



Taighde, Idirphlé, Comhairle
Research, Dialogue, Advice

Inequality and Well-Being Frameworks

COUNCIL REPORT

No.163 July 2023



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Council

An Oifig Náisiúnta um Fhorbairt Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Development Office NESDO

1. The main tasks of the National Economic and Social Council shall be to analyse and report on strategic issues relating to the efficient development of the economy and the achievement of social justice.
2. The Council may consider such matters either on its own initiative or at the request of the Government.
3. Any reports which the Council may produce shall be submitted to the Government, and shall be laid before each House of the Oireachtas and published.
4. The membership of the Council shall comprise a Chairperson appointed by the Government in consultation with the interests represented on the Council, and
 - Three persons nominated by agricultural and farming organisations;
 - Three persons nominated by business and employers organisations;
 - Three persons nominated by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions;
 - Three persons nominated by community and voluntary organisations;
 - Three persons nominated by environment organisations;
 - Four other persons nominated by the Government, including the Secretaries General of the Department of Finance, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Housing, Planning and Heritage, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.
 - Seven people possessing knowledge, experience and skills which the Taoiseach considers relevant to the functions of the Council
5. Any other Government Department shall have the right of audience at Council meetings if warranted by the Council's agenda, subject to the right of the Chairperson to regulate the numbers attending.
6. The term of office of members shall be for three years. Casual vacancies shall be filled by the Government or by the nominating body as appropriate. Members filling casual vacancies may hold office until the expiry of the other members' current term of office.
7. The numbers, remuneration and conditions of service of staff are subject to the approval of the Taoiseach.
8. The Council shall regulate its own procedure.



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Council

Inequality and Well-Being Frameworks

COUNCIL REPORT

No.163 July 2023

An Oifig Náisiúnta um Fhorbairt Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Development Office NESDO

Membership

Chairperson

Mr John Callinan, Secretary General, Department of An Taoiseach and Secretary to the Government

Deputy Chairperson

Ms Elizabeth Canavan, Assistant Secretary, Department of An Taoiseach

Business and Employers

Mr Gerard Brady, Ibec
Mr Hubert Fitzpatrick, Construction Industry Federation
Mr Ian Talbot, Chambers Ireland

Trade Unions

Mr Owen Reidy, ICTU
Mr Joe Cunningham, SIPTU
Mr Kevin Callinan, Fórsa

Farming & Agricultural

Mr John Enright, ICMSA
Mr Damian McDonald, IFA
Mr TJ Flanagan, ICOS

Community & Voluntary

Fr Seán Healy, Social Justice Ireland
Ms Brid O'Brien, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE)
Dr Nat O'Connor, Age Action

Environmental

Ms Karen Ciesielski, Environmental Pillar
Ms Caroline Whyte, Feasta
Mr Jerry Mac Evilly, Friends of the Earth Ireland

Public Service

Mr John Hogan, Department of Finance
Dr Orlaigh Quinn, Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment
Mr Graham Doyle, Department of Housing, Planning & Heritage
Mr David Moloney, Department of Public Expenditure & Reform

Government Nominees

Mr Seamus Coffey, University College Cork (UCC)
Prof Niamh Moore Cherry, University College Dublin (UCD)
Dr Diarmuid Torney, Dublin City University (DCU)
Dr Chris Van Egeraat, Maynooth University
Prof Colin Scott, University College Dublin (UCD)
Noelle O Connell, European Movement
Nicola Mallon, Ex MLA in the NI Assembly
Colette Byrne, Ex Kilkenny County Council

Secretariat to Project

Dr Larry O'Connell, Director
Dr Anne-Marie McGauran, Social Policy Analyst

A full list of the NESC Secretariat can be found at www.nesc.ie

Contents

Executive Summary	vi
Chapter 1	1
Introduction	1
Chapter 2	6
Understanding and Responding to Inequality	6
2.1 Introduction	7
2.2 Conceptual Discussions of Equality	7
2.3 Identifying Inequality	9
2.4 Promoting Equality and Addressing Inequality Through Policy	10
2.5 Promoting Equality and Addressing Inequality	12
Chapter 3	17
Well-Being Frameworks and Inequality	17
3.1 Introduction	18
3.2 Developing and Embedding WBFs into Policy	18
3.3 Equality and WBFs	20
3.4 Strengths of WBF	21
3.5 WBFs and Equality: Limitations	24
3.6 Summary	28
Chapter 4	30
Ireland’s WBF and Equality: Eight Insights	30
4.1 Introduction	31
4.2 Insight 1: Ireland’s WBF Brings New and Improved Information into the Policy Space	31
4.3 Insight Two: The WBF offers an opportunity to make environmental justice more explicit, but needs to develop	32
4.4 Insight 3: Ireland’s WBF Highlights Key Knowledge and Data Gaps that Need New Activities and Resources in Order to be Addressed	32
4.5 Insight 4: The WBF is Developing New Ways of Working That Have the Potential to Address Inequalities	33
4.6 Insight 5: Enhanced Dialogue Within WBFs has the Potential to Address Inequalities	34
4.7 Insight 6: WBFs Have the Potential to Integrate a Range of Policy Work at Different Levels of Government	35
4.8 Insight 7: WBFs Can Help Put a Focus on Key Inequality Goals by Working Towards and Monitoring Specific Targets	36
4.9 Insight 8: WBFs that Incorporate ‘Hard’ and ‘Soft’ Tools May Have a Lasting Impact on Well-being and Inequality	36
Chapter 5	38
Conclusion	38

List of Figures

Figure 1.1:	Figure caption and example	3
Figure 3.1:	Embedding a Well-Being Approach	19

List of Boxes

Box 1.1:	Ireland's Well-being Framework	3
Box 2.1:	From inequality to Well-being: Some Definitions	7
Box 2.2:	Nine Grounds for Discrimination in Irish Employment and Provision of Service Legislation	10
Box 3.1:	How Iceland, New Zealand and Bhutan Use their WBFs in Government and Budget Decision-making	26

Abbreviations

CSO	Central Statistics Office
EU	European Union
GDP	gross domestic product
GNH	Gross National Happiness
HiAP	Health in All Policies
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
WBF	well-being framework

Executive Summary

Inequality, although a contested concept, is generally understood to mean the unequal distribution of social, biological and other factors, which results in unequal opportunities and/or outcomes for those negatively affected. It has damaging consequences for individuals, as well as for the wider society and economy.

A variety of methods and approaches are used by governments and international governmental organisations to address inequality. These include macro-level policies supporting redistribution; legislation and national strategies; institutions to monitor and promote equality; policy proofing and equality budgeting; and positive action and pilot programmes. These approaches range from the ‘hard’ (e.g. legally binding) to the ‘soft’ (e.g. collection of data). Legally binding commitments are usually the strongest, but softer approaches play a role too, in terms of introducing ideas and concepts to promote equality and address inequality. Political will behind their implementation is also key.

A new approach that may hold promise for identifying and addressing inequalities is via a well-being framework (WBF). Such frameworks have been increasingly developed since 2008 as a way of moving away from a focus on gross domestic product (GDP) in order to measure a country’s outcomes (e.g. economic, social, environmental). Typically, a WBF contains the following elements:

- national goals that move beyond the purely economic, to take into account a range of economic, social and environmental factors impacting a country;

- public consultation to help develop these well-being goals;

- a dashboard of indicators to measure performance in the national well-being goals;

- regular publication of performance reports;

- application to the national Budget, which varies from using the indicators to frame budget discussions, to assessing budget proposals for their impact on well-being; and

- new ways of working, with support and guidelines provided in a number of countries.

In some countries there is legislation to underpin the well-being approach, and/or the institutional structures to support it.

The Irish WBF has 11 dimensions of well-being¹ and an accompanying dashboard of 35 indicators to measure well-being in Ireland along these dimensions. Analysis of this dashboard is published annually and incorporated into the Budget, and into expenditure and evaluation policy. Equality is also a cross-cutting theme across the 11 dimensions of the framework.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has argued that it is impossible not to consider the issue of inequality in WBFs. Instead, understanding differences in well-being across different groups is fundamental for the design of effective policies that aim to leave no one behind and to raise the overall well-being of a country’s population.

This report argues that a WBF has a number of strengths for helping to identify and potentially address inequalities, and outlines eight key insights into this. These are:

¹ Environment, climate and biodiversity; safety and security; housing and built environment; subjective well-being; knowledge, skills and innovation; mental and physical health; connections, community and participation; work and job quality; civic engagement, trust and cultural expression; time use; and income and wealth.

- i Ireland’s WBF is bringing new information into the policy space.
WBFs include a large range of information that can help identify inequalities. They require a focus on the distribution of well-being instead of just looking at averages. Data is disaggregated, on the basis of e.g. gender, age, social class, disability and ethnic background. New data that is of particular concern to groups affected by inequalities is also typically included; for example, data on time use, caring, and housing tenure. Intersectional inequalities can also become more evident through this range of data.
-
- ii The WBF offers an opportunity to make environmental justice more explicit – but needs further development.
One of the common dimensions of a WBF is a focus on environment, which allows for an emphasis on environmental inequalities. Low socio-economic position is associated with increased exposure to pollution, and to poorer access to blue and green outdoor spaces. However, the data currently available on environmental issues is often not of sufficient breadth and depth to prioritise and refine environmental well-being objectives. This needs to be addressed.
-
- iii The WBF highlights key data gaps that need to be addressed by new activities and resources.
While WBFs stress the importance of collecting new data, the available data is often fragmented, too small-scale, or not available, particularly for groups impacted by inequality. Limited by the shape of current data collection patterns, addressing this will require a mix of new surveys, larger sample sizes, more frequent data collection, and greater use of good-quality administrative data.
-
- iv The WBF is developing new ways of working that have the potential to address inequality.
Some new processes are being established under the Irish WBF to help incorporate the well-being dimensions into Budget analysis. As more indicators are disaggregated in a way that allows inequalities to become more visible, and as this data is incorporated more into expenditure analysis, this offers opportunities for a greater focus on equality issues in Budget discussions.
-
- v Enhanced dialogue within WBFs has the potential to address inequality.
Consultation to develop the Irish WBF has provided information on lived experience, in the Irish case, and the Government has also committed to conversations on well-being at the National Economic Dialogue forum (a key forum for public consultation and discussion on the Budget). Such arenas for dialogue could, in future, usefully develop to ensure more long-term and direct links with the design of interventions to address inequality.
-
- vi WBFs have the potential to integrate a range of policy work at different levels of government.
A significant potential of WBFs compared with the status quo is that they offer a more fundamentally integrated approach. Where they are adopted as a whole-of-government approach, they can guide policy coherence across government, with all departments assessing their policies and processes for multidimensional well-being impact. This can allow common understandings of policy problems to develop and enable gaps in support affecting those most impacted by inequalities to be identified.
-
- vii WBFs can help focus on key inequality goals by working towards and monitoring specific targets.
The value of WBFs depends on how they are implemented. Some countries have agreed national well-being goals, with specific dates by which the goals must be met. For example, in Wales, the gap in healthy life expectancy between the least and most deprived is to be narrowed by 15 per cent by 2050. The existence of such goals is likely to focus policy work on reaching them, with longer-lasting outcomes for groups affected by inequality.
-
- viii WBFs that incorporate ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ tools may have a longer-lasting impact on well-being and inequality.
The experience of active implementation of WBFs in some countries suggests that ‘harder’ tools, such as legislative underpinning and independent accountability mechanisms, support ‘softer’ tools, such as measurement and consensus building. This suggests that a mix of both approaches is useful in the longer-term implementation of well-being goals, although political will to implement these remains key.

Overall, the Irish WBF, still at an early stage of development, has made significant progress. It is backed by powerful Departments and a Cabinet committee. Some new working methods have been put in place to help its indicators become part of Budget discussions. The work on the WBF is also helping to develop shared consensus and understanding on well-being and how to promote it. The Irish WBF has particular strengths when it comes to identifying inequalities and making them more visible.

This report pinpoints the following areas where further work would be useful:

- examination of gaps in the data needed to help the WBF identify inequalities, such as breakdown by group affected;

- identification of gaps in areas that are relatively new to being measured, such as the impacts of current development on the environment;

- consideration of how inequality goals can be supported by working towards and monitoring specific targets; and,

- consideration of whether WBFs that incorporate 'hard' and 'soft' tools have a longer-lasting impact on well-being and inequality.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Inequality comes in many forms that shape and affect the distribution of opportunities and outcomes for many groups by, for example, age, gender, disability, ethnic background and socio-economic status.

Inequality has damaging impacts on individuals and the wider economy and society. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and World Bank studies have shown that growing inequality, particularly that which affects low-income households, has a negative and statistically significant impact on growth (Brueckner and Lederman, 2018; Cingano, 2014). In terms of social impacts, Wilkinson and Pickett's *The Spirit Level* (2009) showed that higher income inequality in developed societies was correlated with lower life expectancy, literacy, child well-being and social mobility, and with higher levels of imprisonment, obesity, drug use and mental illness. Societies with higher income inequality have lower child well-being (Mowat, 2019).

Greater income inequality has also been correlated with declining levels of trust (Gould & Hijzen, 2016), which has impacts on political engagement, leading to lower voting and campaigning behaviour (Ritter & Solt, 2019; Solt, 2010). Greater inequality is also argued to be linked to environmental degradation, as the better-off² in society are disproportionate contributors to carbon emissions that cause climate change, and also have more political power to shield these activities; while the less well-off disproportionately bear the impact (Peterson, 2017). More developed countries with higher levels of inequality also produce more waste, air pollution and higher carbon emissions, among other negative environmental impacts (Dorling, 2017).

Global income and wealth inequality have been on an upward trajectory for the past three decades,³ raising concerns about what this trend and its continuation mean for economic, social and environmental stability and what can be done to counteract it (Dervis & Kureshi, 2016; OECD, 2014; World Inequality Lab, 2022).

Equality also has an intrinsic value – a moral obligation to do the right or ethical thing. It promotes individuals' sense of fulfilment and self-worth. It reminds us of our common humanity, despite our various differences (Moss, 2015; Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2021).

For all these reasons, inequality is a subject meriting strong policy focus. Equality and social inclusion have, of course, been issues of ongoing concern in Irish policy since the foundation of the State.

This policy focus has also been evident in the work of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), as can be seen in its reports since 2010s on social housing, just transition, unemployment and digital inclusion. In recent NESC publications, inequality was also shown to be evident in the impact of COVID-19 on different groups, depending on their position in society (Hennessy & McGauran, 2021; McGauran & Hennessy, 2021).

Equality is a critical concern in ongoing work on well-being frameworks (WBFs). Many national WBFs are based on the OECD's How's Life? framework,⁴ and the OECD has stated that to fully evaluate the well-being of people in a society, it is impossible not to consider inequalities (OECD, 2021b). Understanding differences in well-being across different groups is also fundamental for the design of effective policies aimed at leaving no one behind, and to raise the overall well-being of a country's population. In line with this, consultation on the development of the Irish WBF has shown that equality issues were an important factor (Government of Ireland, 2021; Government of Ireland, 2022b).

The 2020 Programme for Government committed to developing a set of well-being indices for Ireland, to create a well-rounded, holistic view of how Irish society is faring, and to utilise these indices in a systematic way across government policy-making at local and national levels, in setting budgetary priorities, evaluating programmes, and reporting progress (Government of Ireland, 2020). The Department of the Taoiseach has been leading work on this commitment, jointly sponsored by the departments of Finance and Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform. Box 1.1 provides an overview of this work to date.

² There is also pressure to increase consumption in order to not fall behind, which has negative environmental impacts – see e.g. Pybus, 2022; and Thøgersen, 2017.

³ See World Inequality Database, at <https://wid.world/> [accessed 11/06/23].

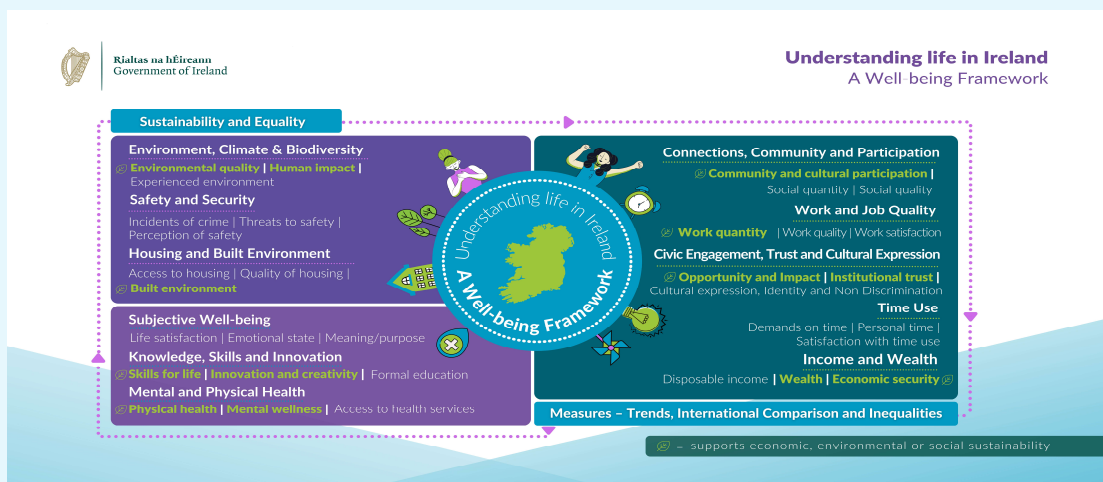
⁴ This WBF developed by the OECD has set out 11 key dimensions for understanding and measuring people's well-being. These focus on current well-being: income and wealth, work and job quality, housing, health, knowledge and skills, environment quality, subjective well-being, safety, work-life balance, social connections, and civil engagement. In addition, four 'capitals' that shape future well-being are included in the OECD's WBF: natural capital, human capital, economic capital and social capital (OECD, 2013).

Box 1.1: Ireland's Well-being Framework

The Government published its first report on a new WBF for Ireland in July 2021 (Government of Ireland, 2021). The report provided an initial vision for well-being in Ireland and a conceptual framework with 11 dimensions of well-being, based on the dimensions of the OECD's How's Life? framework (OECD, 2020). The Central Statistics Office (CSO) also developed an accompanying dashboard of 35 indicators measuring well-being in Ireland⁵.

In June 2022, the Government published a second report on a WBF for Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2022b), which incorporated several phases of consultation to outline an updated WBF containing 11 dimensions, with sustainability (via a tagging approach) and equality as cross-cutting themes. These dimensions, which are based on those developed for the OECD How's Life? framework, are outlined in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Ireland's Well-being Framework



Source: Government of Ireland, 2022b.

The Government's second report (Government of Ireland, 2022b) also outlined an initial approach for embedding this initiative into policy-making over time. This includes annually published, high-level analysis of the Well-being Dashboard and incorporation into the Budget process; complementary, continued embedding into expenditure and evaluation policy; promotion of relevant research and policy developments; and clear supporting structures.

An online Well-being Portal (Government of Ireland, 2022a), in addition to the CSO's Well-being Information Hub (CSO, 2022), was also launched, providing comprehensive, accessible information and an interactive dashboard of key indicators, respectively.

This work represents substantial progress, although embedding the initiative into policy-making is at an early stage and will take time to become fully integrated.

⁵ See <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/hubs/p-wbhub/well-beinginformationhub/> [accessed 23/05/23],

Both of the Government’s reports on well-being have incorporated work carried out by the departments of Public Expenditure and Reform and Finance (DoF, 2022), as well as research carried out by NESC.

In NESC’s work on well-being, the issue of equality has been a strong consideration. NESC’s first input to the development of the Government’s WBF was a consultation report on Ireland’s Well-Being Framework, published in 2021 (NESC, 2021). This report outlined the case for adopting a WBF, and the views of key stakeholders on the suitability of the proposed WBF for Ireland. It suggested that NESC should consider how to support a deeper understanding of the factors that foster a spirit of equity in Ireland, and identify implications and lessons from this for the development of Ireland’s WBF.

Equality was also a key theme of subsequent consultations by the Government on developing Ireland’s WBF and, in its second report on this, stated that ‘NESC will develop further research on how Well-being Frameworks can support a deeper understanding of equality’ and ‘will investigate how well-being frameworks can address the factors that lead to inequality’ (Government of Ireland, 2022b: 36 & 15).

Therefore, this current NESC report considers how a WBF could support a deeper and fresh understanding of inequality and disadvantage in Ireland, and how it can promote equality and address the factors that lead to inequality.

The report is structured as follows.

Chapter 2 examines the notion of equality, outlining some of the main conceptions of what equality is, as well as how inequality manifests itself and among which groups. It finishes by describing the main approaches used by policy-makers to address inequality and promote equality. These take a variety of forms, ranging from ‘hard’ legislation to ‘softer’ interventions such as policy proofing, and play different roles, such as gaining societal acceptance for actions to address inequality, working out new methods of promoting equality, and providing a range of ‘carrots’ and ‘sticks’ to ensure greater equality in society.

Chapter 3 considers how a WBF might add value to work on inequality. It outlines how a WBF has been adopted at the national level in Ireland and, while still at an early stage of development, that it is becoming more embedded in policy. The chapter outlines how a focus on equality is part of this work.

The chapter also summarises the strengths of WBFs for identifying and addressing inequalities, as well as their limitations. Strengths include the new information that these frameworks bring to the policy-making process, as well as new ways of working. Weaknesses include a lack of data, and the fact that the resources and attention applied to the frameworks may not carry them from initial establishment to full implementation.

Chapter 4 describes some ways in which an Irish WBF, even at this early stage, can potentially help identify and address inequalities, and ways in which it could be further developed to do so. Eight insights into this are outlined as follows:

- **Insight 1:** Ireland’s WBF is bringing new and improved information into the policy space;

- **Insight 2:** The WBF offers an opportunity, which can be developed further, to make environmental justice issues more explicit;

- **Insight 3:** The WBF highlights key knowledge and data gaps that require new activities and resources in order to be addressed;

- **Insight 4:** The WBF is developing new ways of working that have the potential to address inequality;

- **Insight 5:** Enhanced dialogue within WBFs can help to address inequality;

- **Insight 6:** WBFs have the potential to integrate a range of policy work at different levels of government;

- **Insight 7:** WBFs can help put a focus on key inequality goals by working towards and monitoring specific targets; and

-
- **Insight 8:** WBFs that incorporate ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ tools may have a longer-lasting impact on well-being and inequality.

Chapter 5 concludes by noting that the Irish WBF is similar to many others developed internationally. Few WBFs are as yet fully embedded or implemented in policy decisions. In line with these patterns, to date the Irish WBF has been strong on raising awareness of well-being and inequality, and has highlighted new data on this and on developing new ways of working. Supports for the implementation of the WBF to date include the NDP Delivery and Reform Unit of the Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform, and the Wellbeing Unit established by the Department of the Taoiseach, which chairs an interdepartmental group to drive implementation of the framework across government. However, over time, there may be a need for additional resources to further support its implementation and ability to address inequalities. Such supports would be in line with the mechanisms used in countries that have been implementing WBFs for some time, and that have subsequently developed ‘harder’ approaches to achieving this.

Chapter 2

Understanding and Responding to Inequality

2.1 Introduction

As equality is a very broad and contested concept (Nicol & Guven, 2021), this chapter will outline some key conceptualisations before moving on to explore where and among whom inequality is most evident. The final sections of the chapter will outline the approaches commonly used by governments to address inequality and promote equality.

2.2 Conceptual Discussions of Equality

Inequality is generally seen as the unequal distribution of social, biological and other factors, which results in unequal opportunities and/or outcomes for those negatively affected. Inequality is different to poverty, although it overlaps with it. Poverty occurs when people are not able to afford sufficient necessities to sustain themselves. However, inequalities can, and often do, give rise to poverty and social exclusion. See Box 2.1 for an outline of these distinct, but related, concepts, and their implications for well-being.

Box 2.1: From inequality to Well-being: Some Definitions

Inequality is generally defined as the unequal distribution of social, biological and other factors, which results in unequal opportunities and/or outcomes for those negatively affected.

Discrimination means less favourable treatment. Direct discrimination occurs when someone is treated unfairly because of a protected characteristic, such as sex or race. Indirect discrimination occurs when practices or policies that do not appear to discriminate against one group more than another actually have a discriminatory impact. It can also happen where there is a requirement that may appear non-discriminatory but that proves to be discriminatory on closer inspection.

Poverty occurs where a person's income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them having a standard of living that is regarded as acceptable by society generally.

Social exclusion occurs when people do not have access to sufficient income, resources and services to enable them to play an active part in their communities and to participate in activities that are considered the norm for people in society generally.

Poverty and social exclusion have a range of non-monetary elements. These include psychological dimensions such as powerlessness, voicelessness, dependency, shame and humiliation (Narayan, 2000).

Well-being is a multidimensional concept for which no single definition has emerged. At an individual level, it relates to a person's physical, social and mental state. At the societal level, the concept of well-being encompasses objective and subjective features of current living conditions, including objective accounting of circumstances such as income or life expectancy, but also reflecting subjective aspects of quality of life, such as feeling content.

There are many links, and reinforcing feedback loops, between the experiences of inequality, discrimination, poverty and well-being. Discrimination and inequality can lead to higher poverty and social exclusion among some groups, as well as to poorer well-being. For example, socio-economic inequalities by race, have been linked with ethnic inequalities in health. Poor health and disability are in turn associated with poorer, subjective well-being, as well as lower incomes and higher poverty. And, as outlined in Chapter 1, they are also linked to a range of wider negative impacts on society and the economy, such as lack of trust and poorer economic performance.

Equality can be defined narrowly in relation to income, for example, or more broadly in relation to the equal capacity of people to participate in economic, social and political life. The latter, wider conception encompasses rights, political participation, social goods, wealth, security, access to services, and capabilities.

Over time, a focus on this broader interpretation of equality has taken precedence and WBFs are part of this debate, with several arguing that a focus on well-being will allow more people to reach their full capabilities (Anand, 2021; Dang, 2014).

Ireland’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also have a broad focus in terms of reducing inequality. Reducing Inequality is the remit of SDG 10, which refers to income, but also to promoting universal social, economic and political inclusion. The tendency for a broader conception of equality to hold sway is also evident in debates on income inequality, with wealth inequality increasingly becoming the focus of policy attention (UN Environment Programme, 2018).

Theorists outline equality in civil freedoms, in political participation, in the social sphere, and in the economic sphere. In the latter, there is significant debate about what exceptions are justified in the equal distribution of goods. Justifications include need, different natural disadvantages (e.g. disabilities), existing rights or claims (e.g. private property), differences in performance (e.g. efforts or sacrifice), efficiency, and compensation for direct or indirect structural discrimination (e.g. through affirmative action). All of these justifications offer different perspectives on what should be equalised in the economic sphere, with different groups holding different opinions.

To take an example of welfare redistribution, there are at least three different ways of looking at it, which Reeskens and van Oorschot (2013) have dubbed ‘equity’, ‘need’ and ‘equality’, and which are defined as follows:⁶

- Equity: Those who contribute more (e.g. through high tax on incomes and long-term employment) should receive more;

- Need: Those in need (e.g. low-income groups or long-term unemployed) should be provided with welfare provisions; and,

- Equality: Each citizen is entitled to the same type and degree of welfare provision, irrespective of their level of need or welfare contributions.

These perspectives are evident in the varying shapes of welfare provision in different countries, which rely in different ways on universal, targeted and pay-related supports. They are also a reflection of the underlying debates, which differ across and within countries, on the balance between structural and individual causes of inequality.

Equality can also be conceptualised as being about opportunity, treatment or outcome/impact (Cairney *et al.*, 2022). Equal opportunities are about ‘ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents’ (Equality and Human Rights Commission UK, undated). Equal treatment is about providing the same treatment to all groups. Equal outcomes (or impacts) approaches argue that equality is not about treating everyone the same, but about treating people in such a way that the outcome for each person can be the same (NYCI, undated).

The differing conceptualisations of equality are evident in discussions of liberal versus radical equality. Liberal equality strategies stress the need for equal opportunities for all and for formal, equal treatment for all regardless of differences such as gender, ethnicity, social class, etc. An example of a liberal equality view is that all groups should be able to access education.

Meanwhile, radical equality strategies stress the need for equality in outcomes for these groups, arguing, to take the same example, that offering equal opportunity to access education does not take into account the differing ability of groups to take advantage of that access. Those from deprived socio-economic backgrounds, those with disabilities, and

⁶ There are, of course, other definitions of equity and equality – see e.g. Stone, 2001.

migrants, for example, tend not to have as favourable educational outcomes as their peers. A focus on equal outcomes tries to overcome the varying ability of different groups to access and benefit from the available opportunities.

Other ways of looking at inequality have been conceptualised in Friedman *et al.*'s (2018) study of literature on social equity in the biodiversity conservation arena. They note four commonly used components of equality across scientific and social disciplines:

- distributional (distribution of rights, responsibilities, costs and benefits);

- procedural (how decisions are made and by whom);

- recognitional (equal status for different distinct identities, histories, values and interests); and

- contextual (a broader grouping of underlying social, economic, environmental and political factors).

They found that the environmental projects they studied most frequently considered distributional equality, followed by procedural. Procedural inequalities have also been the subject of a number of recent sociological studies; for example, on the administrative burdens experienced by those applying for welfare payments (Holler & Tarshish, 2022; Safarov, 2023). Friedmann *et al.* discovered that, despite their importance, recognitional and contextual equality were rarely considered in the research they had reviewed.

Finally, the concept of equality is shaped by time frames. For example, young adults tend to have few savings or assets but over a lifetime these usually build up, with older people generally having the most assets and savings. The question that arises is: should there be greater equality in this area at all life stages? Here the dynamic nature of inequality is also evident: in the past in Ireland, more people were homeowners and at a younger age, which allowed them to build wealth over their lifetimes. But now, with the rate of homeownership dropping, particularly for those from lower socio-economic classes, it does not seem likely that the pattern of older people having more wealth than younger will be maintained in the same way in future, as older people from lower socio-economic classes are likely to have less wealth than their current peers.

2.3 Identifying Inequality

An important issue is how to identify and categorise which groups, and where, are most affected by inequality. Historically, certain groups that have experienced discrimination are often most focused on when combatting inequality.

In terms of equality legislation, Irish law covers nine grounds of discrimination (see Box 2.2). There has been ongoing debate about whether or not socio-economic inequalities should be included as grounds for discrimination in Irish equality legislation, and the current review of this legislation (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2022; IHREC, 2023) will examine this issue. It has been argued that adding a socio-economic status ground would serve the objectives underpinning current equality legislation, and would also enable a more sophisticated intersectional approach (Kadar, 2016).

Other differences that may lead to inequality are those of class/economic status, culture, health, livelihood/employment, and urban/rural location (Betley *et al.*, 2021). Many of these have been included for consideration in WBFs. SDG 10 also stresses the importance of improving equality for migrants, and the Government has specifically referred to poorer outcomes for migrants in its second report on a WBF (Government of Ireland, 2022b).

A focus on intersectionality has also developed over the past few decades, examining how categories of difference (e.g. class, race, ethnicity, disability) interact with each other, and the implications of these interactions for individuals. For example, migrant women in Ireland face a double wage penalty, being paid less than migrant men, who are in turn paid less than Irish men (Laurence *et al.*, 2023).

Ireland's strong focus on geographical inequalities is evident in the HP Deprivation Index, which illustrates variation and inequality, by area, in the population's demography, social class and labour market situation.⁷ However, here the question arises of which geographical areas should be examined. There are, of course, many ways to define these, from small areas to electoral divisions, and to counties and regions. In general, the average experience in larger territorial areas obscures inequalities experienced at the very local level.

Box 2.2: Nine Grounds for Discrimination in Irish Employment and Provision of Service Legislation

- Gender: this means man, woman or transgender;

- Civil status: includes single, married, separated, divorced and widowed people; civil partners and former civil partners;

- Family status: this refers to the parent of a person under the age of 18 years, or the resident primary carer or parent of a person with a disability;

- Sexual orientation: includes gay, lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual;

- Religion: this means religious belief, background, outlook, or no religion;

- Age: a provision that does not apply to a person aged under 16 years;

- Disability: includes people with physical, intellectual, learning, cognitive or emotional disabilities, and a range of medical conditions;

- Race: includes race, skin colour, nationality or ethnic origin; and

- Membership of the Traveller community.

Source: CIB, undated.

There is an increasing focus on environmental inequalities: the ways in which different groups and communities experience environmental burdens such as climate change, pollution, or energy poverty; or enjoy environmental benefits such as access to green space and fresh, affordable food. Such access is linked to improved physical and mental health, taking into account socio-demographic characteristics (Braçe *et al.*, 2020; Guzman *et al.*, 2020). Socio-economic disadvantage makes some communities and households more vulnerable to the negative effects of both environmental pollution and the policies that are intended to address it (O'Neill *et al.*, 2022).

Considering the environment also means focusing on intergenerational inequality, as current resource use and its impacts on environmental systems will have significant consequences for the well-being of younger generations as well as generations to come (PCE, 2021).

2.4 Promoting Equality and Addressing Inequality Through Policy

Even with a broad range of available policy responses to promote equality and address inequality, there are contrasting views across, and within, countries about the appropriate policies for targeting inequality. Governments, therefore, use a variety of different approaches in addressing the inequalities outlined in the previous sections.

At a high level, there is strong consensus that wider policies are key in promoting equality and tackling inequality. For example, the sub-targets under UN SDG 10, which commits to reducing inequality, call for the adoption of fiscal, wage and social protection policies in order to achieve greater equality. The International Monetary Fund also notes that a 'comprehensive mix of fiscal policies can curb inequalities at every stage where they emerge' (Amaglobeli & Thevenot, 2022). This is because policies that target the socio-economic and political context of a society, and that influence the type of political, social, public and other safety nets that are put in place, are most effective at changing the distribution

⁷ See <https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2018/06/The-2016-Pobal-HP-Deprivation-Index-Introduction-07.pdf> [accessed 11/04/23].

of resources associated with social position (Institut National de Santé Publique & National Collaborating Center for Healthy Public Policy, 2016). Indeed, it is increasingly argued that more attention must be paid to such policies in order to address rising inequality, while also promoting growth (Bourguignon, 2004; Khan *et al.*, 2014).

Policies can work at many stages and in many ways, but it is useful to consider how they can impact equality in terms of ‘pre-distribution’, ‘distribution’ and ‘production’ in a country.

First, as argued by Amaglobel and Thevenot (2022), there are quite large disparities in many economies between higher- and lower-income households in terms of access to education, health care, and other resources. Public spending can help to compensate for the disparity between rich and poor in private spending, and can also help reduce the importance of background and other circumstances that are beyond an individual’s control. Such spending is often called ‘pre-distribution’ – although Rodrik and Stantcheva (2021) argue that it is also a type of distribution and so prefer the term ‘pre-production’ spending. They see such funding as taking different shapes for different income groups.

For example, for those on the lowest incomes, pre-production policy interventions include primary education, early childhood care, and vocational training; while for those on middle incomes, public higher education and adult retraining programmes are useful. Meanwhile, to reduce inequality, those on the highest incomes should contribute to funding through interventions such as inheritance and estate taxes. Amaglobel and Thevenot (2022) also include health services and basic infrastructure in this category. Such ‘pre-distribution’ supports help tackle a wide range of inequalities, such as those experienced by people with a disability, migrants and lone parents.

The second area of intervention is the labour market, with Amaglobel and Thevenot (2022) stressing the importance of ensuring that labour market conditions remain fair and socially acceptable. Rodrik and Stantcheva (2021) call this the ‘production’ phase of interventions. Amaglobel and Thevenot see public employment services and worker-retention programmes as part of these types of interventions, but Rodrik and Stantcheva go further: they list a range of policies that influence firms’ decisions. Many of these policies are about market competition, investment and innovation – but they also act to reduce inequality and so can help promote both productivity and equality.

Examples of such labour market intervention policies for those on the lowest incomes include minimum wages, apprenticeships, reduced social security contributions, and in-work benefits. Anti-discrimination employment legislation is also important. For those on middle incomes, there are support programmes for small and medium-sized enterprises; cluster policies that boost innovation; European Union (EU) structural and other funds; occupational licensing; on-the-job training; trade union membership; collective bargaining and work councils; and EU trade policies (e.g. free-trade agreements). And for those on the highest incomes, the interventions to support fairer conditions in employment and the labour market include anti-trust policies,⁸ corporate income tax levels and EU competition policies.

The third and final group of interventions is those that address inequality through redistribution (Amaglobel & Thevenot, 2022) – or ‘post-production’ interventions, as Rodrik and Stantcheva (2021) describe them. Examples include social transfers for those on the lowest incomes, such as housing supports, child benefits and guaranteed minimum incomes; while for those on middle incomes, unemployment insurance and pensions (public pensions and tax relief for pensions) are important. Interventions that focus on those at the top of the income distribution in order to ensure redistribution include top-income tax rates, capital gains and wealth taxes. Amaglobel & Thevenot (2022) include replacement rates, labour tax wedges (and their impacts on second earners) and individualised taxation in this category – factors that are likely to affect low- and middle-income earners more directly. They also note the importance of well-targeted transfers, good tax administration and limiting loopholes in the taxation of capital income. Again, such redistribution can help tackle inequalities experienced by groups such as those with disabilities, migrants and lone parents.

Most welfare states focus more explicitly on the pre-distribution/pre-production and redistribution/post-production phases to address inequality, and less explicitly on the labour market/production stage of interventions. However, Rodrik and Santcheva (2021) argue that changes in the quality of jobs require an increased focus on the production

⁸ Anti-trust policies are regulations that encourage competition and discourage predatory business practices by limiting the market power of any particular firm.

phase. This shows the importance of assessing changes in the dynamics of inequality in order to address it, as sources of inequality change over time.

Ireland scores very well on its level of income redistribution, with equivalised market income inequalities in 2022 reduced from a Gini coefficient of .49 to .28, after tax and welfare transfers (CSO, 2023). However, as noted by Palma (2019), this represents a high degree of fiscal effort. Indeed, the Commission on Taxation and Welfare has argued that, if inequality continues to rise, the taxation and welfare systems must evolve to either develop greater redistributive capacity or facilitate greater earnings capacity across the lower part of the distribution (Commission on Taxation and Social Welfare, 2022).

Countries with a strong focus on pre-distribution and production tend to have lower levels of inequality (Blanchet *et al.*, 2022), in line with the International Monetary Fund's recommendation for 'pre-distributive public policies aimed at narrowing differences in market incomes at their source, such as through public education' (Amaglobeli & Thevenot, 2022). Ireland does provide a range of services to tackle inequality, such as care, housing and education, some of which are universal (primary education) and some of which are based on need (eldercare, social housing). Ireland also has a range of supports that would fall under the 'production' heading – e.g. minimum wage, employment regulation orders, in-work benefits, etc. These are the subject of another report currently in preparation by NESC.

While market income inequality in Ireland has fallen since 2010, in 2018 it was the third highest in the OECD (OECD, 2021a). A range of publications have noted that, proportionally, Ireland's spending on services is low compared with that in the EU15, and the radical development of services is a key route to improving social protection – as well as supporting economic development (NESC, 2005; Palma, 2019; Roche *et al.*, 2016; Sweeney, 2019). Palma (2019) argues that it could be cheaper to tackle market inequality at source through high levels of investment rather than through the continual expansion of social protection spending.

2.5 Promoting Equality and Addressing Inequality

2.5.1 Introduction

The range of views on what inequality is, its causes, and who is most affected, means that governments must establish a variety of approaches reflecting these various debates. A number of these approaches are outlined in the remainder of this chapter.

These approaches employ several types of tools, such as legally binding commitments; tailored interventions; financial penalties; 'name and shame' reporting; collection of data on, and analysis of, inequalities; analytical tools; dialogue; high-level political and administrative support; and dedicated funding and personnel. These approaches range from the 'hard' (e.g. legally binding commitments) to the 'soft' (e.g. collection of data). Legally binding commitments are usually the strongest, but 'softer' approaches play a role too, in terms of introducing ideas and concepts to promote equality and address inequality.

The impact of all approaches is strengthened by high-level political and administrative support and dedicated funding and personnel.

2.5.2 Legal Approaches and National Strategies

In Ireland, the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015 are a key example of a 'hard' legislative approach to promoting equality and addressing inequality. The Acts outlaw discrimination in a wide range of employment and employment-related areas, including recruitment and promotion; equal pay; working conditions; training or experience; dismissal; and harassment, including sexual harassment.

In addition, the Equal Status Acts outlaw discrimination beyond employment to vocational training, advertising, collective agreements, and the provision of goods and services. In Ireland, several such Acts align with commitments from EU Directives.

Such legislation usually aims to tackle inequalities of opportunity or treatment, and leads to greater equality of outcomes. It can address both direct discrimination (e.g. a refusal to accept the Housing Assistance Payment, commonly known as HAP) and indirect discrimination (e.g. a height requirement for a job that women find hard to satisfy compared with men). It can address discrimination after it occurs, when an individual takes a case, or it can spur organisations to introduce practices that prevent discrimination occurring, so that they are not liable to legal action.

Ireland also has a range of strategies and action plans to promote equality and address inequality in response to international and national commitments. Examples include:

- the National Strategy for Women and Girls, 2017–2020;

- the Roadmap for Social Inclusion: 2020–2025; and

- the National Action Plan Against Racism, 2023–2027.

The strength of such strategies depends on the legislative and other government commitments to which they are linked, as well on as the political attention, funding and human resources devoted to them, and their scope and co-ordination.

2.5.3 Institutional Support

Ireland has a number of institutions focused on improving equality. Such organisations, with dedicated staff and funding, typically provide advice and guidance to help promote and implement actions to address inequality. One such organisation is the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, which is tasked with protecting and promoting human rights and equality in Ireland and building a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding in the State. There is also the National Disability Authority, an independent statutory body that provides Government with evidence-based advice and research on disability policy and practice, as well as promoting Universal Design⁹.

A recent addition is the Child Poverty and Wellbeing Programme Office in the Department of the Taoiseach. This aims to bring co-ordination, strategic leadership and enhanced accountability to the child poverty agenda.

Such institutions can also monitor the extent to which inequalities continue or decrease, and can put in place actions to address them. The strength and independence of these actions vary, as does their impact.

2.5.4 Ways of Working

Governments employ a number of procedures and ways of working that aim to promote equality and help address inequality. As how they are implemented tends to vary, their impacts can also vary.

The first of these that will be explored is ‘proofing’, the process of reviewing policies and programmes in relation to the likely impact that they will have (or have had) on inequality or poverty, and working to ensure that negative impacts are minimised. This commonly includes data gathering and analysis of equality issues. There are a variety of examples of proofing in Ireland. One is the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (IHREC, undated), which is a statutory obligation on public bodies to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and protect the human rights of those to whom they provide services and staff when carrying out their daily work. Another example is poverty proofing, the process of assessing policy proposals to analyse their impacts in relation to key social outcomes (Johnston, 2017).

Proofing often aims to tackle inequality of outcomes but is generally a ‘soft’ approach. However, these approaches can become strong if they benefit from political attention and resources. Poverty proofing in Ireland has a range of strengths, such as political and administrative buy-in, application to the national Budget each year, and tools to support this, in particular the SWITCH model (a tax-benefit microsimulation model linked to survey and register data allowing

⁹ See <https://universaldesign.ie/> [accessed 23/05/23].

analysis of proposed Budget changes) (Nicol & Guven, 2021; Johnston, 2017). The international attention paid to Gini coefficients also supports its effectiveness.

Second, related to proofing, all memorandum decisions submitted to Government are required to outline the impact that the proposal in the memorandum will have on a number of different aspects, including gender equality and people with disabilities. The steps taken to ensure that the policy promotes gender equality must be outlined. This is a type of proofing but, as Nicol and Guven (2021) note, this provision is not matched by a corresponding duty to conduct a gender impact assessment of policy proposals, and so ‘the practical impact of this provision appears to be somewhat limited’ (Nicol & Guven, 2021: 138).

Third, equality budgeting includes a range of approaches to national budgets, such as gender budgeting, equality budgeting, and green budgeting. These approaches use tools (such as equality impact assessment and an equality dimension in resource allocation) to systematically embed consideration of inequality within the overall context of the Budget process, from *ex ante* to *ex post*. Again, there is a reliance on data gathering and analysis. This allows a focus on how people’s experiences differ from that of others, and an understanding of how the impact of public policy can differ between groups. Where these approaches are strong, they can help to reallocate funds within the Budget to address inequality. However, their strength depends on the coherence of the approach, their legal and political underpinnings, and the extent of buy-in.

Fourth, social investment over the life course considers how exposure to risks, both at times of greater vulnerability and throughout the life course, can contribute to inequality. The life course approach proposes long-term policies that build human capital, and short-term policies that support individuals at vulnerable times during the life course (Institut National de Santé Publique & National Collaborating Center for Healthy Public Policy, 2016). This approach has been used in Ireland, for example, as a framework in a number of National Action Plans to combat poverty and social exclusion.

2.5.5 Innovative Programmes

Pilot programmes are another means of testing innovations aimed at addressing inequality. An interesting example in Ireland is the Area-Based Childhood Programme. This previously piloted programme, based in 13 areas with high rates of poverty and deprivation, uses prevention and early intervention approaches to work in partnership with families, practitioners, communities and national stakeholders, in order to deliver better outcomes for children and families in poverty.¹⁰ A key element of many pilots is to use innovative methods to deliver interventions. This can be helpful for supporting groups affected by inequalities. Ideally, these methods would then be mainstreamed for wider effect. Another example of a pilot programme is the National Just Transition Fund, which targets areas of the Midlands affected by the end of peat harvesting and the electricity generation that was based on this (DECC, 2020).

Positive action programmes are another example of innovations aimed at addressing inequality. These commit to specific actions in order to eliminate, prevent or remedy past discrimination, and typically have dedicated resources to do so. These actions often involve helping those from under-represented groups to overcome disadvantages in competing with other groups. Examples in Ireland include the DARE (Disability Access Route to Education)¹¹ and HEAR (Higher Education Access Route)¹² supports for those with disabilities, or from disadvantaged areas, to enter third-level education. Quotas to increase the proportion of women candidates in national elections are another example.

Again, the strength of these approaches vary. For example, an evaluation of DARE found greater representation among those who were more affluent (Byrne *et al.*, 2013). However, this finding has led to the prioritisation of reduced points for those who qualify for both DARE and HEAR – an interesting way to tackle this intersectionality of disability and socio-economic disadvantage (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2020; Irish Universities Association, 2017). Meanwhile, the quotas to increase the proportion of women candidates in national elections are supported by legislation that will see a political

¹⁰ See <https://www.ncirl.ie/Area-Based-Childhood-Programme> [accessed 11/04/23].

¹¹ See <https://accesscollege.ie/dare/what-is-dare/> [accessed 11/04/23].

¹² See <https://accesscollege.ie/hear/> [accessed 11/04/23].

party lose 50 per cent of their State funding if the quota is not met. This is a ‘hard’ approach that has seen an increase in the proportion of women elected since the quotas were established (Brennan & Buckley, 2017).

Prevention and early intervention approaches aim to reduce the probability of avoidable discrimination through tackling underlying causes. Targeted early interventions address the early stages of negative impacts among groups at higher risk of discrimination. An example of this is education for children with disabilities, and reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities in the workplace, which aim to reduce poverty among those with disabilities. These approaches aim to reduce the likelihood of harms occurring, rather than responding after the fact to harms already generated by discrimination (as, for example, an anti-discrimination legal case could). These approaches have links to social investment and pilot programmes.

Fora of deliberative democracy, such as citizens’ assemblies, are used in Ireland to bring citizens (and sometimes politicians) together to discuss and consider important legal and policy issues, including gender equality; same-sex marriage equality; and economic, social and cultural rights. These fora support equality in a number of ways. First, the members of the assembly are randomly chosen as being representative of Irish society, on the basis of age, gender, social class, regional spread, etc. Presentations are made to the assembly members by those whose personal lives are affected by the issue at hand, as well as experts and advocacy groups working to address the inequality. Citizens’ assemblies also contribute to greater public understanding of the impacts of inequality on daily life. Several of the recommendations made to Government by these fora have resulted in amendments on equality issues in the Constitution.

2.5.6 Addressing Inequality Through International Approaches

Irish policy and work on equality has been influenced by the experience of other countries, peer learning, exchange of information on international approaches, and international legislation and agreements.

The EU has had a strong influence on Irish equality law and practice, from the employment equality Acts in the 1970s to other directives, including the recent EU Directive on adequate minimum wages. Sources of funding such as the EU Structural and Investment Funds have also helped address inequality, particularly in the area of ‘production’ policies.

Ireland has also signed and ratified a number of internationally binding agreements on rights. Those that are ratified are transposed into national law and policy. Examples include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Ireland in 1992; the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by Ireland in 2018; the European Convention on Human Rights, which became part of Irish law in 2003; and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Ireland has also signed non-binding international agreements to signal its commitment to reducing inequality. Examples here include the SDGs, as SDG 10 is ‘Reduced Inequalities’. Such approaches are generally viewed as ‘softer’ because they are not implementable by law (although some countries have decided to integrate the SDGs into national law (McEvilly, 2020)). On the other hand, they often include an international reporting mechanism that acts as a pressure to implement them.

The influence of a wider range of supra-national policies is also important for equality. For example, SDG 10 looks for improved regulation and monitoring of global financial markets, as these influence inequality both internationally and nationally, typically by expanding credit and economic opportunities. Oxfam (2014) also argues for changes in international taxation and movement of capital to address inequalities. Amaglobel and Thevenot (2022) have argued for international registers of asset ownership to support this.

SDG 10 also calls for a voice and enhanced representation for developing countries in delivering more effective institutions. This links to the emphasis placed on procedural equality earlier in this report. The importance of strong institutions has been stressed by others (OECD, 2019), due to their influence on elections, the formulation and implementation of public policies, and the collection of tax.

2.5.7 Conclusion

A range of Irish Government processes and policy approaches have helped promote equality and reduce inequality over time; for example, since the introduction of equal pay legislation in 1974, the gender pay gap in Ireland has fallen from 43 per cent in the manufacturing sector in 1970 to 11 per cent in 2018 (Cassidy *et al.*, 2002; Wilson, 2021).

A number of welfare and tax transfers bring Ireland's market income inequality from one of the highest in the OECD to the median for disposable income (OECD, 2021a). Ireland's ratification of UN conventions on the rights of people with disabilities, and of children, have contributed to a wide range of changes aimed at bolstering rights, from the Children's Referendum in 2012 and the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 to strategies for child well-being since the early 2000s, and the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015–2024. The HEAR and DARE schemes have helped higher-education institutes meet targets on the proportion of students with a disability, or from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, among their student cohort (Byrne *et al.*, 2013).

However, it should be remembered that remedies for inequality can be difficult to negotiate and implement. The core social-policy pillars of the welfare state – especially income support, health, education, social services and civil rights – were widely contested when first proposed and reforms were hard-won, particularly in more individualist political cultures such as the United States (Head, 2022). In Ireland, the introduction of employment equality legislation was resisted (Cassidy *et al.*, 2002), and the introduction of rights for LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) people has been contested for many decades (Fahie, 2016). Currently, while wealth inequality is increasing, proposals to change taxes on wealth generate resistance (Weston & Gataveckaitė, 2022). Inequality is also dynamic, meaning that, as one inequality (e.g. income inequality) is addressed, it can become apparent that other inequalities (e.g. wealth inequality) then also need to be addressed.

Various forms of structural power (e.g. access to economic and legal resources) underpin inequality, together with a range of social norms and practices that reinforce hierarchy and tolerate discrimination. This requires change at multiple levels, with adjustments in values and behaviours in many cases, but these are very hard to define, promote and enforce (Head, 2022). Therefore, although processes and policy approaches do reduce inequalities, they are frequently contested and resisted, especially when first introduced.

This fact underpins the focus in this report on the potential for WBFs to help promote equality and further address inequality in Ireland.

Chapter 3

Well-Being Frameworks and Inequality

3.1 Introduction

Public policy in Ireland has a strong focus on improving well-being. However, a well-being approach would develop this further by setting up working methods allowing a wider range of variables to be systematically considered in decision-making, such as in national Budget processes. It also aims to create new evidence to be used in decision-making and to include a wider range of voices in order, for example, to help prioritise national outcomes.

This chapter provides an overview of how WBFs are developed and embedded into the mainstream policy processes; the ways in which they link to the issue of improving equality; and the potential strengths and limitations of WBFs in addressing inequality.

3.2 Developing and Embedding WBFs into Policy

The typical elements adopted in well-being approaches in policy-making and implementation internationally are:

- A high-level statement of ambition, comprising national goals, outcomes or priorities. An important aspect of these goals or outcomes is that they move beyond purely economic goals to take into account a range of economic, social and environmental factors impacting a country.

- Public involvement in developing the well-being goals, often with lengthy consultations with experts on, and residents of, a country. Some countries have instituted ongoing consultation processes for policy implementation.

- Measurement of performance in the national well-being goals against a dashboard of indicators. The dashboards vary in size. Some countries have a small number of headline indicators and a larger set of more finely grained ones.

- Regular publication of performance reports to support monitoring and accountability. These are typically published annually, and are often submitted to parliament. Some aim to frame budget discussions.

- Going beyond reporting, some countries have legislation to ensure continuity in, and accountability for, the well-being approach. Some have institutional structures with responsibility for well-being, some new and some pre-existing. These structures have a variety of roles, with some established to promote the well-being agenda, while others aim to improve co-ordination.

- Application to budgeting, which varies from using the indicator dashboard to frame budget discussions to assessing budget proposals for their impact on well-being.

- New ways of working, with support and guidelines provided in a number of countries (NESC, 2021).

It has been argued that adopting a well-being approach offers new opportunities to orientate work in the policy system towards improving individuals' lived experience (Exton & Shinwell, 2018).

The NESC Secretariat examined a small number of countries to see how WBFs have been embedded in policy-making and how they have supported transformational change (McGauran & Kennedy, 2022). This work explored in detail the experience of adopting WBFs in three countries – Scotland, New Zealand and Wales. It also looked at how well-being approaches have been applied in relation to one sector in Ireland, that of child well-being (through the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures strategy (DCYA, 2014)).

The research shows that there are four stages in the process of embedding a well-being approach in policy-making. Various elements of the typical well-being approach outlined above are used in each of the four stages. These stages (also illustrated in Figure 3.1) are to:

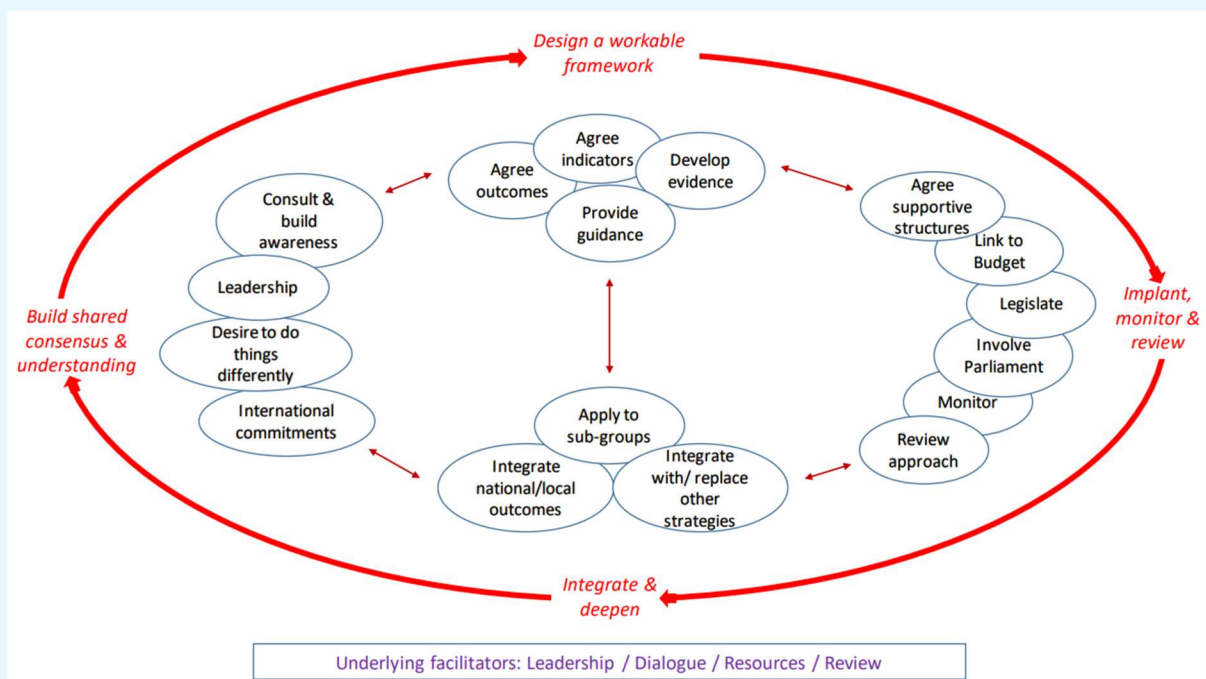
- build shared consensus and understanding;

- design a workable framework;

- implant, monitor and review; and

- integrate and deepen.

Figure 3.1: Embedding a Well-Being Approach



The first stage of adopting a well-being approach – building shared consensus and understanding – involves leadership and an impetus for adopting the approach. The impetus can include national or international commitments, a change in leadership, or an external shock. Building awareness of the framework, and developing buy-in to it, also occurs through communication about well-being and consultation on the type of approach to be adopted.

The second stage – designing a workable framework – usually sees the development of well-being outcomes or goals, as well as indicator suites to measure well-being, and an evidence base on well-being that policy-makers can draw on. This stage also sees the development of guidance for those charged with implementing the approach.

In stage three, the WBF is implanted, monitored and reviewed. Tools used to implant the WBF include legislation to ensure its application, and use of the WBF in budgetary processes. Accountability systems are also developed to monitor and review how the framework is operationalised. In some countries politicians and parliament are involved in this, or the national auditor general; or in others, independent structures are set up to monitor and/or guide implementation.

The fourth stage concerns the integration and deepening of the WBF as it becomes more thoroughly operationalised. It includes the challenge of embedding another framework in a policy-making and implementation system that already has a wide variety of frameworks; there is also consideration at this stage of how to link national and local approaches, and some reflections on how to focus on particular groups when taking a well-being approach.

Although the stages are outlined separately, they are interlinked rather than sequential. There is a cycle of learning in which the outcomes of review and reflection on progress to date help develop a renewed shared understanding of, and consensus on, a well-being approach. Thus, while a country is designing its workable WBF, it can also be building shared consensus and understanding.

Throughout all four stages, implementation of the approach is supported by leadership and dialogue, provision of resources, and continuing review.

3.3 Equality and WBFs

A key message of the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission, established in 2008 by the French Government, was the need for national measurement systems to shift emphasis ‘from measuring economic production to measuring people’s wellbeing’ (Stiglitz *et al.*, 2009: 12).

WBFs, and other, similar frameworks such as the SDGs that were developed in the aftermath of Stiglitz *et al.*’s report, have sought to provide an alternative to measuring progress through gross domestic product (GDP) metrics. This is because GDP, often used as a general proxy of well-being, has a number of limitations in this regard (see OECD, 2011; Social Justice Ireland, 2009). GDP fails to reflect the value of the environment adequately or to give sufficient indication of the sustainability of current output or income. GDP is also disconnected from living conditions, and from distributional outcomes and inequality, in particular.

To fully evaluate the well-being of people in a society, the OECD (2021b) states that it is impossible not to consider inequality. It argues that understanding differences in well-being across different groups is fundamental to the design of effective policies to leave no one behind and to raise the overall well-being of a country’s population.

The OECD’s well-being approach tackles inequality from three perspectives:

- Vertical inequalities. These address how outcomes are spread unequally across all people in society – for example, by looking at the size of the gap between people at the bottom and at the top of the distribution for all dimensions of people’s lives.

- Horizontal inequalities. These focus on the gap between population groups defined by specific characteristics (such as men and women, or young and old).

- Deprivation measures. These focus on people who live below a certain level of well-being (such as those who live in an overcrowded household or without sufficient income to meet basic needs).

The OECD contends that any overarching description of well-being outcomes that focuses on average outcomes alone will be incomplete, as inequality and deprivation are integral parts of the picture. Therefore, in all its measurement of progress on well-being dimensions, the OECD considers the position of different groups, as well as average patterns.

In relation to equality, the Irish Government’s *First Report on a Well-being Framework for Ireland* stated that ‘equality of opportunity is rooted in the framework’ and argued that ‘an important use of the Well-Being framework will be to facilitate a more systematic identification of specific groups within society that experience inequality across a number of dimensions’ (Government of Ireland, 2021: 17).

The WBF is a tool for exploring inequalities within and between dimensions, through disaggregation of the dashboard indicators. The types of inequalities to be explored through the Irish WBF, following the OECD typology, are vertical and horizontal inequalities, and deprivation. The Government’s first report on Ireland’s WBF therefore looked for

disaggregation of indicators on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity, work status, poverty, household composition, and location (region, county or urban/rural).

The consultation process for NESC's 2021 report on well-being also highlighted the importance of equality for respondents. Overall, equality was the most frequently referenced issue in NESC's WBF survey of 539 organisations, in finishing the statement 'I want an Ireland where ...'.

A number of different equality themes were touched on in NESC's consultation, including quality of opportunities, income, wealth, and access to services; equality among different groups in society; a spirit of equity or social friendship; and the eradication of poverty. The focus on equal access to services was strong, with housing, health, education, good food and nature all mentioned. This concern with equity reflects characteristics of the Irish economy, including the high degree of market income inequality, the poverty rate of a number of groups, wealth inequality, and unequal access to affordable, reliable services (NESC, 2021).

The Government's later consultation on a WBF again highlighted the importance of equality for respondents, including a focus on intergenerational inequality (Government of Ireland, 2022b).

The stress on equality in consultations by NESC and the Government led to the incorporation of equality as one of the cross-cutting themes in the national WBF.¹³ Equality was described in the Government's second well-being report as 'a central pillar of the WBF; with the Framework 'enable[ing] and encourage[ing] systematic examination of equality issues across all of the dimensions'. In addition, 'the Well-being Information Hub disaggregates each indicator to highlight where areas of inequality might exist'.

The Government's second report also identified several cohorts that experience inequality across a high proportion of dimensions: women; single-parent households; households with lower incomes; people with permanent sickness or disability; immigrants/non-Irish; and households in rented accommodation.

This report, and this chapter in particular, examines the strengths and limitations of WBFs as an aid to promote equality and reduce inequality in Ireland. The development of evidence on how WBFs can address inequality is only beginning, but there is some learning from Health in All Policies (HiAP) and gender mainstreaming approaches.¹⁴

3.4 Strengths of WBF

WBFs have a number of strengths for identifying inequality, as well as potential for addressing them. These will be outlined in this section.

3.4.1 A Greater Range of Information

WBFs are about moving the focus of measuring well-being away from GDP to a broader conception. In several ways, WBFs allow a greater range of information to become evident, and this supports better identification of inequalities for the purposes of policy-making aimed at addressing them.

Distribution of well-being

WBFs require a focus on the distribution of well-being. Best practice (OECD, 2020) stresses that it is not enough to consider averages. If a WBF only examines averages, it may not detect the experience of minorities experiencing extreme inequality. Averages can also mask situations where some groups experience decline while others progress. Instead, it is essential that WBF dashboards disaggregate data collected on each dimension by the various groups affected by inequality, such as gender, age, social class, disability and ethnic background. This can help make existing disaggregated data more visible; it can also prompt greater disaggregation of indicators already collected, such as those

¹³ The other cross-cutting theme in the WBF is sustainability.

¹⁴ Gender mainstreaming is an approach that aims to combat gender inequality by integrating a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes. HiAP is a collaborative approach to improving the health of all people by incorporating health, equity and sustainability considerations into decision-making across all sectors and policy areas.

on older age, which are often grouped into one 'over 65' category.¹⁵ It can also help increase data on groups that are strongly impacted by inequality but that are not currently visible in many datasets; for example, Travellers and Roma.

As argued by Kennedy (2022), it is important to look at differences between and within groups, and to change over time, in order to fully assess inequalities in well-being and address these through policy.

Many dimensions of well-being

The fact that WBFs focus on a range of dimensions of well-being means that a broad range of issues of greater concern to groups affected by inequality can be identified and examined. Such issues include caring, time use and housing tenure. One Australian study found that the well-being of older people was highest among the group of people who were married, best educated, homeowners and English-speaking. This has implications for what policy should focus on to ensure the well-being of older people, such as secure affordable tenures and integration of migrants (Naidoo, 2019).

Discussion of what economic indicators best represent inequality in well-being

Consideration of what well-being means, and how inequality manifests itself, can also lead to consideration of which economic indicators best demonstrate inequality. For example, indicators measuring financial inequality, balance of trade policy and levels of corruption may provide a stronger indication of inequality (including inequality between countries) than measures such as median income and wealth.

Greater recognition of environmental inequalities

One of the common dimensions of a WBF is a focus on environment, and this allows an emphasis on environmental inequalities to be included. It has been shown, for example, that low socio-economic position is associated with increased exposure of children to traffic-related air pollution, noise, lead, environmental tobacco smoke, inadequate housing and residential conditions, and fewer opportunities for physical activity (Bolte *et al.*, 2010). These factors intersect in a way that risks exacerbating existing inequalities (FoE, 2023). Marmot (2013) also finds that the availability of and access to blue and green outdoor spaces differs depending on socio-economic status, age, gender and ethnicity. These are clearly inequalities that need to be mapped and addressed in Ireland, as O'Neill *et al.* (2022) note, and a WBF offers a policy arena in which to do so.

Brandt *et al.* (2022) argue that the more holistic evaluation of policies offered by WBFs can help to more clearly identify trade-offs and synergies between traditional policy silos. This may be helpful when it comes to addressing inequalities in situations where there are a range of trade-offs. Although it is not easy to decide how to address trade-offs, the multidimensional focus of WBFs can help to make these trade-offs more evident and provide a structure for greater debate on how to address them.

Intersectionality

Another way in which the range of dimensions that a WBF focuses on can be helpful is that intersectional inequalities can become more evident. A WBF allows different aspects of inequality to be grouped together, so that their contribution to well-being is more evident. For example, lone parents are more likely to be in consistent poverty, to have little wealth, to be renting, and to have poor mental and physical health, demonstrating the importance of policy actions in multiple arenas to address the inequalities they experience.

Consultation on lived experience

The strong emphasis that WBFs place on consultation with people on the ground, and on identifying lived experience, can help pinpoint issues relating to inequalities among certain groups. For example, the NESC consultation on WBFs (2021) showed the importance placed on access to services. Dialogue with people in Ireland on policy interventions to be used can also help ensure that such interventions are effectively designed and delivered.

Overall, the ability to focus on and gather a greater range of information on inequalities under a WBF allows more relevant information to feed into policy differences between and within groups and, over time, can thus be more easily identified. Such information is a starting point to help identify inequalities, and can inform the setting of policy goals and the possibility of policy and budget changes to promote greater equality, depending on how the WBF is implemented.

¹⁵ The WHO (2021) regards lack of data disaggregation for over-65s as ageism in data collection.

Good information also allows progress in addressing the inequalities to be assessed. It also helps to show whether or not the approach taken is the right one to address inequality, and if it continues to be the right approach over time.¹⁶

3.4.2 New Ways of Working

WBFs aim to develop new ways of working for policy-makers, and some of these new ways of working can be useful in addressing inequality (as well as other difficult policy issues).

An integrative approach

Brandt *et al.* (2022) argue that the significant potential of a WBF compared with the status quo is that it offers a more fundamentally integrated approach. A WBF that is adopted as a whole-of-government approach can guide policy coherence across government, with all departments assessing their policies and processes for multidimensional well-being impact. This is in contrast to the usual parallel processes in which economic statistics are mostly used to assess economic policies, social statistics are mostly used to assess social policies, and environmental statistics are mostly used to assess for environmental policies (Durand & Exton, 2019).

The integrative approach offers better opportunities for policy-makers and implementers to work together. This allows common understandings of policy problems to develop. It can also allow the gaps in support affecting those most impacted by inequality to be identified (DCYA, 2018). This can help to develop cross-sectoral actions to address inequality. For example, in New Zealand, the action plan to reduce child poverty has led to the Families Package, which has a wide range of measures for tackling child poverty. These include extra tax credits for families with children, increased paid parental leave, and increased Accommodation Supplement and Winter Energy payments (Bennett, 2018). Another mechanism used to protect the income of poor families in New Zealand is that, since 2020, schools that draw their pupils from lower-income areas can receive a \$150 payment per student, per year, if they agree not to ask parents and caregivers for voluntary donations (New Zealand Government, undated). Almost 90 per cent of eligible schools opted in to this scheme (Cooke, 2019).

The effectiveness of this approach depends on how well co-ordinated the WBF is with other policy approaches. Some countries have 'hard' levers to help this happen. For example, in Wales, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires that public bodies set objectives to meet the seven Welsh well-being goals. This provides an overarching set of goals that all public bodies must aim for in their work.¹⁷ The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales and the Welsh Auditor General also monitor how this work is developing and publish reports on their findings. Where 'hard' levers do not exist, the relative status of the WBF compared with other frameworks can be difficult to figure out and, thus, to apply. This does depend, however, on the political support attached to such levers.

Supporting an outcomes approach

As noted in McGauran and Kennedy (2022), an outcomes approach is fundamental to a well-being approach. An outcomes approach means using indicators for situational analysis, articulating the outcomes sought of policy, and measuring progress towards these. Thus there is a link between the outcome sought and the policy levers that can bring it about. WBFs, therefore, focus not on the share of government budget spent on education or healthcare but on the skills achieved within a country's education system or the state of its population's health (Brandt *et al.*, 2022).

This approach is useful for work on equality of outcomes, one of the key concepts of equality. The outcomes focus can help to create not just more evidence on the existence of inequalities, but also a focus on what works to help address them. For example, when the National Cancer Registry was set up in Ireland in 1991, it began to provide data on cancer and outcomes for those with the disease. This showed variation in geographic outcomes, so the data was a key basis for the National Cancer Strategy and subsequent improved outcomes (Maguire, 2023).

¹⁶ For example, Logue and Callan (2016) note how policies aiming to reduce poverty through increasing the minimum wage may have limited impact, as a significant number of minimum-wage workers live in households above the poverty line, and as there is a strong link between poverty and household joblessness.

¹⁷ See <https://www.gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-act-essentials-html#section-60668> [accessed 11/04/23].

3.4.3 Increasing Awareness

At a minimum, the introduction of a WBF can help raise awareness of the importance of focusing on outcomes in a wide range of dimensions of well-being, which is likely to assist with identifying inequalities. It can also foster public debate and engagement about what matters most to people themselves (Brandt *et al.*, 2022). Although this approach is relatively ‘soft’, it can help establish elements of a WBF as legitimate areas for policy intervention. It may also broaden discussion and understanding of issues such as equality and well-being, which can help lead to the development of ‘harder’ interventions.

3.5 WBFs and Equality: Limitations

This section will consider the limitations of WBFs for identifying and addressing inequality.

3.5.1 Vague, Contested and Large in Scope

One limitation of WBFs is that they are considered ambiguous and conceptually vague, and are contested (O’Mahony, 2022). This can be a strength at an initial stage, as it allows commitment to a vague idea without making firm commitments or hard choices, or engaging with trade-offs.

However, contestation is likely to occur at later stages, on determining the meaning of well-being and who or what is responsible for defining and addressing well-being problems. Vague concepts also mean that a WBF can be easily diluted and distorted, rather than effectively translated into action.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the definition of inequality is also contested, as are the policy solutions (Cairney *et al.*, 2022). When combining WBFs and inequalities, there is a risk that double ambiguity and contestation can reduce the extent to which WBFs can address inequalities.

A further difficulty is posed by the fact that WBFs are large in scope and demand the coherent and concerted action of many actors across numerous policy sectors, at multiple territorial levels. The scope of such a framework makes it difficult to implement, particularly when there is a lack of ‘hard’ levers to draw all the elements together. This has implications for how well a WBF can address inequality.

3.5.2 Data on Some Issues is Poor

As previously outlined, a strength of WBFs is that they can make inequalities more evident, due to the range of dimensions they encompass, and the requirement to disaggregate data. However, even where there is strong commitment to measurement, the available data is often fragmented, too small-scale, or not available, particularly for groups impacted by inequality.

For example, in Ireland, data on ethnic groups, sexual orientation and religion is infrequently collected (usually just through the Census). Where data is collected through surveys, often the representation of some groups (e.g. by nationality, age or ethnic group) is too small to be valid. Data on disability, where collected, can be inadequate for use in decision-making, as the severity of disability is rarely recorded (CSO, 2020). Data on persistent poverty is available for children (through the Growing up in Ireland national longitudinal survey) (Maître *et al.*, 2021) – but not for adults.

Data on environmental issues, where it exists, is also often not of sufficient breadth and depth to prioritise and refine environmental well-being objectives. There is a tendency for available data to be incorporated into environmental dashboards (PCE, 2021), rather than the optimum data needed to measure inequalities, for example.

Furthermore, other data that is useful in WBFs, such as the New Zealand CBAX tool, which assigns a monetary value to issues such as loneliness or damp homes (Jensen & Thompson, 2020), is often not disaggregated by group (Birkjær *et al.*, 2021). Therefore it does not show that, for example, loneliness has a stronger negative impact on older people than

other groups, as they are more likely to live alone and be less mobile. This limits the extent to which data linked to a WBF can be used to identify and address inequalities. There is, however, potential to change this; for example, by weighting the data by group.

Ultimately, lack of appropriate data limits the extent to which WBFs can adequately identify inequalities, which has implications for how they can address them.

3.5.3 WBFs Give Us Information That We Already Know

While some dimensions of WBFs are new, such as the focus on environmental issues, it is already largely evident which groups suffer most from inequality. As Cornwall and Brock (2005) note, in the developed North, there are already many regions with disadvantage, where populations have poor access to employment, amenities and State services, and have lower life expectancy and education levels. These dimensions are now all counted by WBFs – but they were all counted prior to the existence of WBFs.

In Ireland, the WBF dashboard of indicators shows that lone parents experience inequality across a wide range of well-being indicators (Government of Ireland, 2022a). However, it is well known since at least the early 2000s that lone parents experienced and continue to experience one of the highest rates of consistent poverty in the country. Other data collected since the early 2010s (e.g. on wealth in Ireland, and on emergency housing) also clearly shows the disadvantage experienced by lone parents. This suggests that WBFs may not always add to the picture of already recognised inequalities.

3.5.4 The Value of WBFs Depends on How They are Implemented

As OECD researchers on well-being have noted, ‘the real pressure test for well-being initiatives is whether they will be able to graduate from “yet another report” to tangibly influencing government decision-making, and ultimately, people’s quality of life’ (Brandt *et al.*, 2022: 9). To date it has been found that the application of WBFs to government decision-making is relatively rare. Looking at WBFs in 12 countries, Birkjær *et al.* (2021) found that only 3 (Iceland, New Zealand and Bhutan) were going beyond measurement to actively use well-being measures in policy-making. Details on the approaches taken in Iceland, New Zealand and Bhutan are summarised in Box 3.1.

Box 3.1 outlines how, in Iceland, New Zealand and Bhutan, a small number of specific well-being priorities are agreed on and there are detailed mechanisms to ensure that these are systematically incorporated into national Budget decisions and allocations. New Zealand also has targets, underpinned by legislation, to reduce child poverty in order to improve child well-being. Bhutan regularly assesses the gross national happiness of different groups and feeds this into policy decisions. These approaches are ‘harder’ than those used solely to monitor well-being. However, New Zealand and Bhutan benefit from having a long period of development during which to embed the WBFs, as well as strong political support for their implementation.

If a WBF is not actively used in implementing public policy, it risks being too ‘soft’ to make a difference in concrete policy actions, and so is limited in what it can do to address deficits in well-being, including those to address inequality. Where a WBF is weakly implemented, it risks becoming ‘symbolic policy’. Such policies have more communicative than substantive value, where policy does not have organisational capacity or resourcing to produce concrete outcomes. Nevertheless, such policies can play a role by capturing political attention and promoting recognition and prioritisation of issues (Cairney *et al.*, 2022).

Box 3.1: How Iceland, New Zealand and Bhutan Use their WBFs in Government and Budget Decision-making

In Iceland, the Ministerial Council on Fiscal Affairs agreed on six well-being priorities that would serve as the basis for drafting the Government's 2021–2025 fiscal strategy, and consequent national annual Budget. These priorities are mental health, secure housing, better work–life balance, zero carbon emissions, innovation growth, and better communication with the public, and were identified by ranking the 39 well-being indicators in the Icelandic well-being dashboard. This prioritisation has shifted national budget allocations towards the achievement of these six goals. Today, these goals steer 30 of the Government's 35 policy areas and serve as a basis for policy-making (Birkjær *et al.*, 2021).

In New Zealand, the Public Finance (Wellbeing) Amendment Act 2020 requires the Budget Policy Statement to include the well-being objectives that guide the Government's Budget decisions. Five are chosen per year, and in 2022 these were just transition, physical and mental well-being, the future of work, Māori and Pacific peoples, and child well-being. In addition, the Fiscal Strategy Report, which is presented on Budget Day, must explain how well-being objectives have guided the Government's Budget decisions; it must also provide an assessment of the extent to which the fiscal performance of the Government has been consistent with its strategy. Ministers must also show how their Budget bids would achieve the well-being priorities.

New Zealand also has a strong focus on reducing child poverty in order to improve child well-being. The Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018 requires the Government to set long-term (ten-year) and intermediate (three-year) targets on a defined set of child poverty measures, and to report annually on them. In addition, the Government must report each Budget Day on how the Budget will reduce child poverty, and on progress towards child poverty targets (McGauran & Kennedy, 2022).

Bhutan also prioritises a number of well-being priorities, called the Pillars of Gross National Happiness (GNH). These are good governance, sustainable socio-economic development, preservation and promotion of culture, and environmental conservation. These are also nine domains of GNH. The GNH Screening Tool systematically assesses the impacts of new policies and projects at the formulation stage, based on these domains and pillars. The projects and policies are assessed by a committee, using a pre-determined formula, to gauge their likely level of impact on 26 variables that contribute to GNH. If the score on their likely impact is positive or neutral, the policy or project is recommended to decision-makers for implementation. Those that do not sufficiently promote GNH are reverted to the relevant bodies for review and improvement.

The impact of policies on GNH is assessed through the results of the Gross National Happiness Survey of Bhutan's citizens, which is carried out every five years. This clearly shows the differences in GNH between groups; for example, the lower happiness of women compared with men, of those in rural areas compared with urban, of older people, and of those with low levels of education. The overall approach is underpinned by the Constitution of Bhutan, which states that the State shall strive to promote conditions to enable pursuit of GNH (Gross National Happiness Commission, 2010; Lama & Dorji, 2017; Ozonas Marcos, 2020).

3.5.5 Political Support for WBFs

McGauran and Kennedy (2022) have noted that the introduction of WBFs is often supported by both senior politicians and senior administrators. This can provide WBFs with powerful impetus. Power is a key aspect of how WBFs are implemented, and can strengthen or weaken them, depending on how strongly it is applied and at which stages.

Several researchers argue that the links between a WBF and power and politics need to be made more explicit. White (2010) argues that adopting a well-being approach will not replace politics. On the contrary, she suggests that there are serious politics in the ways in which well-being is understood. Jenkins (2016) goes further, arguing that while WBFs offer a new language in which to talk about policy, this language masks the inequalities of power between the author of the framework and its subject. Merely having the WBF in place does not change power relations between the disadvantaged and the structures in which they live (Cornwall & Brock, 2005).

Discussions of power link to the work done by macro-policies on pre-distribution, production, and redistribution, as outlined previously. Many argue that such macro-policies change structures of distribution and so have the strongest impact in addressing inequality. Similarly, 'hard' policy tools, such as legislation, sanctions and targeted programmes with funding, can also tackle inequality, particularly where they have strong political support. However, the route from a WBF to achieving 'hard' policy tools and changes in significant macro-policies is not guaranteed. While WBF processes can input information on distribution and how it can be changed into Budget processes and their associated macro-policies, there is often no requirement for this change to occur.

On the other hand, progressing WBFs so that they influence Budget processes and macro-policies in this way takes time. New Zealand, perhaps best known for how it considers well-being dimensions in its national Budget, took eight years to move from developing a WBF to having a well-being Budget, underpinned with legislation. The Budget and accompanying legislation were put in place when a new government took power, showing the importance of political will for the strong implementation of WBFs.

Considering macro-policies and national Budgets leads to the issue of trade-offs. Governments by their nature pursue many aims, some of which are contradictory, meaning that trade-offs and prioritisation of one aim over another will occur. In these cases, national economic goals with 'hard' levers, such as fiscal discipline measures, while valid for many reasons, can eclipse the aims of 'softer' well-being-type approaches that lack 'hard' levers. For example, Cairney *et al.* (2022) have shown that similar approaches to WBFs, such as gender mainstreaming and HiAP approaches, often become subordinate to neoliberal approaches that use 'harder' levers.

Furthermore, some of the 'harder' approaches may weaken 'softer' ones. Considering political support for measures to address inequality, Cairney *et al.* argue that governments produce 'a messy compromise, in which they make a commitment to reduce inequalities in health or education but rule out the policy instruments—such as tax and spending to boost economic redistribution—that seem to be fundamental to policy success' (Cairney *et al.*: 2). This leads to a twin-track approach in which governments can simultaneously reduce *and* exacerbate inequality, depending on the intervention examined. For example, one policy could be improving daily living conditions for disadvantaged children (e.g. through free school meals), while a broader structural policy that increases inequality in society (e.g. by cutting inheritance tax) could have the opposite effect.

WBFs that are effective in addressing inequality need to be strong enough to promote action to address inequality, which may require the use of 'hard' levers in tandem with strong political support.

3.5.6 The Focus of Implementation

Assuming that a WBF has adequate 'hard' levers and the necessary political support to effectively address inequality, its impact depends on what type of method is then taken in order to keep addressing these inequalities. As an example, there are a number of proven ways to conceptualise and address health inequalities (Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2011; Institut National de Santé Publique & National Collaborating Center for Healthy Public Policy, 2016). One method is to target the most disadvantaged groups in society; a second is to close the gaps in equality between defined groups; and a third is to reduce the overall gradient of health inequalities across the population.

The first and second methods tackle inequalities by addressing the gaps between the worst off and the average. As this method focuses on the most disadvantaged, it tends to gain improvements for them, but on the other hand, it tends to ignore not only health inequalities across the health gradient but also those in the groups just above the least well off.

However if the third method is used, then that means looking not only at the gaps that exist between those at the top and at the bottom of the scale or at the situation of those most disadvantaged, but also at how health is distributed across all population groups. This approach aims to keep improving the health of the entire population as it levels out health inequalities across groups. An example of a wide-ranging policy to impact the health gradient in Canada was the Medical Care Act, which introduced universal healthcare. The Institut national de santé publique, Québec & the National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy of Canada (2016) view this approach as the most effective to reduce inequalities. It is able to improve conditions for the least-well off as well as others, leading to an overall improvement. This is an example of a policy which changes structures of pre-distribution and redistribution to improve the health of many groups in society. Is it possible for a WBF to help deliver such an approach? This depends on the extent of action taken to address inequalities identified.

HiAP approaches also offer some lessons. Studies show that, for example, Healthy Cities projects work better in some places than others (Cairney *et al.*, 2022), depending on the degree of policy-maker, planner and stakeholder support; the extent of the approach's economic benefit; clarity about how it will operate; and how well it connects social and medical services (Simos *et al.*, 2015). Similarly, a WBF that gains wide and senior stakeholder support, has clarity in operation, and connects key implementors successfully, is likely to be more effective in addressing inequalities than another framework that does not.

3.5.7 Inequalities have been Addressed Successfully Without WBFs

Another factor to consider is that equality (and well-being) have been successfully supported by governments' policies without the use of WBFs. For example, as outlined by the Nordic Council of Ministers (Birkjær *et al.*, 2021), Nordic countries have excelled in achieving high rates of well-being in their populations for at least the last decade – but without empirical guidance on what constitutes well-being, and without actively promoting well-being. Birkjær *et al.* attribute the high levels of well-being in the Nordic countries to high levels of income and extensive social benefits (acting on pre-distribution and redistribution), as well as low corruption and well-functioning State institutions, and a clear sense of autonomy, freedom and social trust among citizens. Cairney *et al.* meanwhile link high levels of gender equality in Nordic countries to active and interventionist governments in the Nordic States, large public sectors, a tradition of strong public responsibility for social welfare, and dedication to universalism and equality. These countries have a history of equality policy infrastructures, political elites that recognise the value of equality, and strong ties between civil equality movements and feminist policy actors. Deliberative and consensus politics help, too. All these factors work to ensure pre-distribution, redistribution and good-quality employment. Many other governments have had policies over many decades to enhance well-being in terms of education, health, income, employment, etc., without describing them in the terms used by WBFs.

However, WBFs play a useful role in promoting well-being. Through their indicators, they can identify and highlight inequalities, which can help in drawing political attention and promoting debate on how to address them. It is useful to try a new approach, such as via a WBF, to see how it may assist with identifying and addressing inequalities.

3.6 Summary

This chapter has outlined both strengths and limitations in how WBFs can help identify and address inequality. In summary, WBFs are currently mainly focused on what the NESC Secretariat, whose research is summarised in Section 3.2, called Stages 1 and 2 of being embedded, i.e. building awareness and consensus, and developing a range of well-being goals, indicators and evidence.

With their multidimensional focus, and attention to inequalities in well-being, these stages of work allow greater identification of inequalities and greater awareness of these inequalities in policy discussions. However, these benefits are limited by a lack of available data.

Internationally, few WBFs have moved to the stage of addressing well-being in public policy (Stages 3 and 4 of being embedded). The experience of Iceland, New Zealand and Bhutan shows that 'hard' levers to draw attention to inequalities (such as children in poverty) and prioritise certain well-being outcomes in Budgets and new policies and programmes seem to help to embed a focus on well-being, and associated inequalities, in policy-making. However, very few countries have moved to this stage of a WBF. It also appears that 'hard' levers with political support behind them are helpful; however, not all WBFs have these.

While the strengths and limitations of WBFs in identifying and addressing inequality were treated separately in Chapter 3, it is worth noting that some aspects of WBFs are simultaneously both a strength and a weakness. Specifically, although WBFs may be 'soft', they raise awareness of wider well-being issues and promote debate on them among the public, policy-makers and politicians, which may allow 'harder' interventions in future. This is important considering that most interventions to address inequalities are contested, so having data and debate demonstrating the need for them may help.

In addition, the fact that WBFs cover multiple policy areas and actors can also be both a strength and a weakness – what exactly needs to be done is not as clear, and may lack coherence, but does allow for a greater focus on well-being and inequalities in more sectors and areas.

Chapter 4

Ireland's WBF and Equality: Eight Insights

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines eight insights into Ireland’s WBF and the elements that are in place to allow it to identify and address inequality. It will also draw on elements of international WBFs that could be considered for helping Ireland’s WBF to address inequalities, as its development and implementation progresses. The Government has committed to a formal review of the WBF within four to five years of the publication of its second report on a WBF.

4.2 Insight 1: Ireland’s WBF Brings New and Improved Information into the Policy Space

The Irish WBF has been concerned with how it can be used to identify inequalities in well-being in society. Equality is one of the two cross-cutting themes in the WBF and the Government has committed to disaggregating indicators in the framework in order to explore vertical and horizontal inequalities, and deprivation (Government of Ireland, 2021).

Through the use of new indicators, and commitments to develop them in areas where data is lacking, the WBF helps to identify inequalities and make them more visible.

Many of the WBF’s dashboard indicators are already disaggregated. For example, the indicators for subjective well-being are broken down for a number of groups, e.g. by age, gender, ethnic background, health status and poverty level. This results in the publication of more detailed data, such as data on higher depression levels among those who are more disadvantaged.

The CSO’s online Well-being Information Hub also plays an important role in bringing this data to a wider audience. The indicator data shown there is easily accessible, both for policy-makers and the general public. A substantial amount of data relevant to inequality is thus grouped together and easily found, such as data on median wealth by household composition, those at risk of poverty after paying rent and mortgage, and satisfaction with how democracy works, as categorised by principal economic status.

The range of dimensions in the Irish WBF also brings new information more clearly into the policy-making space, and some of this is very relevant to identifying inequalities. For example, it monitors the subjective well-being of residents in Ireland as well as levels of civic engagement, trust and cultural expression; time use; connections, community and participation; and safety and security.

This adds to the data previously more readily available for some dimensions of the WBF, such as on knowledge, skills and innovation; housing and the built environment; and work and job quality.

The focus on these new areas of data is important. For example, declining trust has negative impacts on social cohesion and political legitimacy. Differences in time-use are very evident on a gender basis. The safety and security of e.g. older people, those from ethnic minorities, can be much weaker than that of other groups. The well-being indicator data will be updated constantly, and a yearly report analysing the dashboard will be published, helping to keep the issues raised in it on the policy agenda.

The consultation carried out for the development of the WBF has also yielded new data on equality issues of importance to residents of Ireland. Both the NESC 2021 consultation process, and the Government’s consultation process later in 2021, highlighted several aspects of equality to be focused on, including access to services (Government of Ireland, 2021; NESC, 2021). Some of the indicators adopted do measure some aspects of this, such as the sub-indicator which looked at the level of unmet healthcare needs, and why they were not met.

Use of such data can contribute to better public policy by supporting the development of more defined descriptions of policy challenges, the articulation of clearer policy goals and identification of people who may benefit from more targeted policy interventions (Kennedy, 2022).

4.3 Insight Two: The WBF offers an opportunity to make environmental justice more explicit, but needs to develop

O'Neill *et al.* state that ‘the development of a Well-being Framework for Ireland represents an important opportunity to incorporate an explicit focus on environmental justice in the further development of a set of indicators’ (O'Neill *et al.*, 2022: 25). They recommend that future iterations of the dashboard incorporate measures of environmental injustice, which can help highlight inequalities in this area. This chimes with the recent recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly on Biodiversity Loss, which call for the WBF to be modified to more accurately measure social, economic and environmental progress in Ireland. The Assembly also recommends that the WBF, encompassing environment, climate and biodiversity, be at the very core of economic decisions made now and in the future (Citizens’ Assembly, 2023).

It is important for environmental data under a WBF to also illustrate a sense of the intergenerational distribution of benefits implied by current resource use. The New Zealand Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE, 2021) has noted that the advice currently received by decision-makers there is insufficient to make informed trade-offs between investing in well-being now and investing in well-being for the future. The data used tends to be what is available, rather than that which is necessary to help decide which environmental objectives are in need of substantial additional investment. The Commissioner argues that more information is needed on environmental tipping points, future risks and resilience, and uncertainty. Collecting such data would help improve the quality of information available in the budget process to reflect what is known about these issues. This is an important base for action to support greater intergenerational equality in terms of environmental issues.

Given that New Zealand’s WBF is more advanced than Ireland’s, it is likely that these findings are also relevant to Ireland and should be borne in mind as more environmental data is gathered. It would be useful to consult with environmental NGOs (non-governmental organisations), as well as those gathering environmental data in other countries, in order to identify best practice for developing good environmental data. Data gathered to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) may also provide useful indicators – and, as noted in the Government’s first report on a WBF, there is a significant degree of overlap between WBFs and the SDGs, and they can bolster each other as complementary initiatives. The Welsh and Scottish frameworks to promote well-being have both used the SDGs as a base.

NESC’s forthcoming work on natural capital accounting may also assist in highlighting some of the necessary indicators.

4.4 Insight 3: Ireland’s WBF Highlights Key Knowledge and Data Gaps that Need New Activities and Resources in Order to be Addressed

The work on Ireland’s WBF is drawing attention to key data and knowledge gaps and represents a call for action to address these. Limited by the shape of current data collection patterns, addressing these issues will require a mix of new surveys, larger sample sizes, more frequent data collection, and greater use of good-quality administrative data.

Data disaggregation is not consistently available, which limits what it can tell us about inequalities. This in turn has implications for understanding the dynamics behind inequalities, and for knowing what works to address them. For example, only one sub-indicator under subjective well-being has a breakdown by poverty level, and similarly only one sub-indicator collects data on ethnic background. A similar pattern is found when looking at disaggregation for many other dimensions in the WBF. Disaggregation is limited by data availability, current research on where inequality exists, and policy priorities. It is also hampered by the need to make the dashboard usable while not becoming too large; however, this does reduce the extent to which the data collected can identify and subsequently address inequalities.

One county-based organisation found that less than one-half of the indicators in the WBF dashboard were available at the county level.¹⁸ This limited the extent to which well-being in that area could be compared with that in other areas

¹⁸ Information from a confidential interview with NESC.

and at the national level. In future, as Ireland works towards Stage 4 of embedding its WBF, consideration could be given to developing nationally comparable indicators through which the well-being of areas can be measured and compared with the national picture and that in other counties. This would facilitate using the WBF to argue for national resource allocations to address deficiencies and inequalities in well-being.

In addition, indicators on several of the concerns highlighted by respondents in the consultation phases for developing the WBF (e.g. on empowered communities) are not currently collected. However, the Government identified data gaps in its first report on the WBF, with the intention of reducing these gaps progressively across future iterations of the WBF (Government of Ireland, 2021). The CSO (undated) has also committed in its strategy statement to progressing statistical development in the area of well-being, among others. This will help measure and identify further inequalities, and the forthcoming Equality Data Strategy will support this also.

The Government has also noted that while the dashboard shows an overall picture of the state of well-being in Ireland, departments and agencies must develop, strengthen or formalise frameworks and indicator sets for specific cohorts, in order to support a deeper understanding of policy areas that cannot be achieved through the overarching WBF. Such developments will help generate data that can analyse well-being for specific cohorts in public policy.

The CSO has also been working on making greater use of administrative data by promoting the use of encrypted common identifiers (PPSN (Personal Public Service Number), Eircode and UBI (Unique Business Identifier)) in these datasets, so that data can be linked across sources and over time without revealing the identity of individuals or businesses. Use of such data reduces the number of surveys necessary to collect data and the associated costs, but also has significant potential to provide information from existing sources, particularly on groups impacted by inequality who are difficult to identify in surveys, such as Travellers, Roma, migrants and ethnic minorities.¹⁹

In this way, the Irish WBF is creating a context in which the need for better information is being recognised, and its production supported.

4.5 Insight 4: The WBF is Developing New Ways of Working That Have the Potential to Address Inequalities

The work of the Irish WBF is helping to support the emergence of new ways of working for policy-makers.

First, some new processes are being put in place in relation to the Budget, to apply from Budget 2023 on. Annual high-level analysis of the Well-being Dashboard is being conducted and published at an early stage of the Budget process, to provide high-level evidence and context for the identification of potential priorities, and highlighting progress or lack thereof across a wide range of policy issues.

Second, this analysis is feeding into the annual National Economic Dialogue, which included, in 2022, a focus on well-being issues, to help inform budgetary discussions across longer-term economic, social and environmental factors.

Third, Budget Day documentation will include the most up-to-date version of the Well-being Dashboard.

Fourth, the Government anticipates that, over time, well-being dimensions will be incorporated into expenditure and evaluation, including in Spending Reviews, indicating how expenditure is allocated to the 11 dimensions (Government of Ireland, 2022b). As more indicators are disaggregated in a way that allows some inequalities to become more visible, and as this data is better incorporated into expenditure analysis, opportunities are offered for a greater focus on equality issues in Budget discussions. It is important that this data connects to policy choices and funding, in order to tackle inequalities in well-being.

¹⁹ Until 2021, Roma were not included as an ethnic minority in the Irish census. Travellers also appear to be under-represented in the 2006 Irish Census (Watson *et al.*, 2017). A number of household surveys also do not capture all Travellers and Roma.

Fifth, the NDP Delivery and Reform Unit in the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform has developed a policy analysis tool using Ireland’s WBF. This approach has been piloted in relation to policies affecting older people and children. It asks policy-makers to describe how existing public policy is focused on progressing well-being, the resources and services used to do this, and the effectiveness of these measures. This process will inform discussion on further development of well-being in policy, the articulation of relevant policy goals, and the identification of appropriate indicators to measure progress. The guidance outlines how variations in well-being for different groups can be assessed for the purposes of policy-making, providing examples of relevant differences by, for example, educational attainment, affluence, family composition, disability and economic status (Kennedy, 2022). However, Kennedy notes that this is early work in a central Department, and therefore needs to be more fully applied by the line departments which work on the relevant policies. Such processes have the potential to help address inequality, although it is not clear yet how this would work in practice. It will take time for the tool to be fully developed and used, and its impact assessed.

Sixth, the Government is also supportive of Departments identifying shared policy goals beyond traditional departmental silos, and of promoting cross-departmental agreements and initiatives. This offers possibilities for supporting cross-departmental initiatives that are focused on addressing inequalities.

Finally, the Irish WBF is supported by a Programme for Government commitment to develop it, and the development of the framework is and has been supported by three key departments – the departments of the Taoiseach; Finance; and Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform. The NDP Delivery and Reform Unit in the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform provides guidance on embedding the WBF into policy-making, and the Well-being Unit in the Department of the Taoiseach chairs the interdepartmental group set up to drive implementation of the WBF across Government. The Cabinet Committee on the Economy and Investment will provide overarching political support for the well-being initiative.

These strengths underpinning the framework could help to orient attention more towards it and the inequalities it reveals, and the necessary actions to address them.

4.6 Insight 5: Enhanced Dialogue Within WBFs has the Potential to Address Inequalities

Well-being approaches aim to view progress through the lens of the lived experience of ordinary people. Some countries have strong requirements on this; for example, Scotland’s Child Poverty Act requires that Ministers consult with people who have experience of living in poverty when writing delivery plans for how to meet child poverty targets. Consultation to develop the Irish WBF provided information on lived experience in the Irish case, and the Government has committed to conversations on well-being at the National Economic Dialogue forum, which is a positive development.

However, the latter is only one occasion for dialogue within the Budget process, and may also provide only an indirect link to the development of policy interventions to address inequalities. Other practices can provide more long-term and direct links. To give an example, a participatory budgeting model used in Tower Hamlets in London allowed local people to take part in a variety of different processes to decide which of a range of possible council services should be supplied to their area. There was also a ‘service speed dating’ event where local steering groups met service providers and negotiated with them to alter the services to suit the preferences of the local area. This led to many of the services being considerably altered for the better (Local Government Association, 2016).

The Irish WBF could usefully develop its dialogue with people on the ground in order to ensure more long-term and direct links with the design of interventions to address inequality.

4.7 Insight 6: WBFs Have the Potential to Integrate a Range of Policy Work at Different Levels of Government

WBFs in a number of countries operate as overarching mechanisms for drawing together a range of government departments and agencies, and work at national and local government level.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires public bodies at the national and local level to set and publish objectives to show how they will achieve the seven Welsh well-being goals. These organisations must also use five ‘ways of working’ to meet these goals.²⁰ This ensures that there is a common set of objectives and processes to link their work in the area of well-being (McGauran & Kennedy, 2022).

In Scotland, local authorities and health boards are required to jointly publish annual reports on their actions to reduce child poverty in their local areas. These reports link to the national objectives and indicators on reducing child poverty (McGauran & Kennedy, 2022).

A WBF offers the potential for such integrated work in Ireland. This could operate in a number of ways. For example, it could help align priorities of government policy across a range of sectors and governmental levels, as in Wales.

It could help to promote integrated design of programmes, or integrate a range of funding streams which go to one area, or one group. Some work is already underway in this regard in Ireland, with, for example, four pilot programmes to develop local child poverty action plans, led by a local Children and Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) in co-operation with their corresponding Local Community Development Committees (LCDC) (DCEDIY, 2021).

Another option is that using a WBF as an overarching, integrative mechanism could help ensure that funding allocations are more multidimensional and promote several dimensions of well-being. For example, allocation of funding for school construction would automatically trigger discussion and potential allocation of funding for sports facilities, to help promote good health for students.

In the Irish context, a Programme for Government commitment, with aligned Statements of Strategy, could offer an opportunity to align a range of policies with a number of well-being priorities. The National Planning Framework is another overarching mechanism that could offer some opportunities for mainstreaming well-being priorities.

However, it has to be borne in mind that work to make a new framework align [or align with] all existing frameworks would be extensive. Both Wales and Scotland passed new legislation to assist with the implementation of their well-being frameworks. From the Welsh example, it is clear that aligning all government work around national priorities requires significant resources; in that case, involving the input of staff from the Future Generations Commission. The auditor general and parliaments in each country are also involved. In Scotland, more integrated government work has been made possible by the abolition of the government departmental structure, with the role of Ministers redefined to emphasise collective decision-making (Elvidge, 2012).

However, such a top-down approach, with national-level goals setting the policy agenda for improving well-being, is just one way of improving well-being in public policy. A bottom-up approach that helps to inform an holistic approach to policy analysis and design, and their implementation, and with a focus on equality, also offers opportunities. A combination of both may be particularly effective.

²⁰ See <https://wcva.cymru/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Ways-of-Working-of-The-Well-being-of-Future-Generations-Wales-Act-2015.pdf> [accessed 23/05/23].

4.8 Insight 7: WBFs Can Help Put a Focus on Key Inequality Goals by Working Towards and Monitoring Specific Targets

Ireland has an overall vision for its WBF, and 11 well-being dimensions that are measured over time. A key area where other countries have gone further than Ireland is the agreement of national goals or milestones for well-being in the framework. This reflects the fact that these countries have been working on the development of WBFs longer than Ireland has.

A number of these goals are specifically focused on addressing inequality. For example, after Wales agreed on its national well-being outcomes (or dimensions as referred to in Ireland and by the OECD), it went on to develop specific national milestones, including the following goals that are to be met by 2050:

- eliminate the gap in well-being between the most and least deprived areas by 2050;

- narrow the gap in healthy life expectancy between the least and most deprived by 15 per cent;

- the percentage of working age adults with no qualifications will be 5% or below in every local authority in Wales by 2050; and

- eliminate gender, disability and ethnicity pay gaps.²¹

Although these are challenging goals to work towards, the existence of such goals is likely to focus policy work on reaching them. In Wales, considerable resources, specifically in the form of the Future Generations Commissioner, whose office has approximately 30 staff, is now working to monitor and hold organisations to account in relation to progress towards achieving national goals.²²

Chapter 2 of this report noted the range of legislation and plans, institutions and ways of working that help Ireland promote equality and tackle inequality. There is a strong case to look further at how inequality targets within a WBF, combined with the institutional ability to monitor these in an accountable way, could be used to co-ordinate and drive that ongoing work. This could also help to prioritise the many aims of a WBF, which may assist in its implementation and its ability to address inequalities.

4.9 Insight 8: WBFs that Incorporate ‘Hard’ and ‘Soft’ Tools May Have a Lasting Impact on Well-being and Inequality

The processes and policy approaches typically used by governments to promote equality and tackle inequality were outlined in Chapter 2 of this report. These processes include legally binding commitments; tailored interventions; sanctions; ‘name and shame’ reporting; high-level political and administrative support; dedicated funding and personnel; data on and analysis of inequalities; analytical tools; and dialogue. In parallel, macro-policy approaches focus on changing patterns of pre-distribution, redistribution and production in order to tackle inequalities in these areas.

The early stages of developing a WBF, building shared consensus and understanding and agreeing a workable framework, tend to rely on and require strong political leadership. However, the nature of the work in these early stages tends not to require that many ‘hard’ tools.

²¹ See <https://www.gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-national-indicators-2021-html> [accessed 11/04/23].

²² A Commission for Future Generations Bill 2023 has been introduced in the Dáil, drawing on the Welsh approach and aiming for discussion of a body that would have a role in advising, assisting and overseeing Government bodies in relation to the dimensions of Ireland’s WBF. See <https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/bill/2023/8/eng/initiated/b0823d.pdf> [accessed 11/04/23].

As work advances in implanting the WBF into mainstream policy, with monitoring, review and full integration into decision-making, 'harder' tools may be useful, although their impact depends on the context and political will behind them. Harder tools would include political or some form of independent oversight; legislation with binding commitments; strong monitoring and review processes; dedicated funding and personnel; and comprehensive application to national budgets and decision-making.

The experience of different approaches used in Iceland, New Zealand, Bhutan and Wales suggests that WBFs with strong political involvement, legislative underpinning, regular independent monitoring and review, and independent accountability measures to ensure that they influence budgeting and other national decisions, may be better able to incorporate well-being concerns into decision-making.

These processes are similar to some of those outlined in Chapter 2 as being used by governments to promote equality and address inequalities, such as legally binding commitments, 'name and shame' reporting, and dedicated funding and personnel. Where such 'hard' tools are in place, it is possible that WBFs have more potential to change some patterns of redistribution, pre-distribution and production, which would help address inequalities. The new Child Poverty and Wellbeing Programme Office being established in the Department of the Taoiseach will provide a model of enhancing accountability and coherence for actions to address child poverty and well-being across government; this will include bringing together 'hard' and 'soft' methods of improving child well-being.

Without this mix of processes, it seems that WBFs could fail to reach their full potential (Birkjær *et al.*, 2021). They are likely to still be valuable as complements to other harder interventions, however, given their ability to raise awareness of equality and well-being issues, and how to address them.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The Nordic Council of Ministers notes that only one-quarter of the WBFs which they reviewed had advanced to using WBFs in policy-making decisions (Birkjær *et al.*, 2021).

Ireland's development of its WBF is at an early stage, compared with a number of other countries. Nonetheless, this report shows that significant progress has been achieved and that in many respects the Irish WBF mirrors international WBFs when it comes to its ability to identify and address inequalities.

The Irish WBF has a range of strengths, particularly for identifying inequalities, and is backed by powerful Government Departments and a Cabinet committee.

Through the use of new indicators, and the intention to address gaps in indicators over time, Ireland's WBF is helping to identify inequalities and also make them more visible. Some new working methods have been put in place to help this data become part of Budget discussions. The work on the WBF is also helping to develop shared consensus and understanding on well-being in Ireland and how to promote it.

This report has identified eight key lessons which can help to shape the next stages in the evolution of Irish work on developing a well-being framework.

The report also pinpoints areas where further work would be useful. These include:

- examining gaps in the data needed to help the WBF identify inequalities, such as breakdowns by groups affected;

- identifying gaps in areas that are relatively new to measurement, such as the impacts of current development on the environment;

- considering how inequality goals can be supported by working towards and monitoring specific targets; and

- considering whether WBFs that incorporate 'hard' and 'soft' tools have a longer-lasting impact on well-being and inequality.

This report and the lessons it contains are designed to stimulate discussion and action on how the WBF can become more embedded into policy and decision-making by moving further along the four stages seen in countries that are more advanced in this process (McGauran & Kennedy, 2022).

Bibliography

- Amaglobeli, D. & Thevenot, C. (2022), 'Tackling inequality on all fronts', *Finance & Development*, March.
- Anand, P. (2021), 'Wellbeing in Public Policy: Contributions Based on Sen's Capability Approach', *LSE Public Policy Review*, DOI. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.31389/lseppr.49> [accessed 11/04/23].
- Bennett, L. (2018), 'Government's families package takes effect today: More more cash for families', *New Zealand Herald*, 30 June. Available from: <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/governments-families-package-takes-effect-today-more-cash-for-families/HGXZCJM6EUQLIYMF6EKHN EYJXU/> [accessed 11/04/23].
- Betley, E.C., Sigouin, A., Pascua, P., Cheng, S.H., MacDonald, K.I., Aregno, F., Aumeeruddy-Thomas, Y., Caillon, S., Issac, M.E., Jupiter, S.D., Mawyer, A., Mejia, M., Moore, A.C., Renard, D., Sebastien, L., Gazit, N. & Sterling, E.J. (2021), 'Assessing Human Well-Being Constructs with Environmental and Equity Aspects: A Review of the Landscape', *People and Nature*, DOI. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10293> [accessed 11/04/23].
- Birkjær, M., Gæmderinger, A. & El-Abd, S. (2021), *Towards a Nordic Well-Being Economy*, Analysis No. 02/21, Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Blanchet, T., Chancel, L. & Gethin, A. (2022), 'Why is Europe more equal than the United States?', *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 14(4): 480-518.
- Bolte, G., Tamburlini, G. & Kohlhuber, M. (2010), 'Environmental inequalities among children in Europe – Evaluation of scientific evidence and policy implications', *European Journal of Public Health*, 20(1): 14-20.
- Bourguignon, F. (2004), *The Poverty-Growth-Inequality Triangle*, Paris: The World Bank.
- Braçe, O., Garrido-Cumbrera, M., Foley, R., Correa-Fernández, J., Suárez-Cáceres, G. & Laforteza, R. (2020), 'Is a view of green spaces from home associated with a lower risk of anxiety and depression?', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(19): 7014.
- Brandt, N., Exton, C. & Fleischer, L. (2022), *Well-Being at the Heart of Policy: Lessons from National Initiatives Around the OECD*, Basic Papers No. 01, Berlin: Forum for a New Economy.
- Brennan, M. & Buckley, F. (2017), 'The Irish legislative gender quota: The first election', *Administration*, 65(2): 15-35.
- Brueckner, M. & Lederman, D. (2018), *Inequality and Economic Growth: The Role of Initial Income*, Policy Research Working Paper 8467, Washington, DC: World Bank Group.
- Byrne, D., Doris, A., Sweetman, O., Casey, R. & Raffae, D. (2013), *An Evaluation of the HEAR and DARE Supplementary Admission Routes to Higher Education*, Maynooth: National University of Ireland, Maynooth.
- Cairney, P., Keating, M., Kippin, S. & St. Denny, E. (2022), *Public Policy to Reduce Inequalities Across Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cassidy, M., Strobl, E. & Thornton, R. (2002), 'Gender Pay Differentials and Equality Legislation in the Republic of Ireland', *Canadian Public Policy*, DOI. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3552349> [accessed 11/04/23].
- CIB (undated), 'Equality in the workplace' [online]. Available from: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/equality_in_work/equality_in_the_workplace.html [accessed 11/04/23].
- Cingano, F. (2014), *Trends in Income Inequality and its Impact on Economic Growth*, Working Papers No. 163, Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Citizens' Assembly (2023), *Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss*, Dublin: Citizens' Assembly.
- Commission on Taxation and Social Welfare (2022), *Foundations for the Future*, Department of Finance, Dublin: Government of Ireland.
- Cooke, H. (2019), 'Donation scheme: Nine in 10 eligible schools sign up to scrap school donations next year', *Stuff*, 18 November. Available from: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/117507639/donation-scheme-nine-in-ten-eligible-schools-sign-up-to-scrap-school-donations-next-year> [accessed 11/04/23].
- Cornwall, A. & Brock, K. (2005), 'What do buzzwords do for development policy? A critical look at "participation", "empowerment" and "poverty reduction"', *Third World Quarterly*, 26(7): 1043-1060.

- CSO (2020), *Equality Data Audit* [online]. Available from: <https://www.cso.ie/en/methods/methodologicalresearch/rp-eda/equalitydataaudit2020/> [accessed 10/03/23].
- CSO (2022), 'Well-being Information Hub' [online]. Available from: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/hubs/p-wbhub/well-beinginformationhub/> [accessed 25.05.22].
- CSO (2023), *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022* [online]. Available from: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2022/> [accessed 20/03/23].
- CSO (undated), *CSO Statement of Strategy 2020–2023* [online]. Available from: https://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/corporatepublications/CSO_Statement_of_Strategy_2020-2023.pdf [accessed 11/04/23].
- Dang, A.T. (2014), 'Amartya Sen's Capability Approach: A Framework for Well-Being Evaluation and Policy Analysis?', *Review of Social Economy*, 72(4): 460-484.
- DCEDIY (2021), *EU Child Guarantee: Ireland's National Action Plan*, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Dublin: Government of Ireland.
- DCYA (2014), *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020*, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Dublin: Government of Ireland.
- DCYA (2018), *Mid-term Review of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020*, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Dublin: Government of Ireland.
- DECC (2020), *National Just Transition Fund* [online]. Available from: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/e-d10d-just-transition-fund/> [accessed 11/04/23].
- Dervis, K. & Kureshi, Z. (2016), *Income Distribution Within Countries: Rising Inequality*, Washington DC: Brookings Institute.
- DoF (2022), *Sustainability in the Irish Well-being Framework: A Review*, Dublin: Department of Finance.
- Dorling, D. (2017), 'The Equality Effect' [online]. Available from: <https://newint.org/features/2017/07/01/equality-effect> [accessed 13/04/23].
- Durand, M. & Exton, C. (2019), *Adopting a Well-Being Approach in Central Government: Policy Mechanisms and Practical Tools*, Global Happiness and Well-Being Report, Worldwide: Global Happiness Council.
- Elvidge, J. (2012), *Civil Service Reform*, Written evidence submitted, London: UK Parliament.
- Equality and Human Rights Commission UK (undated), 'Understanding equality' [online]. Available from: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/secondary-education-resources/useful-information/understanding-equality> [accessed 20/03/23].
- Exton, C. & Shinwell, M. (2018), 'Policy use of well-being metrics: Describing countries' experiences', SDD Working Paper No. 94, Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Fahie, D. (2016), "'Spectacularly exposed and vulnerable" – How Irish equality legislation subverted the personal and professional security of lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers', *Sexualities*, 19(4): 393-411.
- FoE (2023), *Still Left out in the Cold*, Dublin: Friends of the Earth Ireland.
- Friedman, R.S., Law, E.A., Bennett, N.J., Ives, C.D., Thorn, J.P.R. & Wilson, K.A. (2018), 'How just and just how? A systematic review of social equity in conservation research', *Environmental Research Letters*, 13(5).
- Glasgow Centre for Population Health (2011), *Focus on inequalities: a framework for action*, Briefing Paper 30, Glasgow: Glasgow Centre for Population Health.
- Gould, E.D. & Hijzen, A. (2016), *Growing Apart, Losing Trust? The Impact of Inequality on Social Capital*, Working Paper WP/16/176: International Monetary Fund.
- Government of Ireland (2020), *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*, Dublin: Department of the Taoiseach.
- Government of Ireland (2021), *First Report on a Well-being Framework for Ireland*, Dublin: Department of the Taoiseach.
- Government of Ireland (2022a), *Understanding Life in Ireland: The Well-being Dashboard 2022*, Dublin: Department of the Taoiseach.

- Government of Ireland (2022b), *Understanding Life in Ireland: A Well-Being Framework*, Dublin: Department of the Taoiseach.
- Gross National Happiness Commission (2010), 'Gross National Happiness Policy Screening Tools', Health, Wellbeing, and HIA: Working better, working smarter, 3rd Asia and Pacific Regional Health Impact Assessment Conference, Dunedin, New Zealand: International Associations for Impact Assessment.
- Guzman, V., Garrido-Cumbrera, M., Braçe, O., Hewlett, D. & Foley, R. (2020), 'Health and wellbeing under COVID-19: The GreenCOVID survey', *Irish Geography*, 53(2).
- Nicol, S. & Guven, P. (2021), *OECD scan of equality budgeting in Ireland: Equality mainstreaming and inclusive policy making in action*, Public Governance Directorate, Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Head, B.W. (2022), *Wicked Problems in Public Policy: Understanding and Responding to Complex Challenges*, London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Hennessy, O. & McGauran, A.M. (2021), *The Impacts of Covid-19 on Ethnic Minority and Migrant Groups in Ireland*, Research Series Paper No. 18, Dublin: National Economic and Social Council.
- Holler, R. & Tarshish, N. (2022), 'Administrative Burden in Citizen-State Encounters: The Role of Waiting, Communication Breakdowns and Administrative Errors', *Social Policy and Society*. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S147474642000355> [accessed 11/04/23].
- Houses of the Oireachtas (2020), *DARE HEAR Summary Report 2020* [online]. Available from: https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2021-07-13_pg512-13-07-21_en.pdf [accessed 13/04/23].
- Houses of the Oireachtas (2022), 'Dáil Éireann Debate: Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2021: Second Stage [Private Members]' [online]. Available from: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2023-02-23/42/> [accessed 13/04/23].
- IHREC (2023), *The Incorporation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights into the Irish Constitution* [online]. Available from: <https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2023/02/The-Incorporation-of-Economic-Social-and-Cultural-Rights-into-the-Irish-Constitution.pdf> [accessed 13/04/23].
- IHREC (undated), 'Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty' [online]. Available from: <https://www.ihrec.ie/our-work/public-sector-duty/> [accessed 13/04/23].
- Institut National de Santé Publique & National Collaborating Center for Healthy Public Policy (2016), *Policy Approaches to Reducing Health Inequalities*, Briefing Note, Quebec: Institut National de Santé Publique.
- Irish Universities Association (2017), 'DARE-HEAR Facts and Figures', Working Paper, Dublin: Irish Universities Association. Available from: <http://mobilitytoolkit.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/DARE-HEAR-Facts-and-Figures-2017-1.pdf> [accessed 13/04/23].
- Jenkins, M. (2016), 'Reasons to be cautious about "well-being" in economic development (and elsewhere)', *International Journal of Happiness and Development*, 3(3): 108-124.
- Jensen, K. & Thompson, C. (2020), 'Valuing Impacts: the contribution of CBAX to improved policy practices', *Policy Quarterly*, 16(1): 67-76.
- Johnston, H. (2017), 'Poverty proofing – An evolutionary process towards poverty reduction', *Administration*, 65(3): 123-139.
- Kadar, T. (2016), 'An Analysis of the Introduction of Socio-Economic Status as a Discrimination Ground', Working Paper, Dublin: Equality & Rights Alliance.
- Kennedy, F. (2022), 'Well-being and Public Policy: Utilising a well-being perspective to inform public policy', WPPU Working Paper No. 1, Dublin: Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.
- Khan, M.A., Khan, M.Z., Zaman, K., Hassan, U. & Umar, S. (2014), 'Global estimates of growth–inequality–poverty (GIP) triangle: evidence from World Bank's classification countries', *Quality & Quantity*, 48: 2631–2646.
- Lama, K.P. & Dorji, S.T. (2017), 'Gross National Happiness and SCP in Bhutan' in Schroeder, P., Anggraeni, K., Sartori, S., Weber, U., (eds), *Sustainable Asia: Supporting the Transition to Sustainable Consumption and Production in Asian Developing Countries*, New Jersey: World Scientific Publishing, pp. 133-162.

- Laurence, J., Kelly, E., McGinnity, F. & Curristan, S. (2023), *Wages and Working Conditions of Non-Irish Nationals in Ireland*, Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.
- Local Government Association (2016), 'Tower Hamlets, "You Decide!"' [online]. Available from: <https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/tower-hamlets-you-decide> [accessed 13/04/23].
- Logue, C. & Callan, T. (2016), *Low Pay, Minimum Wages and Household Incomes: Evidence for Ireland*, Budget Perspectives 2017, Paper No.3, Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.
- Maguire, P. (2023), 'Public health reform taking off - but success depends on State tackling inequality', *The Journal.ie*, 3 January. Available from: <https://www.thejournal.ie/system-overload-targets-5952222-Jan2023/> [accessed 11/04/23].
- Maître, B., Russell, H. & Smyth, E. (2021), *The dynamics of child poverty in Ireland: Evidence from the Growing Up in Ireland survey*, ESRI Research Series 121, Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.
- Marmot, M. (2013), 'Universal health coverage and social determinants of health', *The Lancet*, 382(9900): 1227-1228.
- McEvelly, J. (2020), *The Role of Public Bodies in Driving Ireland's Decarbonisation*, Dublin: Friends of the Earth Ireland.
- McGauran, A.M. & Hennessy, O. (2021), *Gender and Covid-19 in Ireland*, Research Series Paper No. 21, Dublin: National Economic and Social Council.
- McGauran, A.M. & Kennedy, E. (2022), *Towards Transformative Outcomes: Examples of how Well-being Frameworks have been Embedded into Policy Making*, Secretariat Paper No. 30, Dublin: National Economic and Social Council.
- Moss, J. (2015), 'How to Value Equality', *Philosophy Compass*, 10(3): 187-196.
- Mowat, J.G. (2019), 'Exploring the impact of social inequality and poverty on the mental health and wellbeing and attainment of children and young people in Scotland', *Improving Schools*, 22(3): 204-223.
- Naidoo, Y. (2019), 'A Multi-Dimensional Individual Well-Being Framework: With an Application to Older Australians', *Social Indicators Research*, 146: 581-608.
- Narayan, D. (2000), 'Poverty Is Powerlessness and Voicelessness', *Finance & Development: A quarterly magazine of the IMF*, 37(4).
- NESC (2005), *The Developmental Welfare State*, Report No. 113, Dublin: National Economic and Social Council.
- NESC (2021), *Ireland's Well-Being Framework: Consultation Report*, Report No. 155, Dublin: National Economic and Social Council.
- New Zealand Government (undated), 'Fees, Charges and Donations' [online]. Available from: <https://www.education.govt.nz/school/funding-and-financials/fees-charges-and-donations/#:~:text=Minister%20of%20Education,-.What%20is%20the%20donation%20scheme%3F,donations%2C%20except%20for%20overnight%20camps> [accessed 10.06.22].
- NYCI (undated), 'What is equality?' [online]. Available from: <https://www.youth.ie/articles/what-is-equality/> [accessed 20/03/23].
- O'Mahony, T. (2022), 'Towards Sustainable Wellbeing: Advances in Contemporary Concepts', *Frontiers in Sustainability*, 3: 1-17.
- O'Neill, S., Gleeson, C., Torney, D., Mercier, S., Daly, C. & Wall, R. (2022), *Environmental Justice in Ireland: Key Dimensions of Environmental and Climate Injustice Experienced by Vulnerable and Marginalised Communities*, Community Law and Mediation Centre, Dublin: Dublin City University.
- OECD (2011), *How's Life? Measuring Well-Being*, Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2013), *Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*, Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2014), *Shifting Gear: Policy Challenges for the next 50 Years*, Economics Department Policy Notes, Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2019), *Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development 2019: Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality*, Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2020), *How's Life? 2020: Measuring Well-being*, Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2021a), *Government at a Glance 2021: Country Fact Sheet: Ireland*, Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD (2021b), *How's Life in Latin America? Measuring Well-Being for Policy Making*, Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Oxfam (2014), *Working for the Few: Political Capture and Economic Inequality*, Briefing Paper 178, Oxford, UK: Oxfam International.

- Ozonas Marcos, M. (2020), 'How to Integrate a Gender Perspective Into Well-Being Budgeting Practices: Insights From a Comparative Case Study Between Bhutan and New Zealand', *Feminismo/s*, 35: 29-61.
- Palma, J.G. (2019), 'How does Europe still manage to achieve a relatively low and fairly homogeneous level of inequality in spite of a broad diversity of fundamentals?' in Sweeney, R. and Wilson, R. (eds), *Cherishing All Equally 2019: Inequality in Europe and Ireland*, Dublin: TASC, pp. 19-46.
- PCE (2021), *Wellbeing budgets and the environment: A promised land?* Wellington: Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment of New Zealand.
- Peterson, E.W.F. (2017), 'Is Economic Inequality Really a Problem? A Review of the Arguments', *Social Sciences*, 6(4): 1-25.
- Pybus, K. (2022), 'Income inequality, status consumption and status anxiety: An exploratory review of implications for sustainability and directions for future research', *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 6(1): 100353.
- Reeskens, T. & Van Oorschot, W. (2013), 'Equity, equality, or need? A study of popular preferences for welfare redistribution principles across 24 European countries', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20(8): 1174-1195.
- Ritter, M. & Solt, F. (2019), 'Economic Inequality and Campaign Participation', *Social Science Quarterly*, 100(3): 678-688.
- Roche, W.K., O'Connell, P.J. & Prothero, A. (2016), 'Introduction "Poster Child" or "Beautiful Freak" Austerity and Recovery in Ireland' in Roche, W.K., O'Connell, P.J. and Prothero, A. (eds), *Austerity & Recovery in Ireland: Europe's Poster Child and the Great Recession*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-22.
- Rodrik, D. & Stantcheva, S. (2021), 'A Policy Matrix for Inclusive Prosperity', Working Paper 28736, Cambridge, Massachusetts: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Safarov, N. (2023), 'Administrative Literacy in the Digital Welfare State: Migrants Navigating Access to Public Services in Finland', *Social Policy and Society*. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746422000719> [accessed 11/04/23].
- Simos, J., Spanswick, L., Palmer, N. & Christie, D. (2015), 'The role of health impact assessment in phase V of the healthy cities European network', *Health Promotion International*, 30(1): i71-i85.
- Social Justice Ireland (2009), *Beyond GDP: What is Prosperity and How Should it be Measured?* Dublin: Social Justice Ireland.
- Solt, F. (2010), 'Does Economic Equality Depress Electoral Participation? Testing the Schattschneider Hypothesis', *Political Behavior*, 32(2): 285-301.
- Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2021), 'Equality' [online]. Available from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/equality/> [accessed 04/05/23].
- Stiglitz, K., Sen, A. & Fitoussi, J.P. (2009), *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*, Paris: European Commission.
- Stone, D. (2001), *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, London: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Sweeney, R. (2019), 'Irish social and economic trends among European countries' in Sweeney, R. and Wilson, R. (eds), *Cherishing All Equally 2019: Inequality in Europe and Ireland*, Dublin: TASC, pp. 73-98.
- Thøgersen, J. (2017), 'Unsustainable Consumption: Basic Causes and Implications for Policy', *European Psychologist*, 19(2): 84-95.
- UN Environment Programme (2018), *Inclusive Wealth Report 2018*, 'Executive Summary', Nairobi, Kenya: United Nations Environment Programme.
- Watson, D., Kenny, O. & McGinnity, F. (2017), *A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland*, Research Series No. 56, Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.
- Weston, C. & Gataveckaite, B. (2022), 'Young people face risk of "substantial" reduction in the amount of money parents can leave to their children tax-free', *Irish Independent*, 12 September. Available from: <https://www.independent.ie/business/personal-finance/young-people-face-risk-of-substantial-reduction-in-the-amount-of-money-parents-can-leave-to-their-children-tax-free-41980900.html> [accessed 11/04/23].
- White, S.C. (2010), 'Analysing well-being: A framework for development practice', *Development in Practice*, 20(2): 158-172.
- Wilkinson, R. & Pickett, K. (2009), *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, London: Allen Lane.
- Wilson, L. (2021), *The Gender Pay Gap in the Republic of Ireland*, Report Series No. 5, Dublin: Nevin Economic Research Institute.
- World Inequality Lab (2022), *World Inequality Report 2022* [online]. Available from: <https://wir2022.wid.world/executive-summary/> [accessed 11/04/23].

Publications

Council Reports					
No.	Title	Year	No.	Title	Year
1	Report on the Economy in 1973 and the Prospects for 1974	1974	14.	Population Projects 1971-86: The Implications for Social Planning—Dwelling Needs	1976
2	Comments on Capital Taxation Proposals	1974	15.	The Taxation of Farming Profits	1976
3	The Economy in 1974 and Outlook for 1975	1974	16.	Some Aspects of Finance for Owner-Occupied Housing	1976
4	Regional Policy in Ireland: A Review	1975	17.	Statistics for Social Policy	1976
5	Population and Employment Projections: 1971-86	1975	18.	Population Projections 1973-86: The Implications for Education	1976
6	Comments on the OECD Report on Manpower Policy in Ireland	1975	19.	Rural Areas: Social Planning Problems	1976
7.	Jobs and Living Standards: Projects and Implications	1975	20.	The Future of Public Expenditure	1976
8.	An Approach to Social Policy	1975	21.	Report on Public Expenditure	1976
9.	Report on Inflation	1975	22.	Institutional Arrangements for Regional Economic Development	1976
10.	Causes and Effects of Inflation in Ireland	1975	23.	Report on Housing Subsidies	1976
11.	Income Distribution: A Preliminary Report	1975	24.	A Comparative Study of Output, Value-Added and Growth in Irish and Dutch Agriculture	1976
12.	Education Expenditure in Ireland	1976	25.	Towards a Social Report	1977
13.	Economy in 1975 and Prospects for 1976	1975	26	Prelude to Planning	1976

27	New Farms Operators, 1973 to 1975	1977	42	Report on Policies for Agricultural and Rural Development	1978
28	Service-type Employment and Regional Development	1977	43	Productivity and Management	1978
29	Some Major Issues in Health Policy	1977	44	Comments on Development: Full Employment	1978
30	Personal Incomes by County in 1973	1977	45	Urbanisation and Regional Development in Ireland	1979
31	The Potential for Growth in Irish Tax Revenues	1977	46	Irish Forestry Policy	1979
32	The Work of the NESC 1974 - 1976	1977	47	Alternative Strategies for Family Support Income	1980
33	Comments on Economic and Social Development; 1976 - 1980	1977	48	Transport Policy	1980
34	Alternative Growth Rates in Irish Agriculture	1977	49	Enterprises in the Public Sector	1980
35	Population and Employment Projections 1986: A Reassessment	1977	50	Major Issues in Planning Services for Mentally and Physically Handicapped Persons	1980
36	Universality and Selectivity: Strategies in Social Policy	1978	51	Personal Incomes by Regions: 1977	1980
37	Integrated Approaches to Personal Income Taxes and Transfers	1978	52	Tourism Policy	1980
38	Universality and Selectivity: Social Services in Ireland	1978	53	Economic and Social Policy: Aims and Recommendations	1980
39	The Work of the NESC: 1977	1978	54	The Future of the National Economic and Social Council	1980
40	Policies to Accelerate Agricultural Development	1978	55	Urbanisation: Problems of Growth and Decay in Dublin	1981
41	Rural Areas; Change and Development	1978	56	Industrial Policy and Development: A Survey of Literature for the Early 1960s to the Present	1981

57	Industrial Employment and the Regions, 1960-62	1981	72	Social Welfare: The Implications of Demographic Change	1984
58	The Socio-Economic Position of Ireland within the European Economic Community	1981	73	Health Services: The Implications of Demographic Change	1984
59	The Importance of Infrastructure to Industrial Development in Ireland: Roads, Telecommunications and Water Supplies	1981	74	Irish Energy Policy	1984
60	Minerals Policy	1981	75	Economic and Social Policy 1983: Aims and Recommendations: A Review of Recent Changes for Education, Social Welfare and the Health Services	1984
61	Irish Social Policy: Priorities for Future Development	1981	76	The Role of the Trading Sectors	1984
62	Economic and Social Policy 1981: Aims and Recommendations	1981	77	The Criminal Justice System: Policy and Performance	1985
63	Population and Labour Force Projections by County and Region, 1979–1991	1981	78	Information for Policy	1985
64	A Review of Industrial Policy	1982	79	Economic and Social Policy Assessment	1985
65	Farm Incomes	1982	80	The Financing of Local Authorities	1985
66	Policies for Industrial Development: Conclusions and Recommendations	1982	81	Designation of Areas for Industrial Assessment	1985
67	An Analysis of Jobs and Losses in Irish Manufacturing	1982	82	Manpower Policy in Ireland	1986
68	Social Planning in Ireland: its Purposes and Organisational Change	1983	83	A Strategy for Development 1986–1990	1986
69	Housing Requirements and Population Change; 1981 - 1991	1983	84	Community Care Service: An Overview	1987
70	Economic and Social Policy 1982: Aims and Recommendations	1983	85	Redistribution Through State Social Expenditure in the Republic of Ireland, 1973 - 1980	1988
71	Education: The Implications of Demographic Change	1984	86	The Nature and Functioning of Labour Markets	1988

87	A Review of Housing Policy	1989	102	Population Distribution and Economic Development: Trends and Policy Implications	1997
88	Ireland in the European Community: Performance, Prospects and Strategy	1989	103	Private Sector Investment in Ireland	1998
89	A Strategy for the Nineties: Economic Stability and Structural Change	1990	104	Opportunities, Challenges and Capacities for Choice: Overview, Conclusions and Recommendations	1999
90	The Economic and Social Implications of Emigration	1991	105	Opportunities, Challenges and Capacities for Choice	1999
91	Women's Participation in the Irish Labour Market	1992	106	Review of the Property Proofing Process	2001
92	The Impact of reform of the Common Agricultural Policy	1992	107	Benchmarking the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness	2002
93	The Irish Economy in a Comparative Institutional Perspective	1993	108	National Progress Indicators	2002
94	Association between Economic Growth and Employment	1993	109	Achieving Quality Outcomes: The Management of Public Expenditure	2002
95	Education and Training Policies for Economic and Social Development	1993	110	An Investment in Quality: Services, Inclusion and Enterprise, Overview, Conclusions and Recommendations	2002
96	A Strategy for Competitiveness, Growth and Employment	1993	111	An Investment in Quality: Services, Inclusion and Enterprise	2003
97	New Approaches to Rural Development	1995	112	Housing in Ireland; Performance and Policy	2004
98	Strategy into the 21 st Century: Conclusions and Recommendations	1996	113	The Developmental Welfare State	2005
99	Strategy into the 21 st Century	1996	114	NESC Strategy 2006: People, Productivity and Purpose	2005
100	Networking for Competitiveness Advantage	1996	115	Migration Policy	2006
101	European Union: Integration and Enlargement	1997	116	Managing Migration in Ireland: A Social and Economic Analysis	2006

117	The Irish Economy in the Early 21 st Century	2008	132	Quality and Standards in Human Services in Ireland: Disability Services	2012
118	Ireland's Five-Part Crisis: An Integrated National Response	2009	133	Quality and Standards in Human Services in Ireland : A Synthesis Report	2012
119	Well-Being Matters: A Social Report for Ireland	2009	134	The Social Dimensions of the Crisis: The Evidence and its Implications	2012
120	Next Steps in Addressing Ireland's Five-Part Crisis: Combining Retrenchment with Reform	2009	135	Five-Part Crisis, Five Years On, Deepening Reform and Institutional Innovation	2013
121	The Euro: An Irish Perspective	2010	136	Ireland's Environment Data: Inventory, Assessment and Next Steps	2014
122	Re-finding Success in Europe: the Challenge for Irish Institutions	2010	137	Jobless Households: An Exploration of the Issues	2014
123	Supports and Services for Unemployed Jobseekers: Challenges and Opportunities in a Time of Recession	2011	138	Social Housing at the Crossroads: Possibilities for Investment, Provision and Cost Rental	2014
124	Quality and Standards in Human Services in Ireland: Overview of Concepts and Practices	2011	139	Wind Energy in Ireland: Building Community Engagement and Social Support	2014
125	Promoting Economic Recovery and Employment in Ireland	2012	140	Homeownership and Rental: What Road is Ireland On?	2014
126	Draft Framework for Sustainable Development for Ireland: NESC Response	2012	141	Ireland's Rental Sector: Pathways to Secure Occupancy and Affordable Supply	2015
127	Quality and Standards in Human Services in Ireland; Policing and the Search for Continuous Improvement	2012	142	Housing Supply and Land: Driving Public Action for the Common Good	2015
128	Quality and Standards in Human Services in Ireland: Residential Care for Older People	2012	143	The Dynamics of Environmental Sustainability and Local Development: Aquaculture	2016
129	Quality and Standards in Human Services in Ireland: The School System	2012	144	Moving Towards the Circular Economy in Ireland	2017
130	Quality and Standards in Human Services in Ireland: Home Care for Older People	2012	145	Urban Development Land, Housing and Infrastructure: Fixing Ireland's Broken System	2018
131	Quality and Standards in Human Services in Ireland: End-of-Life Care in Hospitals	2012	146	Moving from Welfare to Work: Low Work Intensity Households and the Quality of Supportive Services	2018

147	Climate-Change Policy: Getting the Process Right	2019	162	Just Transition in Agriculture and Land Use	2023
148	Transport-Orientated Development: Assessing the Opportunity in Ireland	2019	163	Inequality and Well-Being Frameworks	2023
149	Addressing Employment Vulnerability as Part of a Just Transition in Ireland	2020			
150	Housing Policy Actions to Deliver Change	2020			
151	The Future of the Irish Social Welfare System: Participation and Protection	2020			
152	Grounding the Recovery in Sustainable Development: A Statement from the Council	2021			
153	Shared Island: Projects, Progress and Policy Scoping Paper	2021			
154	Digital Inclusion in Ireland: Connectivity, Devices & Skills	2021			
155	Ireland's Well-Being Framework: Consultation Report	2021			
156	Collaboration on Climate and Biodiversity: Shared Island as a Catalyst for Renewed Ambition & Action	2021			
157	Shared Island: Shared Opportunity NESC Comprehensive Report	2022			
158	The Covid-19 Pandemic: Lessons for Irish Public Policy	2022			
159	Private Rental in Ireland	2023			
160	Understanding the Irish Economy in a Time of Turbulence	2023			
161	Social Enterprise on the Island of Ireland	2023			

Secretariat Reports					
No.	Title	Year	No.	Title	Year
1	Ireland's Economic Recovery: An Analysis and Exploration	2011	15	Cost-Benefit Analysis, Environment and Climate Change	2018
2	Understanding PISA and What it Tells us About Educational Standards in Ireland	2012	16	Multistakeholder Agreements in Climate Governance and Energy Transition: The Dutch Energy Agreement	2018
3	Towards a New Climate Change Policy	2012	17	The Framing of Climate Action in Ireland: Strategic Considerations	2019
4	Ireland and the Climate Change Challenge: Connecting 'How Much' with 'How To'. Final Report of the NESC Secretariat	2012	18	Urban Structure, Spatial Planning and Climate Emissions	2019
5	Review of Developments in Banking and Finance	2013	19	The Transition to a Low-Carbon and More Digital Future: Supporting the Needs of Vulnerable Workers and Enterprises	2020
6	Employment and Enterprise Policy	2013	20	Approaches to Transition	2020
7	Greening the Economy: Challenges and Possibilities for Integrating Sustainability into Core Government Policy	2013	21	Shared Island Consultation: Climate and Biodiversity Challenges and Opportunities	2021
8	Activation Policy	2012	22	Community Call: Learning for the Future	2021
9	Consumer Prices	2012	23	Shared Island: Projects, Progress & Policy The Good Jobs Agenda	2021
10	Review of Irish Social and Affordable Housing	2014	24	Housing and Urban Development Policy Priorities	2021
11	Financing of Social Housing in Selected European Countries	2014	25	Shared Island: Projects, Progress & Policy The Island Economy	2021
12	Reflections on Infrastructure Policy and Institutional Developments in the UK	2017	26	Building a New Relationship between Voluntary Organisations and the State in the Health and Social Care Sectors	2021
13	Land Value Capture and Urban Public Transport	2018	27	Shared Island: Projects, Progress & Policy A Regional Perspective on Ireland, North and South	2021
14	International Approaches to Land Use, Housing and Urban Development	2018	28	Shared Island: Projects, Progress & Policy Sharing Knowledge and Lessons in Combatting Poverty	2021

29	Shared Island: Projects, Progress & Policy, A Shared Island Perspective on Mental Health	2022	30	Towards Transformative Outcomes: Examples of how Well-being Frameworks have been Embedded into Policy Making	2022
31	An Opportunity to Review and Reframe Collective Bargaining and the Industrial Relations Regime	2023			

Research Reports					
No.	Title	Year	No.	Title	Year
1	Cluster in Ireland: The Irish Dairy Processing Industry: An Application of Porter's Cluster Analysis	1997	12	Low Work Intensity Households and the Quality of Supportive Services: Detailed Research Report	2018
2	Cluster in Ireland; The Irish Popular Music Industry: An Application of Porter's Cluster Analysis	1997	13	Advancing the Low-Carbon Transition in Irish Transport	2019
3	Cluster in Ireland: The Irish Indigenous Software Industry: An Application of Porter's Cluster Analysis	1997	14	Transport-Orientated Development: Assessing Opportunity for Ireland Background Case Studies	2019
4	Profit Sharing Employee Share, Ownership and Gainsharing: What can they Achieve?	2000	15	Four Case Studies on Just Transition: Issues for Ireland	2020
5	Sustaining Competitiveness Advantage: Proceedings of NESC Seminar	1998	16	Modelling the Zero-Carbon Transition: International Approaches and Lessons for Ireland	2020
6	Ireland's Child Income Supports: The Case for a New Form of Targeting	2007	17	Energy Transition Pathways and the COVID-19 Pandemic; An analysis of the 'green recovery' responses in Denmark and Ireland	2020
7	State of Play Review of Environmental Policy Integration Literature	2015	18	The Impacts of COVID-19 in Ethnic Minority and Migrant Groups in Ireland	2021
8	Socially Integrated Housing and Sustainable Urban Communities: Case Studies from Dublin	2016	19	Economic Resilience in Sustainable Communities: Innovative Approaches in Public Spending to Maximise Local Benefits	2021
9	The Burren Life Programme; An Overview	2016	20	Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Ireland and the Agricultural Sector	2021
10	Nature's Values; From Intrinsic to instrumental	2017	21	Gender and COVID-19 in Ireland	2021
11	Valuing Nature; Perspectives and Issues	2017	22	Building Long-Term Resilient and Sustainable Cities	2021

23	Perspectives on Micro-Generation: Public Participation in the Low-Carbon Transition in Ireland (MISTRAL)	2021	
24	Exploring Place-based Opportunities for Policy and Practice in Transition	2022	
25	Exploring Shared Opportunities in the North West: Findings from Focus Groups	2023	



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Council

National Economic & Social Council

Parnell Square +353.1.814.6300
Dublin 1 info@nesc.ie
D01 E7C1 nesc.ie