

# POLICY SUBMISSION

**Submission to the National Crime Council  
on the consultation paper**

**Tackling the Underlying Causes of Crime:  
A Partnership Approach**

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***The aim of the Combat Poverty Agency is to promote a just and inclusive society by working for the prevention and elimination of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland. The recommendations in this submission are intended to advance this aim through the Agency's statutory functions of policy advice to government and public education. Combat Poverty welcomes the opportunity to comment on the National Crime Council's Consultation Paper on "Tackling the Underlying Causes of Crime: A Partnership Approach".***

Combat Poverty strongly endorses the National Crime Forum's emphasis on the necessity of dealing with the root causes of crime and the promotion of social inclusion as a vital element in effective crime reduction strategies. Given this emphasis on social inclusion, Combat Poverty would welcome the integration of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) in the consultation paper.

Crime prevention benefits not only direct victims, but also indirect victims at risk of social exclusion, such as the elderly who restrict their lifestyles in order to avoid crime.<sup>1</sup> Crime prevention helps build social capital and cohesion, and consequently has both economic and social benefits. Reduced expenditure on imprisonment could be reinvested in communities.

## **Inequality and Social Cohesion**

As the report rightly notes the causes of crime are multi-faceted and include factors such as low family income/consistent poverty, poor housing and low levels of service provision in local areas. There are also additional factors.

As noted in the report there is a need to place crime in its broad socio-economic context. "There has been widespread criticism of the fact that, at a time of unprecedented national prosperity, Ireland is becoming an increasingly unequal society whose less-privileged members are falling behind the rising standards of living of the great majority".<sup>2</sup> One of the most important factors in determining the level of crime is the relative sense of deprivation.<sup>3</sup>

Ireland is acknowledged to have a very high level of income inequality, which worsened under the impact of tax and welfare policies in the latter part of the 1990s; resulting in increased relative income poverty. In 2000 22% of the population were below 60% of median income (€147 per week), up from 16% in 1994.<sup>4</sup> As Bacik *et al.* note "greater differences between the rich and poor may increase resentment towards the better off explaining, for example, the

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<sup>1</sup> Ciaran McCullagh, *Crime in Ireland: A Sociological Introduction* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Proinsias Breathnach, "Social Polarisation in the Post-Fordist Informational Economy: Ireland in International Context", *Irish Journal of Sociology* (2002), 11, no. 1.

<sup>3</sup> McCullagh, *Crime in Ireland*.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Nolan *et al.*, *Monitoring Poverty Trends in Ireland: Results from the 2000 Living in Ireland Survey* (Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute, 2002).

much higher crime rate in the US".<sup>5</sup> The "Celtic Tiger" has had certain other costs, as individualism and materialism undermined social solidarity and cohesion, thereby creating a conducive environment for crime. Reducing relative income poverty would increase social cohesion and should be an important aspect of an effective crime prevention strategy.

As societies become more prosperous the level of property crime tends to fall, as goods can be acquired through legitimate means, whereas crimes against the person tends to increase, with some studies suggesting growth in alcohol consumption as the most important causal factor.<sup>6</sup> An effective crime prevention strategy should also address this issue given the rapid growth in alcohol consumption in Ireland in recent years. Basing his conclusions on a variety of studies, O'Donnell (1998) predicted there would continue to be an increase in recorded crime. Large increases in recorded crime have recently been announced.

## Poverty, the Labour Market and Crime

The links between crime and poverty go in both directions. Poverty and inequality may fuel crime, and crime may increase poverty, for victims who do not have insurance cover, for example, or for ex-offenders who have difficulty in accessing employment. Areas with high crime rates also discourage business investment, thereby contributing to further disadvantage. Without a comprehensive system of support, people in marginalised communities will become more disengaged with the rest of society, leading to a further breakdown of community morale and continuation of the cycle of disaffection and disadvantage.<sup>7</sup>

***Lack of opportunities and social mobility are important underlying causes of crime. For some communities and groups in Ireland social mobility has remained very restricted as detailed in a recent study.<sup>8</sup> As Bacik et al. note: "73.3% of District Court Defendants are from the most economically deprived areas....Thus it must be argued that an effective crime prevention policy should be framed in economic terms, rather than being seen as a policing and punishment issue" (p.25).***

Research from the United States suggests that juvenile delinquency is strongly correlated with parental participation in "secondary", insecure and "flexible" labour markets.<sup>9</sup> "An individual's bonds to conformity may be weakened by job instability, low wages and few benefits, thus creating a

<sup>5</sup> Ivana Bacik *et al.*, "Crime and Poverty in Dublin: an analysis of the association between community deprivation, District Court appearance and sentence severity" in Ivana Bacik and Michael O'Connell (eds.) *Crime and Poverty in Ireland* (Dublin: Round Hall Sweet and Maxwell, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Ian O'Donnell, "Crime, Punishment and Poverty" in Bacik and O'Connell, *Crime and Poverty in Ireland*.

<sup>7</sup> See Kathleen O'Higgins, "Social Order Problems" in Tony Fahey (ed.) *Social Housing in Ireland: A Study of Success, Failure and Lessons Learned* (Dublin: Oak Tree Press and Combat Poverty Agency, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Daly and Leonard, *Against All Odds*.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Wadsworth, "Labor Markets, Delinquency, and Social Control Theory: An Empirical Assessment of the Mediating Process", *Social Forces* (2000) 78, no. 3. Examples of the secondary labour market would include casual, part-time and temporary work.

situation in which individuals may feel they have nothing to lose by engaging in criminal activity".<sup>10</sup> This suggests the importance of "bridge building" active labour market programmes,<sup>11</sup> labour market regulation, up-skilling and life-long learning to enable people in disadvantaged communities to access better quality, more secure jobs. Such an approach would yield inter-generational dividends. "If parents' hard work, diligence, and dedication are rewarded with success, children are more likely to value these characteristics than if their parents' efforts have resulted in dead ends or failures".<sup>12</sup> Raising the incomes of those who are disadvantaged would have other benefits by reducing stress and thereby facilitating child-centred parenting.<sup>13</sup> Community investment is also important as "the lack of facilities for huge numbers of children and young people sometimes results in vandalism as a form of recreation, as well as a way of expressing resentment".<sup>14</sup> More research is required into pathways into crime for young people.

## Educational Disadvantage and Crime

As the consultation paper notes "Ireland's level of investment in education is far below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development average....with the greatest deficits apparent at primary and secondary levels" (p. 68). Eighty per cent of prisoners in Mountjoy have left school before the age of 16. This suggests the importance of investment to reduce educational disadvantage.<sup>15</sup> Early school leaving requires an integrated multi-level approach to ensure equality in education, a focus on the early years, parental involvement, and that schools are a meaningful part of the community.

***High levels of stress can be an important factor in children's educational under-attainment. This is often linked to social problems such as low family income or bullying. NEPS should prioritise those areas and children where its services are most needed. However, this should be in the context of a holistic strategy which also deals with the underlying structural social problems which may lead to educational under-attainment.***

### *Repeat Offending*

Recidivism is an important cause of crime. As the consultation paper notes one of the difficulties faced by ex-offenders is reintegrating into society.

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 1044.

<sup>11</sup> These work to ensure transitions from unemployment to high quality employment, and maintain training, as needed, once the person is in employment to ensure their continued development.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p. 1045.

<sup>13</sup> Wilson (1974) quoted in McCullagh, *Crime in Ireland*, p. 50.

<sup>14</sup> "Crime and Poverty", Combat Poverty Agency submission to the National Crime Forum, 1998. See also Mary Daly and Madeline Leonard, *Against all odds: Family Life on a Low Income in Ireland*, pp. 107-109 (Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency and IPA, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> The report supports consideration of the introduction of incentives for teachers to stay in schools designated as disadvantaged. Equally or more important is investment in schools and their environs to reduce pupil/teacher ratios, support parental involvement and the training of teachers to work in disadvantaged schools. St. Patrick's College undertakes this training, with very successful results.

Innovative approaches have been adopted in Ireland<sup>16</sup> and in other parts of the world. For example, in Boston the Department of Corrections has a pre-release centre where “offenders” receive wages in the open labour market. Employers are encouraged to hire them through the use of a \$2000 tax-credit.<sup>17</sup> Prior to release offenders have a savings plan to enable them to be able to avoid the “necessity” of crime. This might be particularly appropriate in Ireland given the high costs of private rented accommodation. The issue of providing adequate public and social housing also needs to be urgently addressed.

***Combat Poverty strongly supports the introduction of Positive Sentence Management in order to aid ex-prisoners in their reintegration and the development of non-custodial sanctions for young offenders. In this context Combat Poverty supports a reorientation of the criminal justice system away from punishment to rehabilitation.***

#### *The Geography of Crime and Institutional Responses*

The consultation paper argues that “the community based approach to crime prevention is based on the fact that crime is concentrated in specific locations and disproportionately affects specific sections of the community. Furthermore different crimes affect different areas at different times” (p. 34). One of the main advantages of the partnership approach is community involvement. When people become more involved the community becomes more integrated and sets defined limits on anti-social behaviour.<sup>18</sup> Building social capital at a local level is a vital element in crime prevention, however it also needs to be complemented by other initiatives and national policies to ensure adequate incomes, tackle educational disadvantage, further reduce unemployment and support urban regeneration.

While much criminal activity is localised, some types of crime have more complex geographies. There is a need to deal with “white collar” crime, such as tax evasion, which result in the under-funding of public services and thereby contributes to a cycle of crime. This requires the strengthening of existing institutions to ensure equity, accountability and transparency.

*Some crime is also part of global networks, particularly the drugs trade. Crises of state legitimacy in the developing world, as a result of economic crisis, create conditions conducive to illicit activities. Thus tackling the root causes of crime also has an international dimension.*

***Combat Poverty welcomes the National Crime Council’s emphasis on tackling the underlying causes of crime and supports a partnership approach based on participation. Effective approaches will have a***

<sup>16</sup> “Evaluation of the Pilot Phase of the BOND” (Blanchardstown Offenders for New Directions) Project by Ray Smith, Kate O’Brien, Ann Marie O’Connor, unpublished, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Northside Partnership and Local Employment Service to “Exploring Collaborative Approaches to the Re-integration of Offenders and Ex-prisoners”, ADM Conference 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2002.

<sup>18</sup> The partnership approach needs to consider who will be involved, their time constraints and their likely level of commitment.

***combined focus on the needs of individuals “at risk”; building communities; appropriate community policing,<sup>19</sup> and reducing inequalities nationally and globally.***

***Local level partnerships should be piloted and build on successful community initiatives such as those organised by parents on drugs education, youth workers with young people at risk, and peer education by young people. There are innovative examples of initiatives in the UK, such as “Crime Concern”. “Real planning”, where communities are actively involved in physical land use planning may also have an important role to play.***

***Local level partnerships will also need to be supported in tackling crime/anti-social behaviour. Thus integration at local level needs to be matched by integration at agency/national levels between Local Authorities, Government Departments, and the social partners. Tackling the underlying causes of crime will also require a deeper commitment to social inclusion at the level of national policies as mapped out in the NAPS. A multi-faceted approach is required to address a multi-faceted problem. If such an approach is adopted it should be possible to reduce crime for both the short and the long-terms.***

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<sup>19</sup> Aogán Mulcahy, “Policing and Social Marginalisation in Ireland: A Research Proposal Submitted to the Poverty Research Initiative of the Combat Poverty Agency”, 2001.