



## Poverty across the generations



Across Europe, whole families – children, parents and grandparents – find it hard to escape poverty as it seems it is passed on from one generation to another.

People born into poverty are more likely than others to be poor when they get older because their life chances were undermined from an early age. In turn, statistics show that there is a strong chance that their children and grandchildren will also be poor.

In Ireland it has been found that persons from less advantaged education backgrounds, from lower socio-economic groups and with less favourable economic circumstances in childhood were all found to have considerably higher poverty rates in adulthood than others.<sup>1</sup>

According to the European Commission, children growing up in poverty and social exclusion are less likely than other children to do well in school, enjoy good health and stay out of trouble.

Once poor children have grown up, they may find it difficult to get work and struggle to find their place in society. If their own children go on to have a poor education and then find it difficult to get a good job, they too are much more likely to remain poor in adulthood.

What is more, low lifetime incomes provide a poor return for pensions, which contributes to the fact that around 17% of older men and 22% of older women are at risk of poverty.

Older people who live in poverty also tend to be more socially excluded than others as they do not have the means to go out and to be an active participant in the local community.

### A stubborn problem

Poverty and social exclusion are hard to defeat and as a consequence, there appears to be a 'handing on' of these serious difficulties through the generations.

Breaking what looks like a cycle is a major challenge for policy-makers because it impacts on so many areas including employment, education, social mobility, health and long-term care, family life and housing. The economic crisis and subsequent tightening of public finances have exacerbated the situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Nolan, B., R. Layte, C.T. Whelan and B. Maître. 2006. *Day In, Day Out: Understanding the Dynamics of Child Poverty*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration and Combat Poverty Agency.



Another dimension which adds to the seriousness of the problem is that more and more older people – many of whom live on small pensions – are having to help out their own children and grandchildren, if and when, they lose their jobs. This problem also occurs in reverse, as younger people help out their parents who have lost their jobs or who are struggling to make ends meet on small pensions.

The situation is putting more people at risk of poverty, as families are having to use their incomes to support more relatives than they did before the crisis hit the economy.

### **Intergenerational solidarity**

According to the [NGO Coalition on Intergenerational Solidarity](#), affordable access to quality services for children, adults and the elderly can play a vital role in preventing poverty and social exclusion.

In particular, access to education – which takes account of each individual's overall development throughout their lifetime – can play a key role in breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

At local level, the Coalition believes that early years' education and care services can help to break the transmission of poverty while providing a healthy environment for the development of young children and a means of strengthening parenting skills.

In Ireland the role of intergenerational support has been addressed by Minister for Children & Youth Affairs, Mr. Barry Andrews T.D, "Intergenerational solidarity has the potential to be a very positive force combining young people's energy, dynamism and creativity with adults experience and knowledge to better understand and address both local and national issues." 29<sup>th</sup> April 2010

The concept of intergenerational solidarity encourages young and old to help each other – and provides a way of ensuring that all members of society are valued.

That is why the EU supports the European Day on Solidarity and Cooperation between the Generations, which first took place on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April in 2009.

The European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion will continue to raise awareness and stimulate debate about how best to raise the many challenges of poverty and intergenerational solidarity.