



Sinn Féin

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Introduction

Sinn Féin welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on Multiple Deprivation Measures (MDM). Such measures are necessary in order to identify deprivation, inequality, poverty and need which should, in turn, inform policy making. The measuring and tracking of multiple deprivation over time is essential in order to measure policy outcomes. If policies are successful a reduction in levels of deprivation should be apparent.

Thus multiple deprivation measures cannot be operated in isolation and need to be viewed in tandem with equality legislation, policies such as NTSN, an anti-poverty strategy, a fuel poverty strategy etc. There also needs to be clear linkages between departments, and a consistency and standardisation in the approach to tackling objective need, deprivation, inequality and poverty. Indicators of multiple deprivation will inform departments where they need to skew resources on the basis of objective need and in line with their statutory equality requirements.

All-Ireland Deprivation Indicators

It is disappointing and in clear breach of the letter and spirit of the Good Friday Agreement to note the absence of all-Ireland deprivation indicators in this consultation. Partition has had a detrimental effect on economic growth and wealth creation on the island of Ireland. Inequality, poverty and deprivation throughout Ireland requires urgent and immediate attention. In line with the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement, therefore, this should come under the auspices of the All-Ireland Ministerial Council.

Therefore deprivation indicators which will provide the basis for cross-border comparability should be adopted. In particular, there is a need to produce all-Ireland statistics which will dovetail into those proposed under the current index for the six counties. This task becomes more significant due to the developmental role likely to be adopted by the three cross-border Corridor Groups (ICBAN, NWRCG and EBRG) which have the responsibility to produce three Integrated Area Plans under the EU Structural Programmes. In order to be effective, combating deprivation and poverty must be tackled on an all-Ireland basis.

As such, a core element in the production of any new index of deprivation in the north of Ireland is that they are translatable into those available in the south of Ireland. A first step to pursue this would be to obtain copies of the cross-border poverty index produced on behalf of ADM/CPA and NIVT (now CFNI) in 2000.

General Comments

- While the ranking of wards from most to least deprived is a useful tool it does pose a problem for areas that are just above the threshold. An example of this is the designation of Urban Regeneration Areas being defined as the 10% of wards with the highest deprivation scores.
- It should be recognised that spatially-based measures of deprivation are limited in that not all of those who live in disadvantaged areas are themselves disadvantaged, and not all disadvantaged people live in disadvantaged areas. At risk individuals and households can exist right across the north of Ireland. Their needs must be catered for whether they live in high or low concentration areas.

- Concerns that the categorisation of urban wards under Noble ‘favoured’ the attribution of disadvantage to urban as opposed to rural areas should be addressed. In the shift from Robson to Noble a trend was identified in terms of perceived rural ward improvement as a result of the choice of statistical indicators. It has been noted that such “dramatic improvement in areas such as Fermanagh, Dungannon and Cookstown may have more to do with statistics than reality. Noble’s exclusion of some of the indicator s used by Robson, such as lack of public sewerage, may partly account for this shift”.¹

Domains and Weighting

With the exception of crime, the domains identified are generally acceptable and broadly similar to those already in place. The inclusion of a wealth domain, which would measure net personal asset values in an area, should be considered for future measurements.

The mathematical treatment of domain scores is generally acceptable as are the normalisation of data, ranking and application of the exponential function. The weighting of individual indicators within the domain measures needs to be approached in a strictly objective and rigorous fashion in order to reduce any risk of bias.

Weak Community Infrastructure

Sinn Féin is of the view that a new domain of Weak Community Infrastructure should not be included in the MDM. It is not a recognised measure of deprivation and where it is being used in the roll-out of the Local Community Fund it is being done in the absence of sufficient and robust evidence based outcomes and it has been used as a means of skewing resources in contravention of equality requirements and NTSN considerations. Indeed research has not even been completed on the criteria of Weak Community Infrastructure yet Round II of the fund is already underway.

Income Deprivation

- A problem with measuring the number of people living in families in receipt of a means-tested benefit is that it does not take account of low-income individuals not in receipt of a means-tested benefit, including those that may be entitled to a benefit but who do not take it for whatever reason. If such individuals are distributed unevenly across the north this could distort indicator scores.
- There is a concern that the inclusion of numbers of children living in houses in receipt of income support, JSA (IB), or Disability Working Allowance as opposed to two measures of adults and children alone might prejudice the capture of the full effect of income poverty on both children and adults. It is essential that these measures get a higher rating to ensure that these factors are not lowered relative to the old measure.
- The updating of the measures to include reference to Working Family Tax Credit is welcome. Further, the impact of changes to Working Tax Credit and Children’s Tax credit needs to be taken into account regarding plans to update this measure.

¹ See Research Paper 02/02: Measures of Deprivation: Noble V Robson (Dr Robert Barry) January 2002.

The adoption of this benefit on the basis of a 60% income threshold as will ensure a sharper picture of income than the benefit generally.

- The inclusion of those groups not ‘captured’ by inclusion on these benefits but who are in households in receipt of housing benefit or rate rebate is to be welcomed.
- We agree with the production of two measures focussing on Children and Older People Income Measures which should result in more defined policies in regard to these two groups.

Employment Deprivation

- The indicators should also include duration of unemployment with a particular focus on the long Term Unemployed (LTU).
- There should be measurement of the ‘hidden unemployed’, that is people who are not working but who are not on any benefits. This could be, for example, the numerous women who are currently excluded from the labour force but fall into the category of ‘stay-at-home’ mothers.
- People who are carers for elderly or sick relatives suffer involuntary exclusion from the world of work. Very often they suffer from poverty and social exclusion. This category should be included as an indicator.
- Research into proxy measures for hidden unemployment should be undertaken. NIERC have carried out a number of studies which provided mechanisms for estimating the hidden unemployment levels. It would then be useful if a proxy measure for ‘hidden’ unemployment be utilised and built into the Employment Domain measure.

Health Deprivation and Disability

- The changes in this domain are generally acceptable. However we believe that two indicators should be retained - people registered as having cancer and the proportion of all 12-17 years olds with extractions and registration or non-registration with a dentist.
- An indicator should be constructed for emergency admissions to Mental Health Hospitals, including voluntary and those under the Mental Health Order.

Education, Skills and Training Deprivation

- The widening of the indicator on exclusion from Further Education to those aged 17-20 is welcomed.
- We do not agree with the restriction of the indicator measuring proportions of adults with no or low levels of qualifications to those aged below 60. Adult educational disadvantage should include all adults, irrespective of age. Furthermore, two measures are conflated here – those with no education and those with low education. These should be separated as we are dealing with two different aspects of adult educational disadvantage.
- We welcome the adoption of sub-domains for youth and adult educational deprivation as this will allow more specific direction of policy and resources.
- We feel that the application of equal weighting to both youth and adult educational disadvantage is the correct approach.

Geographical Access to Services

- Given the sectarian nature of the state in the north of Ireland and the resultant sectarian geography it is not practical to have a geographical access to services domain based primarily on distance. The domain needs to reflect provision of and access to services rather than distance as additional factors other than distance can determine how long it takes to access a service. Examples of this are North Belfast, the Short Strand in East Belfast and nationalist residents of the Garvaghy Road in Portadown. In all these areas people live in close spatial proximity to services but do not feel safe in accessing them so therefore have to travel further to access similar services. A more accurate indicator would be average travel times. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation already incorporates this measurement.
- The public services included in the previous domains should remain in the new proposals.
- It is not clear that all areas can equally access public services, for example, in some areas dentists are no longer taking on new clients from the NHS. Is it possible to estimate the numbers of people who are excluded from dental treatment as a result of this trend?
- The proposal to give the public transport indicator a higher weighting than road distances to services is problematic when a core component of this indicator will be based on absolute numbers of cars per capita as opposed to the numbers of households with cars as a proportion of the total number of households. In rural areas, owning more than one car per household is commonplace and necessary as there may be more than one worker in the household. This factor would distort the indicators. Thus any transport indicator would need to prove neither discriminatory to either urban or rural communities. More transparency over this indicator is required. Pending this, the weighting of the transport indicator should be reduced from its 50% as identified in the consultation paper.
- The indicator should be based on the frequency of buses and not just the number of bus stops. An average frequency indicator derived from Translink timetables may offer a better picture of access problems.

Living Environment

- The inclusion of indicators on household overcrowding are welcomed
- The inclusion of acceptances under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Order is also welcome. Homelessness is a critical problem across Ireland and this needs to be given recognition.
- There are concerns that the inclusion of pedestrian and cyclist casualties resulting from road traffic accidents may give an incomplete picture. This measure would tend to focus on accidents in urban conurbations as opposed to rural areas. What about agricultural accidents with tractors? What about volumes of heavy HGV traffic? These are clearly factors which impact significantly on our Living Environment.
- Other measures which might be included would be proximity to open-cast mines and quarries, assessments of road quality and proximity to mobile phone masts.
- Sinn Féin supports the proposal to restructure the sub domains into housing quality and housing access, outdoor physical environment and impact of the conflict.

- As well as indicators for conflict related incidents and injuries, an indicator of proximity to British military installations should be included. Helicopter over-flights in particular areas could also be measured.
- Essentially, Sinn Féin would like to see the expansion of the measures in this domain to include environmental factors which impact heavily on the quality of life e.g. quarries, proximity to masts, HGV traffic volumes, road quality and the ongoing impact of British military occupation.

Crime Domain

- Given the problems around the current policing arrangements and the unacceptability of the PSNI to significant sections of the population this domain should not be included in the MDM. Reporting rates vary so dramatically between areas where there is support for the PSNI and areas where there is not that a completely distorted picture would be presented. There is not sufficient and robust evidence based data on which to justify the inclusion of a crime domain. This has been recognised in the Scottish and Welsh indices; those societies do not have the problems with the unacceptability of policing arrangements that pertain in the north of Ireland.

Weighting

Sinn Féin proposes the following weightings:

Income Deprivation	25%
Employment Deprivation	25%
Health Deprivation and Disability	15%
Education, Skills and Training Deprivation	15%
Geographical Access to Services	10%
Living Environment	10%

Conclusions

Sinn Féin welcomes the updating of the Multiple Deprivation Measure. In particular, we welcome the adoption of the new Super Output Areas (SOAs) as a more accurate means of grouping Output Areas (OAs). We also welcome the linkage between this system and the Ward level of data output. This will enable some degree of comparability and trend reading.

While we are in agreement with most of the broad proposals we are opposed to the inclusion of the Crime Domain. We believe that the Geographical Access Domain needs to take into account the political and sectarian make-up of the north of Ireland. We are opposed to the inclusion of Weak Community Infrastructure as a domain.

There needs to be clear linkages between the deprivation indices now being developed and work already in place in the rest of Ireland. In particular, we recommend the cross-border deprivation analysis produced by ADM/CPA and NIVT in 2000.

We recommend that the ‘old’ and ‘new’ measures be compared on an urban-rural basis.

It is Sinn Féin's intention to continue to closely scrutinise the operation of the Multiple Deprivation Measures and to ensure that they are translated into policy outcomes which are equality based, fair and targeted towards the objective need of all our people. We are formally requesting that stakeholders who have responded to this consultation are appraised of NISRA's views before implementation gets underway.