to identify additional resources to meet the needs of communities and end poverty. This process should be cross-departmental and empower communities to determine their paths to regeneration including removing structural barriers to participation in society in addition to local regeneration initiatives.

^[1] INTERREG IIIa, Priority 3., 9.2, p.91

[2] see Poverty and Conflict in Ireland: An International Perspective, Combat Poverty Agency, 2005

[3] Poverty and Conflict in Ireland: An International Perspective, Combat Poverty Agency, p. 211

[4]. The similar types of deprivation are highlighted in detail in INTERREG IIIa Operational Programme chapter 3 Macro Area Analysis of the Border Corridor.

[5] This data is also corroborated experientially in Chapter 4 of the same document.

[6] 'National' Development Plan, Chapter 9, subheading Economic and Social Context, sub-point 9.20, p.180

[7] *ibid*, sub-point 9.3 p177, sub-point 9.17 p179

[8] *ibid*, sub-point 9.20, p180

[9] *Ibid*, subheading Political Context pp177-178

[10] The UNDP Report 'Overcoming Poverty' (2000) stated: "The foundation of poverty reduction is self-organisation of the poor at the community level – the best antidote to powerlessness, a central source of poverty. Organised, the poor can influence local government and help hold it accountable. They can form coalitions with other social forces and build broader organisations to influence regional and national policy-making. What the poor most need, therefore, are the resources to build their organisational capacity"

[11] Point 13 from table, Subheading Proposals for Future Direction of New TSN

[12] See UNDP Report "Overcoming Poverty" (2000)

[13] The Concluding Observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Report: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland 5th June 2002 E/C.12/1/Add.79. notes:

18. The Committee reiterates its concern about the persistence of considerable levels of poverty, especially in certain parts of the country, such as Northern Ireland, and among certain sections of the population, such as ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities and older persons. Moreover, despite measures taken by the State Party to combat poverty and social exclusion, the gap between in the State party has increased, according to the information provided by the State party. The Committee also notes with particular concern the high levels of child poverty among certain groups of society in the State party"

Further on the British Government record in the 6 Counties the Committee also concludes:

37. The Committee urges the State party to continue to address the problem of poverty and social exclusion as a matter of high priority, with a special focus on the needs of marginalised and vulnerable groups, and in particular regions, such as Northern Ireland

In relation to the 26 County Government the Concluding Observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Report: Ireland 5th June 2002 E/C.12/1/Add.77 notes:

19. The Committee is concerned that the State party, despite the Committee's recommendation in 1999 (para.12), has still not adopted a human rights based approach to NAPS"

Further on the 26 County Government the Committee urges:

"The Committee urges the State party [...] to integrate human rights into NAPS, in accordance with the Committee's statement on poverty [...] In this regard, the Committee reaffirms the State party's obligation to make the Covenant rights enforceable in domestic legislation and confirms that, whether or not the State party takes this step, it still has a legal obligation to integrate economic, social and cultural rights into NAPS."

^[14] National' Development Plan 2000-2006, the Common Chapter (9.20), p. 180