

BUDGET PROOFING: BACKGROUND AND SOME LEARNING

The Programme for Partnership Government makes a commitment to ‘budget proofing’ as a “*means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights*”. While budget proofing remains a developing area, Ireland is not starting from a blank page, and can incorporate learning from previous iterations.

Experience of proofing in Ireland

Ireland has experience of various proofing initiatives, including poverty proofing, gender, equality, disability impact assessments, and latterly ‘social impact’ assessment. On foot of these initiatives, there is a requirement to outline the impacts on these populations of any substantive proposals brought to government. What is not clear is how systematically this task is implemented, and what, if any, impact this has had on policy decisions. Initiatives to date have shared some common features, including:

- An institutional infrastructure to implement proofing in relevant government departments and agencies;
- Development of impact assessment tools, some more detailed and sophisticated than others
- A strong emphasis on the need for disaggregated data, as well as more generally, evidence relevant to assessing the impact of a particular policy proposal;
- The importance of structured consultation / engagement with people who will be affected by a policy change.

Poverty Proofing	Gender mainstreaming	Social impact assessment
Policy design & review stage	Policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages	Ex post analysis e.g. budget
Assess likely impact on poverty, & inequalities leading to poverty, with a view to reducing poverty	Assess gender impact of actions, so as to progress gender equality	Estimate the likely effects on household incomes, families, poverty and access to employment
Budget; EU Structural Funds; Departmental Strategy Statements and Business Plans; Memos to Government	National Development Plan 2000-6	In Ireland, primarily budgets
Poverty Proofing Guidelines	Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines	Methodology is primarily SWITCH, the ESRI's tax-benefit simulation model
Cabinet Ctte. on Social Inclusion; Inter-Departmental Policy Committee; NAPS Unit in DSP; NAPS Liasion Officers	Gender Mainstreaming Unit in DJE; Equality Proofing Working Group in DJE	Office for Social Inclusion in the DSP

Learning from experience

Over the course of Ireland's experience with implementing proofing a range of learning and recommendations for the future have emerged. These issues are relevant to considerations of how best to progress the current government's commitment to proofing.

Definitions, Data, Indicators, Guidelines

- Whether reducing poverty, advancing equality, or realising rights, the goal of proofing must be clearly **defined**, so that it can be operationalised by officials carrying out proofing
- Disaggregated **data** has become more widely available, however new data sources, and advice on where to access relevant data are required
- Proofing can become a symbolic exercise without **indicators** to monitor achievement and audit progress
- Proofing **guidelines** need to present a streamlined approach and, as far as possible, be customised to different policy domains

Screening and detailed proofing

- An initial screening tool can support the development and enhancement of capacity in an evolving area such as proofing
- Detailed proofing is most effectively carried out on a selective basis, as proposals that self-evidently advance equality, reduce poverty, and strengthen economic and social rights, may require a different approach to proposals with less obvious impacts

Proofing Institutions

- Robust institutional supports are needed to deliver effective proofing, particularly:
 - Support from senior management both **within**, and **across** Departments (e.g. the Co-ordinating Group of Secretaries General)
 - A coordination/oversight mechanism can provide valuable strategic guidance and input specific expertise eg the Equality Proofing Working Group
- Participation in cross-government work of this sort should be recognised as a core activity for the officials concerned

Resources and Training

- Effective proofing must be well resourced, including personnel with the appropriate analytical skills, and relevant data - and be supported by technical
- Training across a range of subjects is also required to support meaningful proofing
 - Training on poverty, inequality and rights should be incorporated into general service training, alongside developing a commitment to evidence based policy making
 - Training should incorporate modules appropriate to the policy activity of departments - general training on implementing proofing guidelines is not sufficient

Transparency, Accountability, Participation

- A core human rights obligation on States is that the basis on which decisions are made must be fully transparent and accountable - clearly defined and readily accessible to all
- Demonstrable evidence of policy impact is important, to show how equality and rights influence decisions alongside competing priorities
- Meaningful consultation with the people affected by policy decisions is critical to developing and understanding the proofing process