

What makes an anti-poverty strategy effective?

by Peter Kenway, Carla Ayrton, Charithra Chandran and Irene Tortajada

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Contents

Summary	4
Chapter 1: Introduction	5
About this report	5
Introduction to the case studies	7
Some characteristics of a good strategy: pointers from past research	10
Chapter 2: Five anti-poverty strategies	12
Case Study 1: Toronto, Canada: 'TO Prosperity': Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2015-2035	13
Case Study 2: Baden-Württemberg, Germany: 'Strong children, rich chances', 2020	18
Case Study 3: Castilla La Mancha, Spain: Strategy against Poverty and Social Inequality, 2017-2020	21
Case Study 4: New Zealand: The Child Poverty Reduction Act, 2018	25
Case Study 5: Scotland: The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act, 2017	30
Chapter 3: Analysis of the anti-poverty strategies	34
Key features of the five strategies	34
Implications for the characteristics of a good strategy	38
The role of the anti-poverty strategy itself	39
Chapter 4: The characteristics of an effective anti-poverty strategy	42
References	45
Annex 1: The role of people with lived experience of poverty	47
Annex 2: Documents consulted	51
Acknowledgements	53

Summary

- » This report develops a framework to assess what makes an anti-poverty strategy effective. Its focus is on the strategy itself and the value it adds, in addition to the anti-poverty actions and initiatives that sit beneath it. A companion study focuses on assessing the impact of poverty-reduction policies and programmes themselves.
- » The report is based on research into five anti-poverty strategies currently being pursued by the national governments of New Zealand and Scotland; the regional governments of Baden-Württemberg (Germany) and Castilla La Mancha (Spain); and the city government of Toronto (Canada).
- » Based on these cases, we conclude that the role of an anti-poverty strategy is to bring about action on poverty within a context in which those who want action are not always the same people and organisations as those who can take action.
- » Drawing additionally on other research into what constitutes a good strategy, we propose that a well-designed anti-poverty strategy should:
 1. Offer a framework which provides a means by which to enable or oblige action.
 2. Be clear what it aims to achieve and only include actions which serve that end.
 3. Recognise that until an anti-poverty initiative has had time to settle in, its planning and implementation are what matter most.
 4. Recognise that effective planning and implementation require good understanding, co-ordination and resources.
 5. Recognise that making something happen has value in its own right.
 6. Be capable of learning as it proceeds, with outcome measures playing an increasing role.
 7. Be the responsibility of a minister with enough seniority to ensure that the strategy is put into effect.
- » The report also records what was found about the roles of those with lived experience of poverty in the five strategies.

1. Introduction

The New Policy Institute (NPI) has been commissioned by the Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) to help develop a framework for assessing the effectiveness of anti-poverty strategies. This is part of a wider project which includes a second study, by the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion at the London School of Economics (LSE), which focuses on assessing the impact of different international anti-poverty policies and programmes. The project is intended to practically inform the Welsh Government in relation to its poverty and social exclusion policy.

This first chapter covers the following:

- The structure of the argument;
- The choice of case studies, including an initial view of some of their key features;
- Approach to the research, including the framework used for the review of the case studies; and
- A summary of the main points from three previous studies offering characteristics of a 'good' strategy.

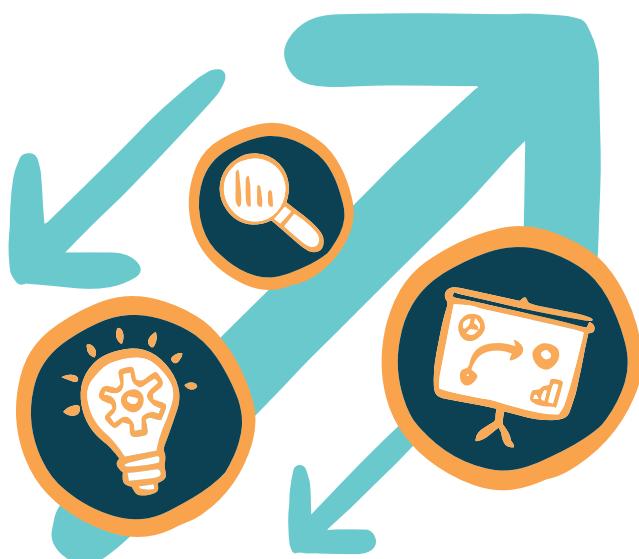
About this report

A focus on the anti-poverty strategy itself

The focus of this study is on the anti-poverty strategy itself, as opposed to the individual anti-poverty actions and initiatives that sit beneath (or within) it.

As mentioned above, the review of international programmes and interventions is the subject of the section of the project carried out by the LSE. This distinction, between the strategy itself and the actions and initiatives that sit beneath it, is helpful in that it allows for consideration of more or less effective ways of ensuring delivery of multiple initiatives across diverse policy areas, with differing delivery partners, and variable degrees of control or agency over the implementation of those initiatives. It acknowledges that strategies are connected to their constituent policies and programmes but can and should add value in terms of determining their likelihood of succeeding.

Drawing this distinction does, however, mean that it cannot just be assumed that the effectiveness of an anti-poverty strategy can be judged by the success (however defined) of its actions and initiatives. This is both a practical question for those responsible for a particular anti-poverty strategy and a methodological challenge for this study. Meeting that challenge has influenced both the structure of the argument and the shape of the report.



The structure of the argument

The argument developed in this report has two starting points:

- a short list of what three previous studies have identified as the characteristics of a 'good' strategy, set out below in chapter 1; and
- the evidence of the strategies themselves, set out in chapter 2.

We then analyse the evidence of the strategies in chapter 3:

- first, to try to reduce them to their key or essential features, with a focus on the parts of them that do not depend upon the content of the actions and initiatives; and
- second, to refine the list of characteristics that make for a 'good' strategy.

This is followed by a final argument which identifies:

- the role that the strategy itself plays, distinct from its actions and initiatives; and
- what constraints and conditions need to be in place in order to ensure that it plays that role well.

This idea, of a strategy that plays its role well can be fairly thought of, we suggest, as a strategy that is effective.

Chapter 4 concludes by presenting a list of the characteristics which an effective anti-poverty strategy should possess.

The conclusion reached here about the role of an anti-poverty strategy is not intended to apply to social policy strategies in general. If anti-poverty strategies are unusual, that would likely come from both the nature of poverty and the politics of taking action to address it.

Stages of the research

The research has had four main stages, spread over a period of five months, commencing in November 2020:

1. A desk-based study was conducted to collect relevant official documents and independent reviews relating to the case studies.
2. Contact was made with an expert for each of the case studies and an interview conducted with them to fill in the gaps from the documents and deepen our understanding of the strategy. These interviews provided information on how the strategies have operated in practice rather than how they appear to operate on paper.
3. Analysis and reflection on the research led to the writing of a draft report which was peer reviewed by experts of poverty policy in Wales and implementation science.
4. Following peer review, a draft final report was written before finalisation and submission to the Welsh government.

Following the completion of the research, and the writing of the draft report, it was agreed that the final report should include information on the role played by people with lived experience of poverty – insofar as such material had already been identified during the research phase. Information on the role of people with lived experience of poverty is therefore presented in annex 1. The role of people with lived experience of poverty was not discussed with any of the individual strategy experts.

Two things should be stressed due to the short time frame for the research and single expert interview held for each case study.

First, these case studies serve as a source of evidence to aid reflection on what might constitute an effective anti-poverty strategy. This report should not be used as an uncorroborated source of information about these strategies. Second, although we have drawn conclusions about these strategies for the purposes of this study, this report does not seek to evaluate them, or pass judgement. Furthermore, where we do express opinions about aspects of these strategies, these are to be understood as our own views and should not be attributed to any of the experts.

Introduction to the case studies

The choice of case studies

The research base for this study are five anti-poverty or poverty reduction strategies, in Canada, Germany, Spain, New Zealand and Scotland. Of the five, two are regional strategies (the state of Baden-Württemberg in south-west Germany and the region of Castilla La Mancha in central Spain); two are national strategies (Scotland and New Zealand); and one is a city strategy (Toronto in Canada). All five strategies were active in 2020. The oldest of them began in 2015. All have clear and detailed documents, including an action plan with indicators or targets.

The selection of strategies reflected several factors including similarity of the territory and its government to those of Wales, the availability of documentation and the availability of an expert who had some detailed knowledge of the strategy. As 'regions' of a fully independent country, Baden-Württemberg (BW), Castilla La Mancha (CLM) and Scotland are closest in status to Wales. In economic terms, (BW) is very different from Wales whereas CLM is close to it.

Toronto, though a city, has a similar sized population to Wales. Scotland and CLM are closest to Wales in terms of relevant powers, or the lack thereof. As a fully independent state, New Zealand (NZ) is in a very different position. However, its strategy has been influenced by UK experience in confronting poverty and its institutions will be familiar to a UK audience.

Although we set out to select case studies where the government's formal powers were similar to those of Wales, this turns out not to have been as important as anticipated. The reason for this is that the strategy itself (that is, distinct from the particular anti-poverty actions and initiatives sitting beneath) is in some ways about the gaps between those powers, or put another way, about the informal elements of the machinery of government.

A first view of some key features

One of the challenges in absorbing this report is forming a picture of the five different strategies. Chapter 2 is devoted to a full description of each of them. A short summary of the strategies' key characteristics is shown in Table 1.



Table 1. Summary of the five case study strategies' key characteristics

Case study 1: Toronto	<p>Population: the largest of Canada's cities with a population of 2.7 million people.</p> <p>Strategy type and scope: led and largely implemented by the city council, the strategy is organised around five themes of housing stability, service access, transportation equity, food access and quality jobs and liveable incomes.</p> <p>Timeframe: 2015–2035, with four-year-long action plans (latest, 2019–23).</p> <p>Poverty definition: not relevant since the strategy does not aim to reduce the rate of poverty. Canada's official poverty measure is a market-based one, reflecting the cost of a basket of goods and services representing a basic standard of living.</p> <p>Targets: the strategy and its action plan contain few if any quantifiable targets – the five themes, however, represent desired 'directions of travel'.</p> <p>Monitoring: a programme to fund and implement a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the poverty reduction strategy (PRS) is one of the activities identified in the current action plan. Some previous initiatives have been the subject of qualitative evaluation.</p>
	<p>Case study 2: Baden-Württemberg</p>
	<p>Population: the third largest of Germany's states with a population of 11 million people.</p> <p>Strategy type and scope: a regional government strategy with the single goal of promoting local 'prevention networks' (local, voluntary associations of social workers and other professionals) to work with children from poor families to improve their opportunities for development.</p>
	<p>Timeframe: 2020.</p>
	<p>Poverty definition: not relevant since the strategy does not aim to reduce the rate of poverty. Germany's official poverty measure is a low-income one (below 60% of the national median).</p> <p>Targets: the quantifiable target for the strategy is the number of local cities and districts (out of a total of 44) introducing prevention networks.</p> <p>Monitoring: the state statistical office has published a study designed to identify the factors likely to lead to the successful introduction of a prevention network.</p>
Case study 3: Castilla La Mancha	<p>Population: the third largest of Spain's 17 autonomous regions with a population of two million people.</p> <p>Strategy type and scope: a plan of the regional government with 58 'action points' made up of: palliative measures against poverty; preventative measures against exclusion and vulnerability; measures of efficacy and governance.</p> <p>Timeframe: 2017–2020.</p> <p>Poverty definition used: the strategy follows a broad concept of poverty, akin to social exclusion. However, its targets are narrower and relate to low income (below 60% of median), severe low income (below 30% of median) and material deprivation.</p> <p>Targets: quantifiable targets for risks of: poverty and social exclusion; severe poverty; children with severe material deprivation; energy poverty; low intensity of employment.</p> <p>Monitoring: intermediate, governmental (non-independent) report on the impact in 2017; final evaluation report (after the strategy's end in 2020) in process of being written.</p>

Case study 4:
New Zealand

Population: five million people.

Strategy type and scope: national government strategy, being one element – both focused and a priority – within a wider wellbeing strategy. A Child Poverty Reduction Act (2018) predates and underpins the poverty element of the wider strategy.

Timeframe: 2018 onwards (with an implicit minimum length of 10 years).

Poverty definition: the Child Poverty Reduction Act contains only measures which relate to low income (below 50% of current year median income; below 50% of median income fixed year) and material deprivation.

Targets: four primary measures of poverty and hardship for which Government must set targets, as well as further targets around housing, education and hospitalisation which must also be reported on, though not annually.

Monitoring: the Act requires progress against the outcomes of the strategy to be formally reported. Monitoring is supported by analysis conducted with the Treasury, designed to assess whether the strategy is on track.

Case study 5:
Scotland

Population: 5.5 million.

Strategy type and scope: devolved government strategy, primarily the Scottish government, with collaboration from local government and a set of partners, including charities and universities. The strategy is an Act of Parliament with targets set for 2030. An action plan with policy details is to be published every four years.

Timeframe: 2017 onwards (with an implicit minimum period to 2030).

Poverty definition: low-income thresholds related to UK wide median income (below 60% current year; below 60% fixed year; below 70% and material deprivation). A 'persistent poverty' measure remains to be defined.

Targets: progress against four targets set for 2030, for the four measures of poverty defined above, are monitored yearly.

Monitoring: besides the targets, a delivery progress report also looks at each policy and programme to give progress to date, with monitoring and evaluation being wider than the headline targets. An independent Commission has been set up to monitor progress and advise Ministers on poverty and inequality.

Some characteristics of a good strategy: pointers from past research

There is a large literature on what makes for a good strategy, whether for government or business. Conclusions from such literature can be insightful, especially when they point to the challenges that good strategy development must face. Although a review of the literature was beyond the scope of this report, we have detailed three pieces of work that were particularly useful in guiding this review, summarised in Table 2. The three are:

1. A 2014 review into international anti-poverty strategies conducted by NPI (MacInnes et al., 2014);
2. A 2016 review, conducted by the Public Policy Institute for Wales (PPIW), into what makes for a good government strategy (PPIW, 2016); and
3. A 2004 report by the Cabinet Office, which identified characteristics of the best government strategies as part of its Strategy Survival Guide (Cabinet Office, 2004).

Table 2 is presented under five headings, namely external stakeholders, priorities, context, leadership, government practice and monitoring. The key points on what makes for a good strategy are:

- There was strong agreement across the studies about the role of external stakeholders, who it is argued should be involved from the development and design of the strategy through to implementation and beyond. Communication is important throughout.
- The studies also agree about the importance of monitoring and (in order to ensure effectiveness) the setting of objectives. This may be to hold those responsible to account (NPI) or to inform necessary adjustments (Cabinet Office).

- Two of the three studies (PPIW, Cabinet Office) – but not the one which looked at international anti-poverty strategies (NPI) – stress the need to set priorities.
- The NPI study emphasises the need for:
 - high level commitment, to provide leadership and impetus;
 - independent governance, to ensure continuity when leaders change; and
 - clear responsibility and accountability for action across government.
- Taken together, these suggest an anxiety about how serious governments are when they create anti-poverty strategies – will what has been promised actually be delivered?
- The Cabinet Office study, by contrast, emphasises the need for a clear understanding both of the current and potential future situation, and also of the likely effectiveness of potential policy instruments and the institutional capacity to deliver those policies. It can be seen as being more concerned with whether what has been promised is delivered well. In calling for an investment in skills, the PPIW report is in a similar place, pointing to a need for improved institutional capacity in order to deliver well.

The conditions for a good strategy distilled from these studies could be summed up as **high-level commitment, accountability, involvement and communication, prioritisation, understanding and monitoring**. We will review this list later in the report in light of what the five case study strategies studied in this report suggest about these conditions in practice.

Table 2. Some suggested characteristics of good strategies

	Factors which can increase the chances of success (NPI, 2014)	Characteristics of good strategies (PPIW, 2016)	Characteristics of good public service strategies (Cabinet Office, 2004)
External stakeholders	Involve in design, implementation	Collaborate, communicate	Develop with, communicate effectively to
Priorities		Prioritise goals	Clear about objectives, priorities and trade-offs
Leadership	High-level commitment from politicians and civil servants Independent governance		
Government practice	Clear accountability for delivery Link to economic policy	Invest in skills	Understand causes, trends, opportunities, threats, futures Understand policy instrument and institutional effectiveness Be creative – design/discover new possibilities
Monitoring	Monitor to ensure objectives are met	Set measurable objectives Use evidence to monitor progress	Mechanisms for adaptability, in light of experience

2. Five anti-poverty strategies

This chapter describes the five case studies. The question framework used to review the case studies is presented below in table 3. Ten questions were answered for each case study, in the first instance using the strategy documents listed in annex 2. These answers were then checked and any gaps filled during the interviews with the experts.

Table 3. The ten-question framework used for the case studies

Category	Question
Context and origins of the strategy	<p>Who initiated it, why, and what went before?</p> <p>How does the strategy itself add value, e.g., by introducing something new, prioritising something already being done, by improving co-ordination?</p>
Scope and design of the strategy	<p>What is the goal of the strategy and what sorts of outcomes does it aim for (e.g. poverty reduction; supporting people who are poor or excluded)?</p> <p>What topics does it include and why were they chosen (e.g. for their importance, or because they fit the goal)?</p> <p>How does being in the strategy help prioritise an item/programme?</p> <p>Is there a special budget for programmes included in the strategy?</p>
Putting the strategy into action	<p>Whose actions are included? How is compliance with the plan by bodies outside government (e.g. local government, charities, companies) achieved?</p> <p>Is there an action plan and who within government is responsible for it?</p>
Targets and monitoring	<p>Are there measurable targets and a process for monitoring and evaluation? What external involvement is there in this?</p> <p>To whom are official monitoring or evaluation reports presented – and what then happens?</p>

In what follows, each case study has been presented in a format that follows the four categories shown in Table 3.

Case Study 1

Toronto, Canada: 'TO Prosperity': Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2015–2035

Introduction

Toronto, the capital of Canada's largest province (Ontario), is a city of six million people with an annual operating budget in 2020 of CAN\$13.5bn (£7.7bn). All Canadian provinces have poverty reduction strategies of their own but as provinces have the power to tax income and are responsible for setting the levels of social security support, they are not ideal comparators for Wales, which has very limited social security and fiscal powers. By contrast, while Toronto has power to set the level of property taxes (the largest single source of revenue in the operating budget), a policy of holding property tax rises to the rate of inflation means that the money to spend on poverty (or other policy priorities) is limited.

'TO Prosperity', Toronto's Poverty Reduction Strategy (TPRS) is a 20-year strategy running from 2015 to 2035. Four-year Action Plans accompany the strategy, the first from 2015 to 2018, and the second, approved in late 2019, for 2019 to 2022. This four-year cycle reflects Toronto's election cycle. The strategy came into being against the background of Toronto-wide income-related poverty rates of 20% for adults and 25% for children. The TPRS is not a programme with its own budget but a corporate-wide strategy, providing overall direction on the City's poverty reduction priorities. Six years in, it is a live strategy, but also one with a track-record.

The TPRS has also been the subject of academic evaluation set against the background of poverty reduction strategies in the Global South (Shaffer and Tranjan, 2019).

Context and origins

The TPRS originated with a City Council resolution in 2014, a few months before the City Council election. The TPRS was part of a wider move by cities and provinces across Canada, as well as the federal government (in 2018), to introduce anti-poverty strategies. Some of the individuals and third sector organisations pushing for a strategy had previously been involved with an earlier Ontario poverty strategy. The successful mayoral candidate had pledged to introduce such a strategy if elected.

NPI understand that several different types of strategy were considered by the council's employees. The basic choice was seen as lying between a strategy tightly focused on just a few priorities and one whose aim was to embed an anti-poverty focus throughout the city council divisions (departments) and agencies. The former needed at least one high profile initiative to demonstrate that the TPRS was working and effective.

The latter was more about supporting and educating, aimed at a change of management approach and a reshaping of budgets. A tight financial context might appear to have favoured the latter approach rather than the former.

In practice, the strategy adopted, at the behest of the Deputy Mayor in charge of the project, was more ambitious than either of these, containing five thematic areas as priorities – namely housing stability, service access, transit (public transport) equity, food access, and quality jobs and liveable incomes. It also aimed at systemic change, for example, leveraging the city's economic power to drive inclusive economic growth and engaging city staff and residents on poverty reduction efforts.

Despite this broad scope, the idea that the TPRS was about shaping how divisions and agencies understood poverty and their responsibility for it continued to be important. One sign of this was that the process of consultation over the TPRS in summer 2015, prior to its introduction, not only involved a large number of members of the public, but also all Standing Committees of the Council as well as its agencies, including the Transit Commission.

Scope and design

Poverty definition

The TPRS does not aim to reduce the rate of poverty; definitions of poverty therefore matter only by way of background. When the TPRS came into being, the Canadian Statistical Office published three poverty measures:

- a low-income cut-off (LICO), below which a household's spending on food, shelter and clothing take up a much larger share of its income than average;
- a low-income measure (LIM), where equivalised household income is below 50% of national median income; and
- a market-based measure (MBM), based on the cost of a basket of goods and services representing a basic standard of living (Aldridge, 2017).

In 2018, the MBM was adopted by the federal government as its official measure of poverty. Besides the criticism which the MBM provoked (Sarlo, 2020), prioritising this measure over the others has resulted in a loss of clarity about what the poverty rate really is. For example, in 2018, although Toronto's MBM poverty rate was 13%, the City Council itself described poverty as affecting one in four children in the city and one in five adults (City of Toronto, 2018).

Scope of the strategy and priorities

The second of the four-year Action Plans, for 2019–22, provides a good picture of what is fixed within the TPRS and what aspects of it change over time. The five themes and the recommendations associated with them, which describe the desired direction of travel, remained the same as in the 2015–18 Action Plan. A condensed version of the recommendations, along with the associated theme, are as follows:

- Improve the quality and supply of affordable housing; assist low-income households to secure and maintain affordable housing (housing stability);
- Increase service access and availability; improve access to high-quality programmes for children and youth (service access);
- Make transit more affordable for low-income residents; improve services in the inner suburbs (transportation equity);
- Eliminate hunger; improve access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food (food access); and
- Improve income supports; create employment opportunities for low-income groups with high unemployment; improve job quality (quality jobs and liveable wages).

Looking back, the Action Plan also lists the principal achievements under each of the themes in the 2015–18 period. Three stand out here. The first was phase 1 of the Fair Pass program (under transportation equity), which provides discounted transit fares to adults receiving social assistance. The second (under service access) offered new childcare facilities in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas and youth spaces and hubs in community recreation centres and libraries. The third was the provision of stabilised funding for Toronto Community Housing.

Looking forward, the 2019–22 Action Plan identifies development of the Transit Equity program as one of three key strategic initiatives, alongside the development of an urban Indigenous-led TPRS Action Plan and the promotion of an inclusive approach to economic development.

Budget

The breadth of the TPRS, reflected in its themes and recommendations, has to be seen alongside the fact that it has no specific budget of its own. That does not mean that extra, strategy-related spending above and beyond a department's ordinary budget is ruled out. On the contrary, such extra spending, on 'new and enhanced initiatives', can happen but it is not coming from a pre-determined TPRS-specific financial pot. The scale of this extra spending has been small: some CAN\$100m (£65m) per year over 2015–18, about 1% of the city's total operating budget.

Moreover, 90% of all the TPRS-related spending on new and enhanced initiatives in one year (2017) went on just one item, namely the third of the three 'principal achievements' related to stabilised funding for Toronto Community Housing.

Against this background, reshaping existing activities and spending as a result of embedding an anti-poverty focus throughout the divisions (akin to what the Welsh Government has described as 'bending' policy or services) potentially remains important.

Putting the strategy into action

For a strategy which has no specific budget of its own to work, the driving force behind it (in this case, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Office) needs high-level access and continuing high-level political support. Access means that poverty reduction is on (and the PRS office is at) the table. In a similar way, the existence of the TPRS can help to ensure that ideas previously at the margin move to centre stage. But it is still the divisions who have to identify, develop and bring forward proposals that will turn the recommendations of the TPRS into concrete action. This is the case whether it is about reshaping existing provision in some way or seeking additional funding above the budget. Resources are also required for the work of designing proposals to bring forward.

The resources to do this have to be found from within the divisions. Ideas that might take the TPRS forward are therefore in competition with other calls on the time and resources of the city council even while those ideas are at an embryonic stage.

Responsibility

As a Council strategy, the TPRS is accountable to the City Council in the normal way. Between approving the TPRS in 2015 and beginning preparation in 2019 for the second four-year Action Plan, the only decision made by the Council in connection with the TPRS was the vote to approve the Fair Pass program in 2016. Several further decisions during 2019 show that this aspect of accountability has so far been strongest at the point when new plans are being agreed.

The role of the Deputy Mayor in shaping the strategy at the beginning has been noted above, as has the need for high level political support and leadership for any strategy which has no budget of its own. Although we are not in a position to assess this matter, the death of this Deputy Mayor in 2017 presented a challenge for TPRS given her pivotal political role in it up to that date. The role of poverty reduction advocate was not given to the new Deputy Mayor, but to another councillor.

Our understanding is that there is no external group, formal or informal, to which the TPRS reports. A progress report for the Community was published in each of the first two years of the TPRS but we are unable to find anything more recent that is similar to that.

Targets and monitoring

The question of whether the TPRS has targets and is subject to monitoring depends on what it understood by those terms. Although many of the recommendations associated with the thematic areas could have quantified targets attached, no such targets have so far been created. An evaluation report for phase 1 of the Fair Pass program has been published focussing on establishing the cost of the program during its first phase, understanding the issues associated with its implementation and determining the qualitative impact on low-income residents in terms of the use that has been made of the pass and the benefits from it (Taylor Newberry Consulting, 2019).

While this supports the view that the program has benefited those who have been able to use the pass, there is no yardstick against which to judge whether it succeeded in reaching its goals, or whether it was a sufficient success, given the resources, financial and human, devoted to it.

Monitoring

The 2019 Action Plan does include a detailed proposal for a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the TPRS – to ‘demonstrate impact-level outcomes of PRS initiatives as well as capture the overall impact’ of the TPRS on residents.

We understand the absence of targets and monitoring up until now may reflect a range of views among those involved about both the value of monitoring and what is important. For example, TPRS advocates may be anxious about early results which show little impact: change takes time to come through. A strategy seeking to change the way in which divisions understand and act on poverty may prefer indicators of outputs – how many projects, how much additional money spent or redeployed? – to indicators of outcomes. Outputs also suit those who want to be judged on actions.



Case Study 2

Baden-Württemberg, Germany: 'Strong children, rich chances', 2020

Introduction

Baden-Württemberg (BW) is the most south-westerly of Germany's 16 states (regions), bordering France and Switzerland. With a population of 11 million and a GDP per head 50% above the EU average and more than double that of Wales, BW may seem an unlikely choice for this study. But three reasons commend it. First, BW is unusual among German states in having an anti-poverty strategy at all because responsibility under the German constitution for most policies relevant to poverty belong either at the federal level (Berlin) or the local level. Second, the documentation relating to the strategy is plentiful and clear. Third, the strategy is distinctive in several ways, including its simplicity and the clarity of the distinction between the strategy itself and the programme of actions that it aims to promote.

The strategy, whose title can approximately be translated as 'Strong children – rich chances', aims to improve the opportunities for children whose parents are poor to develop to the full, and in a healthy way, independent of (that is, not limited by) their parents' economic or social status (FaFo B-W, 2020, p12).¹ These improved opportunities are to be delivered through what are called 'prevention networks' – local associations of social workers and other professionals, who will work with children (from about the point when they enter secondary school).

The role of the strategy is to promote and fund these networks. The state has no power to mandate either the networks or the actions they undertake, but it can encourage them by, for example, the financing of posts to set up or help sustain them. Introducing such networks into as many of BW's nine cities and 35 administrative districts as will agree to have them is, precisely, the goal of the strategy itself.

Context and origins

This strategy, which emerged in response to several, separate drivers (outlined below), reflects the limitations and restrictions imposed on the states by Germany's federal constitution. In particular:

- On the one hand, responsibility for children's basic material wellbeing sits at the federal level and depends upon a means-tested income benefit, housing benefit and child allowances. Since total transfer payments are capped at the household level, should a state such as BW make an additional payment to children, a similar sum would simply be subtracted from what is given to their parents. In effect, the strategy could not include the distribution of additional financial resource to poor households.

¹ NPI translation.

- On the other hand, responsibility for action to mitigate the effects of income poverty (rather than directly reducing it) through the provision of services sits with BW's cities and districts. If the state wants them to undertake particular action it must rely on persuading them to do so freely.

A 2015 report by the state statistical office had identified poverty (measured as low income – 60% of median income) as a problem in BW, with state-wide poverty rates (for 2012) of 11% for the whole population and 13% for those under 18 (FaFo B-W, 2015). A recent report shows that the middle years of the decade were a period of rising child poverty, with the rate rising to above 19% in 2016 and remaining at 19% in 2018 (Gesellschaftsmonitoring B-W, p2). The advisory board of the state's Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration had decided to prioritise child poverty. At the federal level, where child poverty has been a theme for decades, in 2019, parties of the left and centre were developing their own plans to improve the material situation of children.

The Ministry's response was to take up the idea of a 'prevention network', developed (in BW) by a social worker in the city of Singen, with the goal of spreading it across the state on a voluntary basis. Development of the strategy involved taking the idea through all the stages of approval, including from the advisory board and from the cities and districts, as well as identifying funding possibilities (including from the European Social Fund). Funding for the strategy needed the approval of the state parliament. 2020 was declared the year of struggle against child poverty in BW. The official campaign against child poverty had the prevention network at its core.

Scope and design

Poverty definition

The definition of poverty associated with the official poverty risks reported above is the proportion of people living in households with less than 60% of national median income. How far this definition is relevant to the prevention networks is unclear, but the small size of the budgets involved (see below) means that these networks cannot be offering a direct benefit to most children in a low-income household living in Baden-Württemberg.

Scope of the strategy and priorities

With only one action under the strategy, the question of where the priorities lie is redundant.

To date, 11 of BW's 44 cities and districts have been awarded state support for such a network in response to two calls for proposals. In most cases, the local organisation making the application appears to be a local public sector body, but in at least one case, the applicant organisation is a large charity.

The motivation behind the prevention network rests on the familiar view that growing up in poverty does not just mean material deprivation but also reduced opportunities for social participation and integration.

Although the details of the prevention networks are beyond the scope of this research, in broad terms they appear to be trying to improve understanding of, access to and usage of a range of public services, including health and specialist education. The individual networks differ in their particular emphases.

While the strategy (and the support it provides) is time-limited, it was expected that if the current BW government were returned to office in state-wide elections in March 2021, the strategy would continue with a further 'call' for proposals. Following those elections and the ensuing negotiations over a new government, a commitment to continue with the prevention network strategy is one of the points in the new coalition agreement.

Budget

On average, the state has provided funding of about €70,000 per project.

Putting the strategy into action

BW's strategy is not one which is attempting to change how government itself thinks about, or works on, matters to do with poverty; nor is it expected to have any lasting lessons for it. With responsibility for the strategy lying within a single ministry, the strategy raises no issues of co-ordination within government. So long as both the minister and ministry's advisory board are committed to it (and parliament approves the funding), there will be no difficulty on the government side in maintaining the strategy as something tangible.

Responsibility

The combination of a clear goal (networks in all 44 cities and districts) and the lack of any power to command the outcome means that the extent to which the strategy has succeeded can be simply measured by the number of networks that have been set up. With responsibility for the strategy sitting within a single ministry, it is also clear who within the government is accountable for the outcome.

By contrast, it is not clear whether the lead local organisations for each network are in any way accountable to the state government for how well their network performs. At least explicitly, the state statistical office's monitoring report is not making such an assessment. Nor is it clear whether there is any accountability to the families of the children, or even the children (some well into teenage years) themselves, either for the strategy or for how the individual prevention networks work.

Targets and monitoring

The strategy itself has the simple output-based target of seeing sustainable prevention networks set up in all 44 cities and districts. Whether the 11 in place so far (25%) should be judged satisfactory is unknown, but such a simple measure certainly allows the question to be posed in a very clear way.

Monitoring

Monitoring of the impact of the prevention networks themselves is built into the strategy. The family research unit of the state statistical office is responsible for assessing each of the networks. The assessment is designed to identify success factors for the development of such networks and to make the experience available to others ('sharing good practice'). It is not, however, designed to evaluate or compare networks in different locations. The state statistical office published a 140-page report on the first six prevention networks ('against child poverty and for child health') in October 2020 (FaFo B-W, 2020).

Case Study 3

Castilla La Mancha, Spain: Strategy against Poverty and Social Inequality, 2017–2020

Introduction

Castilla La Mancha (CLM) is one of the 17 autonomous regions in Spain. It is the third largest in area, located in the centre of the country. Spain operates as a decentralised unitary state, with each autonomous community having variable degrees of devolved power. With a population of two million and per capita GDP below the national average, but close to that of Wales, CLM is a natural comparator for Wales. CLM provides variety among our case studies as, unlike some, its anti-poverty strategy is of a short duration, spanning only four years. The documentation relating to the strategy is clear, and insight is offered from independent monitoring and evaluation reports.

CLM's 'Strategy against Poverty and Social Inequality', running from 2017 to 2020, is a government strategy in the sense that it is directed at government departments. Based on a clear conception of poverty and social exclusion, it is aimed at getting the departments and other public bodies to act – and in many cases, continue to act – against poverty and social exclusion. The strategy is meant to signify a political commitment to act. But while it is directed at government departments, many of the actions are developed in partnership with the third sector bodies who are contracted to provide the services.

Context and origins

The strategy emerged in Castilla-La Mancha following the 2015 election to the Cortes, or regional parliament, when two political parties (the socialist party, PSOE, and the left populist Podemos) had promised action on poverty in their manifestos. After the election, the two began to negotiate over forming a coalition government and the strategy reflects that. In the 2019 election, the PSOE secured a small outright majority.

A separate factor behind the introduction of an anti-poverty strategy is the influence of the European Anti-Poverty Network Castilla-La Mancha (EAPN-CLM).² A network of around 40 social action charities and other grassroots and/or community organisations, whose objectives are to implement and develop network working and unify efforts to achieve better and wider results in the fight to eradicate poverty, exclusion and inequality in the region. They aim to have action against poverty and social exclusion included among the priorities of public decision-makers in Castilla-La Mancha. They promote the empowerment and participation of the most vulnerable groups in public life, making it possible to build proposals that they themselves share with public decision-makers.

² Europea de Lucha Contra la Pobreza y la Exclusion Social en Castilla-La Mancha

EAPN-CLM played a key role in the development of the strategy, having been present at the opening Governing Council meeting in early 2016 when the need to establish a cross-sectional anti-poverty strategy focusing on those worst off was identified. EAPN-CLM also contributed to the design of the strategy and its ratification through consultation. As discussed below, it continues to play a role in the strategy, including in both the monitoring of it and the delivery of some elements. The central role played by EAPN-CLM is acknowledged in the strategy document's opening paragraphs.

Underlying these developments was the rise in poverty in CLM since the economic and financial crisis in 2008. The poverty rate – the risk of poverty and social exclusion (AROPE) – rose steadily from 29% to 38% over the period 2008 to 2016. The 2016 rate, 10 percentage points above the national average, was the third highest among the 17 regions in Spain.

Scope and design

Poverty definition

The strategy uses an integrated conception of poverty that includes, but goes beyond, material deprivation. 'Poverty' in Spain is understood broadly. Low income is one manifestation of it; lack of (or lack of access to) resources is another. Social inclusion and exclusion are also widely used concepts in Spain. In adopting a broad definition, the advance that the strategy is making is not a conceptual one but a practical one, to commit public actors to take a wide range of actions when addressing poverty, rather than focusing action just on low income itself. There is, however, an important duality within the strategy, which is that while its scope is broad, its targets and indicators continue to focus almost exclusively on low income.

Scope of the strategy

CLM's strategy is a broad one, directed as much at social exclusion as at material poverty itself. This breadth can be seen in the subjects covered. They include: affordable housing; a minimum income; addressing energy poverty; universal healthcare; access to employment; equity in education; and exclusion and disadvantage of specific groups, including women and the Romani population.

Some of these subjects were chosen because of evidence on the extent of these problems in the region. Others draw on various declarations, including the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

CLM's Statute of Autonomy mandates special attention be paid to the most socially and economically disadvantaged groups.

The breadth of the strategy can also be seen in the categorisation of measures which it adopts and the 58-point action plan which then sits within it. As a way of summarising this, the categories (and sub-categories) and the number of actions associated with each are as follows:

- Palliative measures against poverty (12 actions);
- Preventative measures against exclusion and vulnerability broken down into: inclusive employment (5); consumption (2); affordable housing (5); homeless assistance (1); young people at risk (3); victims of domestic abuse (3); other (12); and
- Efficacy and governance measures (15).

To give some examples of these measures, palliative measures include: the creation of a registry of households with low incomes; the development of a plan against energy (or fuel) poverty; and school meal grants. Examples of preventative measures include: socio-educational mediation with Romani populations in opportunities of training and employment for young people; preserving, adapting and improving the public pool of social rent housing; solidarity benefits to female domestic violence survivors. Examples of efficacy and governance measures include continuous training of professionals and promoting coordination between housing and social policies.

Priorities

There are two points of note here. The first concerns minimum income and its associated actions (under the heading of palliative measures). The presence of such actions reflects the fact that up until recently, responsibility for a (heavily means-tested) minimum income scheme did exist at the regional level. Emergency benefits were also available at the municipal level. However, the minimum income scheme that was administered at the regional level has recently been absorbed into the national scheme. The implications for both powers and budgets remain unclear.

The second is to do with what is new. Our understanding is that action on energy poverty (the first item in the list of palliative measures after the two on minimum income) is both new and a subject on which CLM is taking a lead nationally. By contrast, most of the other subjects were areas where action was already being taken.

Budget

The strategy has a budget (€1.1 billion over the four years) which may be a way to fund strategy actions or a way to ensure that mainstream departmental budgets allocate sufficient resources to these actions.

Putting the strategy into action

It is inevitable that any broad anti-poverty strategy will draw in many matters where government was already taking some action. When a strategy does that, however, the question is what is advanced by doing so. The CLM strategy offers several possible answers.

- The strategy lists problems to do with how government had worked in the past. With desired outcomes to be achieved mainly through better deployment of existing resources and services, the strategy can add value as a management document.
- By tying actions together across departments, the strategy both signals their collective importance, and provides a basis for proposing and developing co-operation (both between departments and with external organisations) and common approaches (for example, improved participation).
- Besides providing clarity to public servants about what is deemed important, the prospect of an evaluation at the end of the strategy also provides motivation.

Whether any broad strategy with 58 action points can be said to signal specific priorities is unclear.

Certain actions have been prioritised, for example, access to housing and responses to forced evictions. Although, that may not be a product of the strategy itself since any action could, in principle, be prioritised irrespective of whether it is in a strategy or not.

Responsibility

Within the regional government, leadership and responsibility for the strategy rests with the department of social welfare.

Externally, there is a requirement to report to the regional parliament. There is no specific minister responsible for reporting on the targets. It is understood that EAPN-CLM is also responsible for evaluating the strategy (a responsibility which it is in part discharging through contracting this work out). The fact that EAPN-CLM is involved at every stage of the strategy's progress, from inception to evaluation, underlines the central role that it has played, and continues to play.

Targets and monitoring

The strategy identifies five indicators for which numerical targets have been set for 2020. They refer to:

- the overall risk of poverty and social exclusion (AROPE) – below 35% by 2020;
- the percentage in severe poverty – below 4% by 2020;
- the percentage of children with severe material deprivation – below 7% by 2020;
- the percentage experiencing energy poverty – below 7% by 2020; and
- the percentage of people in households with a low intensity of employment (akin to 'part-working' households) – below 15% by 2020.

Three things may be said about this list. First, we understand that it is unusual for government in Spain to set numerical targets. Second, to the extent that some (especially the first and the last) depend on how well the economy is doing, it is clear that meeting the targets is at most only partially dependent on the success of the strategy and on what the regional government does. Third, although the bulk of the strategy and action points belong under the social inclusion/exclusion heading, the targets are all to do with poverty narrowly defined in low income or material terms. This may be a sign of political commitment and of the importance attached to the strategy. How it fits with the vision of a broad strategy is unclear.

Monitoring

An intermediate report on the impact of the strategy was published when data for 2017 was available. Although this showed falls on all five measures, one year's worth of data is insufficient to draw any conclusions, not just about the effect of the strategy and its actions but also about what is really happening to poverty measures themselves (given the inevitable presence of year- to-year statistical fluctuations). A final evaluation report of the strategy is still being written at the moment.



Case Study 4

New Zealand: The Child Poverty Reduction Act, 2018

Introduction

Of the five case studies, only one strategy from an independent, national government is examined, namely that of New Zealand. It is primarily government orientated, although there is collaboration with other bodies. New Zealand may seem like an unlikely choice for this study given that the actions of a national government are being compared with what a devolved nation like Wales would be able to do. However, New Zealand remains a very useful case study for three reasons. First, its strategy is driven from the top, with the Prime Minister herself taking the child poverty reduction portfolio. Second, related documents are clear, setting out the strategy and monitoring/evaluation activities. Third, the strategy is supported by legislation.

New Zealand has a child wellbeing problem. Although it ranks 14th out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index 2019 (UNDP, 2020),³ it ranks 35th out of 38 developed nations in the 2020 UNICEF World's of Influence Report Card, which measures child wellbeing in rich countries (UNICEF, 2020). In this measure, wellbeing includes mental wellbeing, physical health and academic and social skills. In response, both parties in New Zealand prioritised child poverty on their platforms in 2017.

Anti-poverty initiatives in New Zealand have always centred on the idea of equity of services and justice, particularly for indigenous populations, including Maori. Child anti-poverty measures follow suit.

Context and origins

The push for a child poverty strategy can be traced to 2012, when the Children's Commissioner published a report on child poverty (Children's Commissioner, 2012). Having championed the subject from the start, the current Prime Minister has ensured that the subject has a high profile.

Child poverty was a key talking point in both the 2017 and 2020 national elections with the Labour party running on a platform committing to introducing child anti-poverty legislation within 100 days of taking office when they first came to power in 2017. Between 2017 and 2020, Labour governed as part of a coalition. In the 2020 election, it was returned to office with a majority.

The Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018 was enacted (with almost unanimous support) with the aim of achieving significant and sustained reduction in child poverty and to improve the wellbeing of children and young people in New Zealand. It was influenced by the UK's 2010 child poverty strategy, which also committed targets into law. The Prime Minister, who is also now the Minister of Child Poverty Reduction, and the Leader of the Opposition discussed the legislation together.

³ The Human Development Index is a composite index, measuring average achievement in three dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living.

Scope and design

What we refer to as the strategy is, in fact, two documents. The first is the Child Poverty Reduction Act (referred to as 'the Act'), which was passed in 2018. The second is a section of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, which aims to alleviate child and youth material hardship. The Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy (referred to as 'the Wellbeing Strategy') was published in August 2019, and includes the policies and indicators relevant to child poverty reduction put in place after the Act was passed, but it also includes a much wider set of policies relating to wellbeing rather than poverty, which we have not included in the analysis.

Poverty definition

There is no specific definition of poverty or child poverty used within the Act, but the measures only include income measures: low income, material hardship and poverty persistence. The conception of wellbeing in the Wellbeing Strategy goes beyond alleviating material hardship (the concern of the Act), by incorporating income measures but having a much broader wellbeing remit.

In the Wellbeing Strategy, the meaning of wellbeing is understood through the six high-level 'outcomes' where it seeks to improve outcomes for children and young people. These are that children and young people: A) are loved, safe and nurtured; B) have what they need (material hardship); C) are happy and healthy; D) are learning and developing; E) are accepted, respected and connected; F) and are involved and empowered.

Scope of the strategy

Through the Children's Commissioner, children were interviewed. The outcomes included in the Wellbeing Strategy are a direct result of these interviews, including the broadening of focus to include topics such as bullying and inter-family relationships and the delineation between children and youth.

While each of the six outcomes in the Wellbeing Strategy has its own set of indicators,⁴ it is Outcome B 'children and young people have what they need', where the Child Poverty indicators related to the Act sit and which are the only indicators where the government must by law set targets.

An Act of Parliament was chosen as it was considered to force the government (and possibly subsequent governments) to focus on the issue. The Act itself states that its purpose is to help achieve a significant and sustained reduction in child poverty by encouraging a focus by government and society on child poverty reduction; facilitate political accountability against published targets; and require transparent reporting on levels of child poverty (Parliamentary Council Office, 2018).

Four measures of poverty and hardship, for which the Government must set targets, define the core focus of the Act. Two are to do with low income (one a fixed low-income threshold, the other a relative one). The third covers material hardship. The fourth, which is still under development, measures poverty persistence. More detail about the targets is given below.

⁴ For example, Outcome Three: children and young people are happy and healthy, includes indicators on prenatal care and early exposure to toxins.

There is also a set of Child Poverty Related Indicators (which reflect cross-party working). The Act does not require targets to be set for these, but the Government must report annually on one or more of the following indicators: housing affordability; housing quality; food insecurity; regular school attendance; avoidable hospitalisations.

Priorities

Outcome B has four areas of focus: improve earnings and employment; create a fairer and more equitable welfare system; improve housing affordability, quality and security, and help families with the cost of essentials, under which sit 15 policies.⁵ These policies are focused on low-income families, or through their design, low-income families will be the main beneficiaries and are aimed at meeting the targets set by the Act.

The Wellbeing strategy further prioritises poverty reduction. This is because although it wants to achieve the six wellbeing outcomes for all children, they are prioritising certain groups with worst outcomes in many of their policies. These are children with greater needs,⁶ those experiencing poverty or socio-economic disadvantage, and those in State care or who are in contact with the care system. The Wellbeing Strategy aims to reduce child poverty as it is thought it will have a positive impact across all the wellbeing outcomes focused on their priority groups.

Budget

The Public Finance Act was amended to commit the Treasury to reporting what has been done to reduce child poverty every year within the budget report. Outcome B 'Children and young people have what they need' does not have a maximum budget attached to it, according to the Strategy document, but each action is owned by a specific government agency and that action has an agreed amount of money allocated to it.

Putting the strategy into action

Changes were made to legislation, government structures and operation to facilitate the Child Poverty Reduction Act. A Child Poverty Unit (CPU) was set up to support the implementation of the Act. Based in the Department of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet (DPMC) and independent from any single operational unit, the Unit can support multiple agencies and act as coordinator towards shared goals. Additionally, as it does not directly have powers and works through other agencies, positioning at the highest office provides political leverage. There is also a Child Wellbeing Unit within the DPMC, which sits alongside the CPU, with whom they work closely. The CPU focuses on the poverty related aspects of the Wellbeing Strategy, while the Child Wellbeing Unit works more broadly across the six outcomes.

⁵ New policies have been added as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic; however, these have not been included because they are not in the original document.

⁶ The Children's Act does not define 'greater needs' but it includes children and their families facing multiple issues, such as long-term health needs, or multiple interactions with the justice system.

The changes to the social security system, in large part through the 'Families Package' which was introduced from 2018 to help improve incomes for low- and middle-income families with children,⁷ are expected to have a big poverty reduction impact. However, there have been fewer large-scale policies put in place to deal with the broader child poverty related indicators, and one of the roles of the CPU is to work with different departments to implement policies that will improve these measures.

Interaction between different agencies and levels of government has been cultivated. A group of Chief Executives of relevant agencies meets monthly to focus on child poverty. Deputy Chief Executives meet fortnightly (approximately 20 people attend these meetings) to discuss the work and what is coming up. The aim of these meetings is to approach all anti-child poverty initiatives as a whole, rather than department by department. Beneath the Deputies sit the general managers of each agency. This organisation has been in place for three years.

Responsibility

The responsibility for the Act ultimately lies with the Prime Minister herself as she is the Minister for Child Poverty Reduction. The Child Poverty Unit within the DPMC (in tandem with the Child Wellbeing Unit) is responsible on a day-to-day basis for driving the strategy forward, both internally within government and externally.

It is of note, however, that it is the Minister of Finance (through the provisions of the Public Finance Act) who has to report to parliament on child poverty and – very clearly – on what the Treasury itself has done towards meeting the goals.

Targets and monitoring

There are four primary measures of poverty and material hardship for which the Government must set targets. The targets themselves are not part of the Act.

The measures are:

- Low income before housing costs: below 50% of median income ('relative');
- Low income after housing costs: below 50% of median income ('fixed'); A measure of material hardship (reflecting the proportion of children living in households with hardship rates below a standard threshold); and
- A measure of poverty persistence (under development, to be reported from 2025/26).

In 2017/18 the baseline rate for the first three measures were 17%, 23% and 13% respectively. The three-year targets were set at 11%, 19% and 10%; and the 10-year targets were set at 5%, 10% and 6%, a reduction of more than half on each measure.

Monitoring

The Act requires progress against the outcomes of the strategy to be formally reported. The Child Poverty Unit is looking to publish something informally in the coming months.

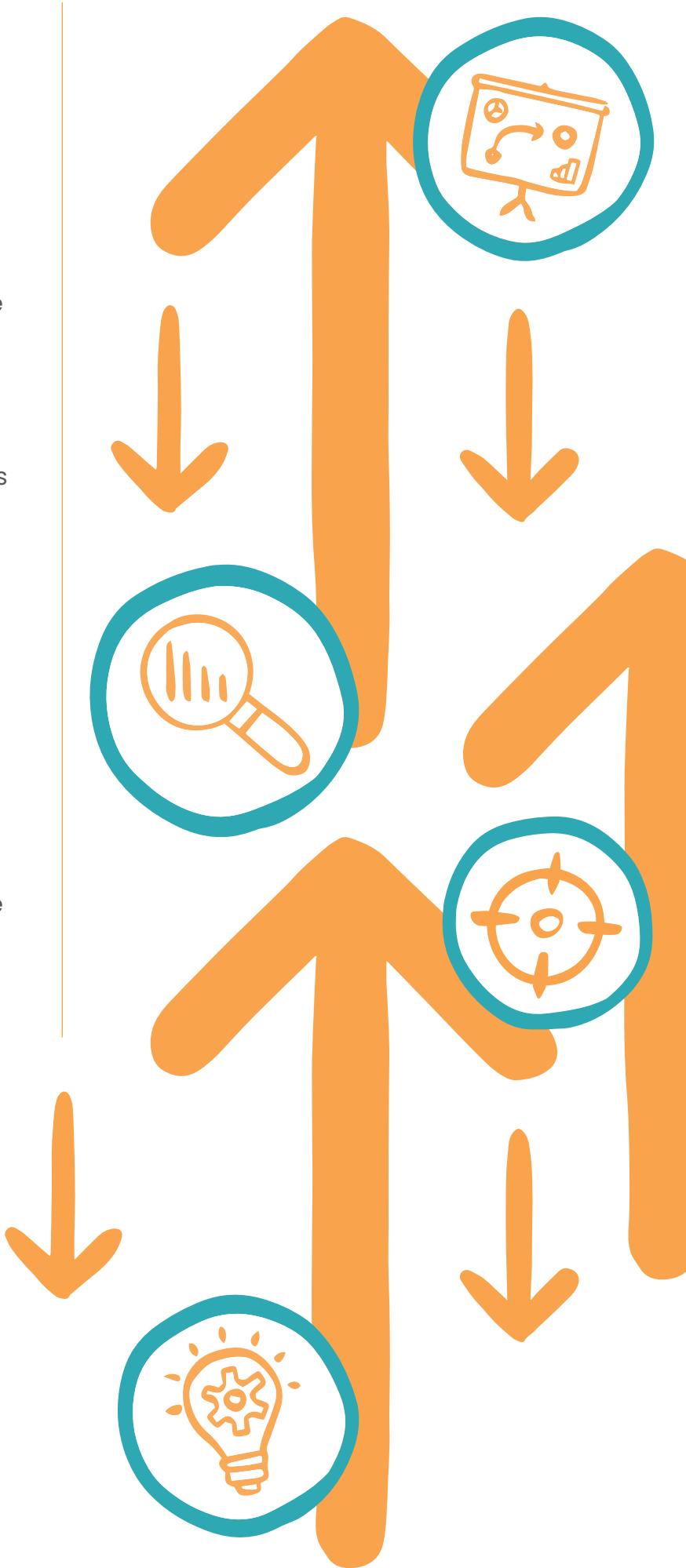
The aim is to refresh the indicators at least once a year as part of the legislative requirement for the responsible Minister to report to Parliament annually on progress against the strategy outcomes. The assessment of the indicators sits with independent government statisticians.

⁷ This includes increasing the Family Tax Credit, introducing a Best Start tax credit, increasing paid parental leave, introducing a Winter Energy Payment to help low-income households heat their homes, increasing financial assistance for carers and increasing the New Zealand equivalent of Housing Benefit.

The Children's Act 2014 requires the publication of an annual report on the achievement of the Wellbeing Strategy's outcomes. The first report was due April 2021 and will include data for each of the outcomes as well as monitoring and evaluation on the policies and actions set out in the first Wellbeing Strategy.

The Children's Act 2014 also requires the Wellbeing Strategy itself (rather than the policies or actions) to be reported on. This involves updates of the strategy to be produced, to indicate what policies the government has implemented since the last iteration of the strategy and any steps taken to evaluate the effectiveness of those policies.

The first report of progress against the child poverty targets shows that, although parts of the Families Package had not yet been implemented in the timeframe of the latest available data, the first two (low income) poverty measures had reductions of between one and two percentage points each from 2017/18 baseline rates of 17% and 23% respectively. The report also noted that the Treasury's modelling suggested that the government was broadly on track to meet its three-year, low-income targets – but as this modelling was done before the pandemic, it was also recognised that these projections might no longer apply.



Case Study 5

Scotland: The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act, 2017

Introduction

The choice of Scotland as a case study is based on the fact that, at least since 2014, the Scottish Government has sought to target poverty directly and explicitly, and at the highest level. There is a long tradition of anti-poverty work in Scotland. The Scottish Government chose to reinstate the child poverty targets, removed by the repeal of a section of the UK Child Poverty Act 2010, in the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, including the income-based targets for child poverty. Scotland saw steadily falling levels of child poverty over a long period from the early 2000s, leaving it with a poverty rate six percentage points below the UK average (Households below average income, 2021).

The strategy is the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017. The Act aims explicitly to reduce child poverty on a low-income measure, and has several other measures that reflect different aspects of poverty. The Act does not set out any detail about how these targets will be achieved, and this is delivered through the requirement for Scottish Ministers to publish child poverty delivery plans in 2018, 2022, 2026, and report on those plans (and indeed the targets) annually. The documentation relating to the strategy is clear, and there have been a number of independent monitoring reports assessing progress, which can be used to draw conclusions on how effective the strategy is.

Although this is a strategy created by the national government, who are also responsible for reaching the targets, the Act also stipulates that local authorities and health boards must report jointly every year on activity they are taking, and will take, to reduce child poverty. A 'national partners' group, including non-governmental stakeholders, was also created to provide expertise and guidance.

Context and origins

In 2016, the Scottish Government published the 'Fairer Scotland Action Plan' – itself a result of the Fairer Scotland 'conversation', a national consultation about how to make Scotland fairer. This included input from the Poverty Truth Commission, which aims to ensure that those with lived experience of poverty and/or affected by policy decisions relating to poverty, are central to decision-making. Ending child poverty is one of the five goals of the Fairer Scotland agenda and making child poverty an Act was seen as a response to the removal of UK targets.

In 2015, the First Minister's Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality issued a report informed by research evidence and views from stakeholders across Scotland called 'Shifting the Curve'. This focused on increasing income, mainly through work (improved wages and hours of work), and reducing expenditure, by looking at housing, childcare and fuel costs.

The Act was passed unanimously (supported by all parties), and is an attempt to publicly state commitment and ensure that poverty reduction remains a priority.

There are marked differences in the areas of devolved competence and fiscal powers between Wales and Scotland, with Scotland having a larger number of devolved policy areas (such as crime and justice). The difference between the two countries increased with the Scotland 2016 Act, when Scotland was granted enhanced tax raising capabilities and welfare powers. This gives the Scottish Government more control over policy areas which could have a direct impact on poverty rates. This difference in context is crucial for policy detail, but may be less so when it comes to the strategy itself.

Scope and design

Poverty definition

The Scottish Government defines poverty as 'fundamentally about lack of income'. This is why the Act focuses on income measures and the government has chosen to aim the majority of the actions in the action plan at increasing family income or reducing costs (Scottish Government, 2018, p7).

Scope of the strategy and priorities

The substance of the strategy is contained in its action plans. The first of these, 'Every child, every chance: the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018-22' was introduced by the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, the Deputy First Minister, and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. It is focused on what are seen as the three key drivers of poverty, namely: insufficient income from work and earnings, high costs of living and insufficient income from social security.

Although the focus is on reducing poverty explicitly by increasing income or reducing costs, there are some policies in the action plan to lessen the impacts of poverty and improve quality of life.

The action plan has four subject headings and one process-related heading. The policies included under each heading are wide in scope and many have a focus on 'priority families' at high risk of poverty. Many of them are described as offering new or expanded support. The headings and a selection of the policies under them are:

- **Work and earnings:** employment support for parents; increasing low pay; a flexible workforce development fund; new support for equality at work;
- **Costs of living:** early learning and childcare; fuel poverty and housing costs; income maximisation and the poverty premium; affordable credit;
- **Social security:** Scottish Child Payment; best start grant; support for carers; job grant; funeral expense assistance; and
- **Helping families in other ways:** Children's Neighbourhoods programme; ensuring education maintenance allowance (EMA) is received; learning support for gypsy/traveller families with children; support to tackle bullying; access to musical education; resources for disabled children, young people and their families.

The action plan aims to strengthen partnership delivery and makes other levels of government responsible for working towards the child poverty targets. For example, expecting regional growth deals to have a focus on reducing poverty and funding a new national child poverty co-ordinator in the Improvement Service (a national improvement organisation for local government in Scotland) to help local authorities fulfil their new statutory planning and reporting duties.

Budget

The Act and the current action plan do not have a distinct budget attached to them. Many of the actions in the action plan have been costed and allocated a budget, while for others the final budget was still to be determined when the action plan was published. Some of the actions have been allocated funding from a £50 million 'Tackling Child Poverty Fund', but these are mostly smaller items within the action plan as this fund is intended to support innovation and is additional to core budgets (for example, the social security budget). The Scottish government estimates that in 2019/20 around £672 million was invested in programmes directed at low-income households with children (Scottish Government, 2020).

Putting the strategy into action

The strategy was created as an Act to establish child poverty as a priority and as a focus for government officials, and to hold the national Government accountable. The requirement to publish a yearly progress report highlights areas where progress is not being made. Ambitious targets, it is believed, force action.

The Act impacts local government through the statutory obligation to deliver an annual report, meaning that local authorities are more engaged and obliged to think about how they can contribute to the child poverty reduction targets. The existence of the Act empowers local authority officials to take more action within their local authorities.

Support and guidance are provided by public and third sector national partners (which include the Scottish Government, Public Health Scotland, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), the Poverty Alliance, Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit at Glasgow Caledonian University (SPIRU) and the Improvement Service), offering local authorities feedback on action plans and a framework through which they can benefit from the knowledge around child poverty that exists across Scotland.

The strategy has attempted to embed action on child poverty and inclusion more generally at different levels of government within Scotland. It has also attempted to embed monitoring and evaluation through the process so that future action plans, both local and national, can learn from the current action plans.

Responsibility

From her first annual Programme for Government (in 2014), the First Minister has signalled both her, and the Scottish Government's, commitment to reducing poverty. There are clear targets for the national government and the ministerial responsibility lies with the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People. Although local government and Health Boards are required to show their commitment through action plans, it is not expected to demonstrate that it has met the national targets. One of the criticisms made of the strategy is that actions and targets are not closely linked enough (Congreve, 2020).

The national government is not obliged to review the local action plans – this year they are being reviewed by SPIRU, but that is by agreement with the Government. In a previous review it was noted that the action plans in many cases had been signed off by the chief executive of local authorities, showing that these were in effect being prioritised.

Targets and monitoring

The Act has four measures:

- 60% of current year median income after housing costs (AHC): 'relative' poverty;
- 60% of base year (currently 2010/11) median income AHC: 'absolute' poverty;
- 70% of median income AHC and unable to afford a number of basic goods and services; and
- persistent poverty, which is children living in relative poverty for three of the past four years.

The baseline rate in 2016/17 was 23%, 20% and 11% for the first three measures, and for persistent poverty, it was 10% between 2012 and 2016. The 2023/24 interim targets are 18%, 14%, 8%, and 8%; and the final 2030 targets 10% for the relative poverty measure and 5% for the other three.

Monitoring

These targets are monitored yearly. However, the normal delivery of official statistics means that data for 2023 will not be published until spring 2025. The delivery progress report also looks at each policy and programme and should give an update on progress to date, and monitoring and evaluation have been built into many of the interventions so there is wider reporting than just on the headline targets.

Some actions on the delivery plan are statements about commissioning further research or starting pilots, which may or may not be rolled out in the future.

A Poverty and Inequality Commission has been set up for the purpose of providing independent advice to Scottish Ministers on poverty and inequality, monitoring progress and proposing solutions to poverty. The commission publish their own 'Child Poverty Delivery Plan' monitoring report, which is separate to the progress report published by the government (although it informs it). The commission has also published a review of the local authority action plans and this year SPIRU will review the local authority action plans.

In the second-year progress report, 56 of the 58 actions reported on previously were in progress or being delivered. However, two of the larger policies, the payment of the Scottish Child Payment (a weekly payment of £10 for every child under the age of six), and the increase in the number of free hours of childcare (from 600 hours to 1,140 hours a year), have been delayed due to the pandemic.⁸ Although two progress reports have now been published detailing progress on each element of the plan, it is too soon to tell if enough is being done for the targets to be met as only one year of data is available. The second progress report on the action plan shows that poverty in 2018/19 has stayed broadly the same, despite independent forecasts that predicted it would rise (Scottish Government, 2020).

⁸ Will be introduced in August 2021 instead of August 2020.

3. Analysis of the anti-poverty strategies

This chapter analyses the anti-poverty strategy case studies with two aims in mind. The first is to create an improved list of the characteristics of a good strategy, using the list set out in chapter 1 as the starting point. The second is to identify what role the strategy itself plays, as distinct from the actions and initiatives beneath it. If a strategy is not just a list or a collection, what is it – and what role does it play? To help with these tasks, the chapter begins by presenting a summary of the five strategies' key statistics and features in the form of a table.

Throughout this chapter, the five are referred to as the Toronto, BW (Baden-Württemberg), CLM (Castilla La Mancha), NZ (New Zealand) and Scottish strategies.

Key features of the five strategies

Table 4 presents an assessment of some key statistics and features of the five strategies. They are:

- duration (of both the strategy and its action plans);
- scale (the number of actions and initiatives);
- scope and population focus (the overarching idea that gives the strategy coherence, plus whether there is focus on a particular group);
- targets;
- monitoring (whether on strategy outputs or strategy outcomes); and
- political responsibility.

It might be thought that seemingly basic information like this would be straightforward to establish, but in reality, that has not been so. As a result, entries in most rows reflect judgements that the authors have had to make. These are explained in the discussion that follows.

Duration

On the face of it, the durations range widely, from one year for BW, four for CLM, through to 20 years for Toronto. The Scottish and NZ strategies have no time limit, and with targets set for the late 2020s, aspire to last at least ten years. Whether they end up being so different remains to be seen. The possibility of extension has been mentioned for BW and CLM. No strategy so far is more than six years old.

All but BW have four- or five-year action plans. Sometimes this matches the electoral cycle (Toronto, CLM) and sometimes not (NZ's general elections are every three years). Toronto's is the only one that has moved onto a second action plan.

Scale

The number of actions or initiatives for each strategy is based on those reported in the latest action plan. BW's strategy contains one initiative; NZ's is shown as containing 15; the others have between 50 and 60.

Table 4. Key features of the strategies

Feature	Toronto	Baden-Württemberg	Castilla La Mancha	New Zealand	Scotland
How long does the strategy run for?	2015 to 2035	2020	2017 to 2020	2018 onwards	2017 onwards
Duration of current/recent action plan	4 years	1 year	4 years	Unlimited	4 years
How many initiatives/actions does the plan include?	55	1	58	15	58
Population group of interest	All	Children	All	Children	Children
What is the strategy's overarching idea?	Five themes	Life chances	Social inclusion	Child poverty	Child poverty
Is reducing poverty a strategy target?	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
What has been the focus of monitoring so far?	Outputs	Outputs	Outputs	Outcomes	Outcomes
What level of politician is responsible for the strategy?	Poverty Advocate Councillor	Social Welfare Minister	Social Wellbeing Minister	Prime Minister	Cabinet Secretary

The count for NZ is restricted to the actions and initiatives in the part of the Child and Youth Wellbeing action plan relating to the outcome that 'children and young people (should) have what they need'. This reflects the way the plan is arranged, with all the actions relevant to the poverty rate (and none that are irrelevant to it) gathered together in one place.

The count for Toronto excludes actions on housing because these are now recorded within the housing strategy action plan. It only includes actions and initiatives that have been planned (though not necessarily funded). If those identified as 'in development' were included, Toronto's count would rise to almost 90.

The counts for the Scottish and CLM strategies include all actions and initiatives in the action plan. Of the 58 Scottish actions, we estimate that 16 are in some sense 'to be confirmed'. Four out of CLM's 58 actions had not been implemented in 2017, with a lack of data on a further 15. Measured this way, the Scottish strategy is rather smaller than CLM's, which in turn is smaller than Toronto's.

Scope and population focus

A key aspect of each strategy's overarching idea is how tightly it constrains the strategy's scope. The two most tightly-drawn strategies are NZ's, focused on children's material wellbeing, and BW's, about the life chances of children in poor families. As explained above, the tightness of the NZ strategy reflects the compartmentalisation of the broader Child and Wellbeing Strategy. Toronto's strategy, defined by its five 'recommendations' (housing stability, service access, transportation equity, food access, quality jobs) is sharply delineated but broad. The idea behind CLM's strategy can be understood either as social inclusion or as a broad concept of poverty going beyond material deprivation and low income to include, for example, access to resources.

Scotland's strategy can be seen as a cross between the CLM and NZ strategies, with CLM's breadth and NZ's focus on child poverty.

Targets

Although high and/or rising poverty rates were cited in all five cases as being among the reasons for introducing an anti-poverty strategy, only the CLM, NZ and Scottish strategies contain targets for the poverty rate. Table 5 summarises the poverty measures for which targets have been set. In both NZ and Scotland, the measures were set out in legislation. All three strategies use a mix of low income and material hardship or deprivation. The main difference between the three is that both the CLM and NZ strategies contain measures related to very low income, whereas Scotland does not (although statistics for the numbers below 50% of median are published).

Monitoring

Table 4 shows whether monitoring of the strategy so far has been focused on outputs (that is, the number of strategy actions or initiatives that have been put into effect) or on outcomes (the number of people who have been impacted by them and/or the extent to which those people's experiences have been impacted).

Monitoring reports for the CLM, NZ and Scottish strategies all contain statistics for the targeted poverty measures. While these are what underpin outcome monitoring, they require interpretation to be meaningful (we return to this below). So far, only NZ and Scottish monitoring show the necessary depth of discussion (in our view). Once the current review of the CLM strategy is published, it too is likely to qualify.

Reporting on the progress of the BW and Toronto strategies has focused on the number of initiatives that have been put into effect (meaning in BW, the number of localities who have responded by creating a local prevention network). CLM's initial monitoring report also counted actions and initiatives put into effect.

Political responsibility

As the holder of the child poverty portfolio, and with the Child Poverty Unit located in their office, responsibility for the NZ strategy rests unambiguously with the Prime Minister. Responsibility for the BW strategy rests with the Social Welfare Minister. We would argue that the word 'unambiguously' also applies here because the Social Welfare Ministry can pursue this strategy on its own.

In the other three cases, although it is clear who is nominally responsible – the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government in Scotland; the Minister of Social Wellbeing in CLM; and a City Councillor designated the 'poverty advocate' in Toronto – quite what 'responsibility' means is not clear. For example, CLM's Social Welfare Ministry is responsible for co-ordination, but responsibility for many individual actions and initiatives rests with other ministries. Responsibility for Toronto's strategy rested at the start with a Deputy Mayor (to whom the Poverty Reduction Team reported directly). Under the current arrangements, where the poverty advocate is an ordinary member of the City Council, 'responsibility' cannot mean the same thing.

Table 5. The measures of poverty to which targets are attached

Strategy	Measures for which targets are set
Castilla La Mancha	Poverty and social exclusion: below 60% median income and/or severe material deprivation and/or low work intensity Severe poverty: below 30% current year median income Children in severe material deprivation Energy (fuel) poverty Low work intensity
New Zealand (children only)	Low income: below 50% current year median income BHC Low income: below 50% 2017/18 median income AHC Material hardship Persistent hardship (measure under development)
Scotland (children only)	Low income: below 60% current year median income AHC Low income: below 60% 2010/11 median income AHC Low income (below 70% AHC) and material deprivation Persistent poverty

Implications for the characteristics of a good strategy

Using this overview of the five strategies as the source of our evidence, we can now suggest refinements to the list of characteristics of a good strategy set out in chapter one. The characteristics were summed up there as high-level commitment, accountability, involvement and communication, prioritisation, understanding and monitoring. The refinements put forward here refer to commitment, priorities, understanding and monitoring.

Commitment

If responsibility rests with the Prime Minister, with a team dedicated to driving the strategy located in their office, then high-level commitment is beyond dispute. But is commitment at the highest level always necessary? The BW strategy, which can be implemented by the Social Welfare Ministry acting alone, suggests it may not be. On the other hand, the special circumstances of this exception reinforce the sense that **for any strategy involving more than one ministry, either the Mayor or Prime Minister themselves, or maybe a deputy, must be responsible**. It is also clear that the Finance Minister must be committed. The stipulation that the NZ Finance Minister should report to parliament on progress towards the poverty targets appears to be a telling detail.

Prioritisation

Two of the experts consulted during the research for this project stressed the importance of prioritisation ('if a strategy doesn't prioritise it's not a strategy'). The question is how a strategy should signal its priorities. Based on the evidence here, our conclusion is that the strategy should be organised such that everything in it is a priority.

With only one action in it, BW's strategy meets this condition trivially. As a result of the way it is organised, so too does NZ's strategy. A strategy presented like this leaves no room for doubt: both the parts and the whole are the priority. By contrast, one containing priorities and non-priorities invites doubts both about individual actions and the strategy as a whole.

A strategy in which everything is a priority must be coherent – actions must be linked to clearly defined objectives, and different objectives must have some unity between them – and compact. We do not see why this should rule out a range of objectives (such as Toronto's 'recommendations'), so long as there is a logic to what is being done. Whether a strategy to reduce poverty can also be one to alleviate some of the problems that go with it ('palliative actions') is unclear. However, a government's anti-poverty strategy need not be its only strategy to contain actions against poverty.

Understanding and monitoring

Monitoring outcomes (or impacts) is seen as a characteristic of a good strategy. Three of the strategies here have not so far tried to do this while the other two have not been collecting data long enough to know what is happening to the poverty rate. The direction of travel in both cases is positive, but a few more years of data is needed to take a definitive view. Scotland has modelled what would have happened to child poverty if no action was taken, so they have something to compare their data with when it becomes available. Both NZ and Scotland face the added problem caused by the Coronavirus pandemic: it may be difficult to work out what is happening to poverty until a few years after the 'end' of the pandemic.

What all the strategies have monitored, however, are outputs. That is, the number of actions and initiatives that have been put into practice. The conclusion we draw is that outcome monitoring is not only difficult in practice, but also misses an aspect of government that is important to both politicians and the public. That aspect is the value of getting something done, irrespective – at least in the first instance – of how it works out. This means that output monitoring has value in its own right and is not just a poor substitute for outcome monitoring. It is also necessary because monitoring outcomes (at least using national surveys) will not produce results in the first years of a strategy and there needs to be at least some understanding of how much of the strategy/ action plan has been put into practice.

The value that is placed on getting things done increases the risk that they are done poorly. The antidote to that is not outcome monitoring after the event but good planning before it. Understanding how to do things well is critical. Well-planned actions do not guarantee that a poverty strategy will work out well, but poorly planned ones make it very likely it will work out badly.

There is a link between one element of planning and outcome monitoring. A key ingredient of outcome monitoring is an estimate of what would have happened (to child poverty, for example) had the action or strategy not been implemented. But this ‘counterfactual’, as it is called, is also a key ingredient in the planning stage, where it plays the role of the baseline or yardstick against which the forecast impact (on child poverty) of a proposed action is measured and the wisdom of the action assessed.

Planned outcome monitoring is important but it is only after enough time has passed for evidence of its impact to emerge that it becomes so.

Until then what matters is making sure that strategy actions are well-designed, capable of meeting the objectives set for them if all goes as expected, and well-implemented. Monitoring measures success, but planning and the understanding of it rests on making success possible. These two, more than monitoring, are the hallmarks of a good strategy.

The role of the anti-poverty strategy itself

The list of features that characterise a good anti-poverty strategy leaves a central question unanswered: what does the anti-poverty strategy itself do, as distinct from the actions and initiatives that make it up? At the start of the report, we pointed out that without an answer to that, we cannot judge whether it is effective.

One role an anti-poverty strategy plays seems obvious: it is a statement of values and a signal of intent. In most if not all case studies, the strategy emerged as a response to poverty becoming party-political, around, or in the run-up to elections. Yet any government policy can be used to send a signal about values if desired. Signalling is not therefore a role that is special to a strategy or which defines it.

The strategies studied here show that there is something else. What they show, in a sentence, is that **the role of an anti-poverty strategy is to bring about action on poverty within a context in which those who want action are not always the same people and organisations as those who can take action.**

In some of the case studies, this was true even within government departments or a particular local authority. Poverty was moved up the agenda and those who wanted to take action had a framework within which to do so.

Baden-Württemberg

The strategy which shows this most clearly is BW's. The source of this clarity is the separation of powers which the German Constitution imposes on the states. Federal-level laws limit income transfers while the local level is responsible for delivering services. As a result, if the BW government wants something done about poverty, it must find someone else to do it. Having identified a prevention network, to improve the life chances of children from poor families, as its anti-poverty action of choice, the role of its strategy is to encourage and enable as many of BW's 44 localities to introduce one as are willing and able to do so.

The number of local prevention networks brought into being (strategy outputs) is a measure of its effectiveness. In the long run, it will only be worthwhile as well as effective if those networks have made an appreciable difference to the lives of the children it is intended to help. Measuring this strategy outcome, however, is a long way off. At this early stage, ensuring that networks work well is the priority. Research by BW's Family Research Unit, aimed at identifying factors that contribute to the building of a successful network, is designed to do that.

We are not suggesting that BW's strategy is a model to be copied, either in its content (although there is some resemblance to the Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland Programme) or in its form. The reason for its prominence is the clear role the strategy is playing, as a bridge between those on the one side who want action (here the BW government) and those on the other who can take it (the localities).

Toronto

Toronto's strategy confronts the same basic problem of how one group who want action on poverty but lack resources can persuade another group who possess the means to act to do so. Here, both groups are within the city government: on the one side, a Poverty Reduction Unit (PRU) reporting (originally) to a Deputy Mayor; on the other, the city government divisions and agencies (departments). The strategy's six 'recommendations' represent desired directions of travel.

Between them, a Deputy Mayor and the PRU can ensure that matters to do with poverty are on the agenda; that proposals relevant to poverty move from the margins to centre-stage; and that such proposals receive support at critical moments. The initiative, however, remains with departments who must be prepared to deploy both human and financial resources to the development and planning of proposals. Like BW, the number of actions implemented under the strategy is a measure of its effectiveness, although the variation in the nature of those actions means that it is a more limited measure than in BW's case.

New Zealand

As a centrally-driven strategy, NZ's is the opposite of Toronto's; yet in seeking to alter the way the government works in relation to poverty, they share something in common. Despite the pledge to reduce child poverty being laid down in legislation, and a Prime Minister clearly committed to poverty reduction, it is telling that a strategy-as-bridge is still required to exert pressure for poverty actions.

Driven by a Child Poverty Unit located in the Prime Minister's department, the strategy includes an effort to change the way the government service understands, values and deals with poverty (through a regular cycle of meetings of Chief and Deputy Chief Executives from government agencies). The Treasury is required by legislation to state what it has done to reduce child poverty in its Annual Budget Report – a form of output monitoring for a strategy whose targets are expressed as outcomes measured by a lower poverty rate.

Castilla La Mancha and Scotland

The distinctive feature of both the CLM and Scottish strategies is the part played in them by major anti-poverty organisations. This is especially pronounced in CLM where the coalition of anti-poverty organisations (EAPN-CLM) was not only a moving force in the creation of the strategy in the first place but maintains a central position in the monitoring of the strategy. Some of its member organisations are also responsible for delivering individual elements of the strategy. While such groups naturally belong among those pushing for action on poverty, there are pros and cons associated with a deeper involvement which finds them on both sides of the bridge. This involvement has the advantage of allowing them to offer insight into problems, experience to support practice, as well as delivering some elements themselves. Against that, however, it poses the question of how such proximity can co-exist with the disagreement that inevitably arises when choices have to be made that in a real sense go against what campaigning organisations and others want to see happen.

Conclusions

What is unavoidable in BW's strategy, because of the strict separation of powers between different levels of German government, is the general reality that every anti-poverty strategy is really a device by which those who want to see action taken against poverty try to persuade, by various means, those who can take action to do so. The clearer a prospective strategy's architects understand that, the more likely the strategy is to be effective.

However, this obviously cannot mean that those who want to see action on poverty should face no restraints. Three of the characteristics identified earlier as being the hallmarks of a good strategy also serve as good reasons for those who can take action on poverty to challenge those who want to see action taken. One is priority: with limited resources (time and expertise, not just money), choices must be made.

A second is coherence: actions must serve the strategy's goals. A third is planning: actions must be well-designed and on the right scale. Providing pushback from the perspective of good administration is the role of civil servants, public and third sector agencies and other service providers. The challenge is to ensure that pushback is both constructive and seen to be so.

This leads to a final point about effectiveness: if strategies are devices for persuasion, pressure and counter-pressure are endemic and must be accommodated rather than suppressed. An effective anti-poverty strategy, and the process which creates it, must contain and allow for tension. Without tension, a strategy cannot be effective.

4. The characteristics of an effective anti-poverty strategy

This final chapter draws together the characteristics of a good strategy, with our conclusions about the role of the strategy itself, in order to set out our criteria for an effective strategy. What is key here is the understanding we have come to gain of what a strategy itself is for. In essence, we see its job as being to bring two forces into play with one-another: on the one hand, those who want to see action taken on poverty and on the other, those who can take action on poverty but whose resources for doing so – financial and human – are, as ever, finite.

An effective anti-poverty strategy is therefore one which enables the two forces to flourish and engage with one-another constructively.

An effectiveness checklist

Against this background, we suggest the following checklist of seven characteristics which an anti-poverty strategy needs to have if it is to be effective. This checklist is intended to be of use to those involved in developing an anti-poverty strategy. In order to be effective, such a strategy needs to:

1. Be understood as a framework which provides those who want action taken on poverty with a means by which to enable or oblige those who can take action to do so. 
2. Be clear what it aims to achieve and only include actions which serve that end. Other actions against poverty are not a priority and so must be excluded. 
3. Recognise that until an anti-poverty initiative has had time to settle in, its planning and implementation are what matter most. 
4. Recognise that good planning and implementation require good and detailed understanding, co-ordination and resources. 
5. Recognise that making something happen is valuable in its own right and a measure, in the first instance, of a strategy's effectiveness. 
6. Be capable of learning as it proceeds, with outcome measures – the impact on people themselves – playing a growing role in this, as a measure in the last instance of a strategy's worth. 
7. Be the responsibility of a minister with enough seniority to ensure that the strategy is put into effect. If action is required by more than one department, the assumption is that this minister is the prime or first minister. 

Looked at from the outside – our viewpoint on the five case studies – and with the simpler task of merely forming a judgement as to whether an anti-poverty strategy is likely to be effective, answers to a few broad-brush questions may be sufficient to reach a conclusion. First, is the strategy ‘for real’ – for action, not just aspiration? That an anti-poverty strategy might just be ‘for show’ is an anxiety identified in the 2014 review of international poverty strategies.

Second, have the actions it has led to been planned and implemented well? This is a concern about strategies in general and the hallmarks of a good strategy suggested by the Cabinet Office and PPIW studies seek to meet this concern. Third, is there a palpable tension to the strategy, between the drive for action and the insistence that action be done well? Without this tension (the source of its energy), an anti-poverty strategy loses force and meaning.

Final remarks

We have three final remarks. First, this view of effectiveness reflects the view of strategies as being about action and what has to be thought about and done to make it happen. In this view, a strategy can be effective because it has made something happen, even if the impact falls short of what was hoped or intended. This stress on action as opposed to the outcomes it eventually leads to has several justifications:

- To warn against any assumption that action on such a complex subject as poverty is straightforward;
- Action must be taken before, and often long before, even a preliminary assessment of the outcomes is possible; and

• While outcomes are the obvious measure of the overall worth of a strategy for researchers, policy professionals, economists and so on, action in its own right ('getting something done') commands itself to politicians – this point, it should be noted, was made to us by one of the strategy experts we consulted.

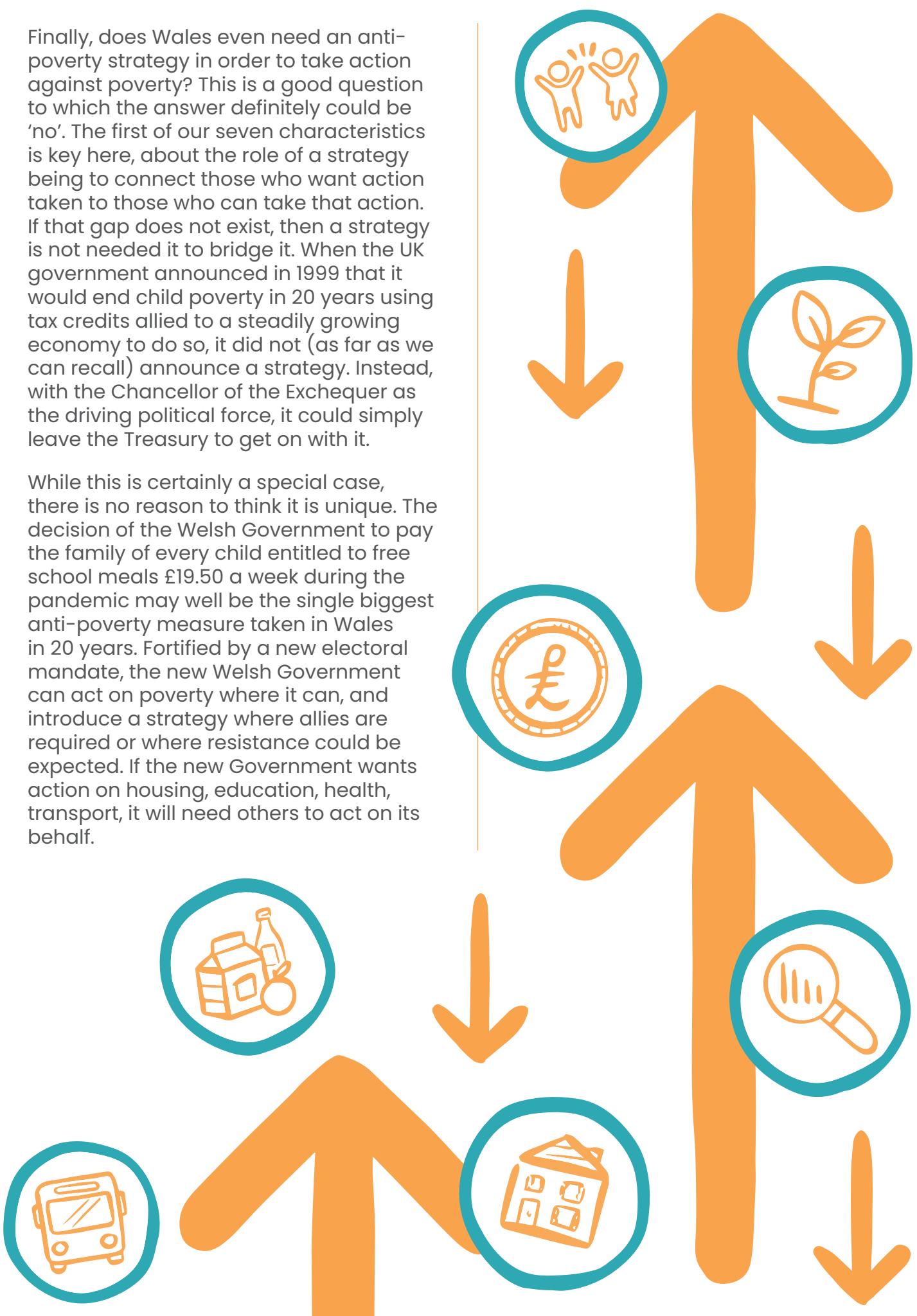
Second, we have not found the definition of poverty to be an issue connected with strategy effectiveness.

By contrast, there is room for disagreement about how poverty is measured – low income alone, and if so on which threshold, and/or material deprivation – but these disagreements are both focused and constrained by the data that is available. The individual and household characteristics of those in poverty in Wales and across the UK have been analysed intensively for many years.

The question of what exactly is meant by poverty does arise in relation to a strategy's aims, whether to reduce poverty (the number of people experiencing it), ease poverty (improve their financial and/or material situation irrespective of whether they 'escape' it or not), or address any of the problems which those experiencing poverty are more likely to face (for example to do with health or education). The five strategies studied here reflect a range of answers to that question. The issue is not what meaning to choose, but rather the coherence between the strategy's stated aims, the actions within it and the measurement chosen – plus of course the necessary prioritisation.

Finally, does Wales even need an anti-poverty strategy in order to take action against poverty? This is a good question to which the answer definitely could be 'no'. The first of our seven characteristics is key here, about the role of a strategy being to connect those who want action taken to those who can take that action. If that gap does not exist, then a strategy is not needed to bridge it. When the UK government announced in 1999 that it would end child poverty in 20 years using tax credits allied to a steadily growing economy to do so, it did not (as far as we can recall) announce a strategy. Instead, with the Chancellor of the Exchequer as the driving political force, it could simply leave the Treasury to get on with it.

While this is certainly a special case, there is no reason to think it is unique. The decision of the Welsh Government to pay the family of every child entitled to free school meals £19.50 a week during the pandemic may well be the single biggest anti-poverty measure taken in Wales in 20 years. Fortified by a new electoral mandate, the new Welsh Government can act on poverty where it can, and introduce a strategy where allies are required or where resistance could be expected. If the new Government wants action on housing, education, health, transport, it will need others to act on its behalf.



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Annex 1: The role of people with lived experience of poverty

This appendix contains information about the role played by people with lived experience of poverty in four of the five strategies. The role of people with lived experience of poverty was not a topic of the original research. The material included here therefore reflects what had already been collected as a bi-product during the research phase. This appendix has also benefitted from a conversation from someone directly involved in the task of enabling people with lived experience to contribute to the development of a poverty strategy. The subject was not, however, discussed with the individual strategy experts.

We report on four strategies – those of Castilla La Mancha, Toronto, Scotland and New Zealand. The absence of evidence of involvement in Baden-Württemberg should not be taken as evidence of absence of involvement. The same comment applies to the other four too: no inferences about those strategies can be drawn from what is *not* said here.

Castilla La Mancha

EAPN-CLM's member organisations were involved in the creation of the CLM strategy but clear evidence of the participation of people with lived experience of poverty in that process is lacking.

EAPN-CLM has a series of Working Groups (Grupos de Trabajo), formed by people with lived experience of poverty, who meet monthly to create proposals to present to political groups and social entities (EAPN-CLM, 2020).

EAPN-CLM took part in the Open Government Meeting (Consejo del Gobierno abierto) in 2016 which is described as having sparked the creation of the strategy, but it is not mentioned which particular entities were involved or whether any of these Working Groups was present (Castilla-La Mancha, 2017).

According to EAPN-CLM's website, the Working Group is 'formed by people with lived experience of poverty or at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Its main objective is to work on the inclusion of the experiences of the beneficiaries of social projects and promote the creation of spaces in which people with lived experience of poverty can exercise their rights'. Monthly meetings, moderated by an EAPN-CLM staff member, 'create proposals to present to political groups and social entities' (EAPN-CLM, 2020). It is unclear how any proposals connected with the strategy might get taken forward.

In 2018, EAPN-CLM coordinated an evaluation of 108 social interventions across the region by its beneficiaries and users. The interventions were provided by the Public System of Social Services. It seems likely that some of these services would fall under the 58 action points of CLM's anti-poverty strategy.

In addition, some 90 people working in the social organisations and public administrations tasked with implementing the strategy were involved in its evaluation, providing qualitative evidence and recommendations for amendments to it going forward, in a public meeting in 2019 (Castilla-La Mancha, 2019).

In summary, while the evidence for involvement at specific points in the strategy process is lacking, the existence of the EAPN-CLM's Working Group (or Groups) coupled with EAPN-CLM's continuing central role in the strategy, combine to suggest that such involvement is indirect, through EAPN-CLM and mediated by it.

Toronto

Like Castilla La Mancha, it is not clear whether people with lived experience of poverty were explicitly or deliberately involved in the development of Toronto's Poverty Reduction Strategy (TPRS) in 2015. What is clear, however, is that in 2017, the City Council created a Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) for the TPRS, formed of 17 people. This group served until 2020. While there is also clear evidence that the process of appointing a successor LEAG, to run to 2023, was begun in late 2019, it is uncertain whether that process has been completed.

The role of (LEAG) is to allow its members to draw on their personal experience to 'inform the effective development, implementation, and monitoring' of the TPRS. People apply to belong to the Group, using an open application form (Poverty reduction Strategy Office, 2019); and members are then selected to provide a mix of people who between them both reflect a 'good representation from equity-seeking groups' and also have experience of a range of relevant programs, issues, and systems (City of Toronto, 2021).

For those applying to become members in 2019, LEAG's priorities were described as comprising: advocacy (feedback on policies, programs and services); acting as conduit between communities and the City; promoting awareness (both externally and internally, to council staff) of the realities of poverty; and to participate in monitoring and evaluation of the TPRS.

In summary, it is clear that the role of the LEAG in the TPRS is a direct one, rather than mediated by another anti-poverty organisation. What is not clear is how great a role the LEAG, which meets monthly, plays in practice, or how much autonomy (for example, over the matters it considers) it possesses.

Scotland

Unlike CLM and Toronto, people with lived experience of poverty did have some input into the development of the Scottish strategy, at least to the extent that a clear message from the Fairer Scotland conversation was that child poverty in a wealthy country is not acceptable. The introduction of the Child Poverty Bill by the Scottish Government was in part a response.

This was consulted on, but it is not stated in the documents reviewed to what extent this consultation included the voices of those with lived experience of poverty.

The Child Poverty Act sets out a range of requirements around the Child Poverty Delivery Plans, which includes the consultation of people with lived experience in two ways. The first is indirectly. There is a long list of stakeholders who must be consulted in the preparation of a delivery plan including organisations which work with or represent families (Scottish government, 2018, see Annex 1). The second is directly, through the requirement to consult 'such persons who have experience of living in poverty and such other persons as [the Scottish Ministers] consider appropriate' (Scottish government, 2018, p.149). For the current plan, 11 parent groups were convened by different organisations, such as the Poverty Truth Commission and Fife Gingerbread.

Two young people's groups were convened, one each by Young Scot and the Princes Trust, and six discussion groups with children were convened by the Children's Parliament (Scottish government, 2018, see Annex 1).

There was also a funding agreement with the Poverty Alliance to run a programme called 'Get Heard Scotland'. This brought people with experience together with policy makers and Cabinet Secretaries, alongside grassroots and third sector organisations. The first annual report, for 2019/2020, was based on 37 community discussions in five local authority areas and included evidence about what was and was not working to tackle poverty at a national and local level (Cowan, 2020).

In summary, adults and children with lived experience of poverty were consulted directly in the development of the delivery plan. There are also mechanisms in place to allow consultation to continue as actions are rolled out. It is not possible to say from this brief review how many policies have been designed with these views in mind.

New Zealand

New Zealand's Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy was widely consulted on, and this included a focus on the views of children and young people in their priority areas (see chapter 2). The government collected the views of 10,000 New Zealanders, including 6,000 children and young people, in the development of the strategy. Public engagement to test draft outcomes and seek input into development of the Wellbeing Strategy included meetings, focus groups, child and adult surveys and postcard to the Prime Minister. Written submissions and a report on the national engagement is available (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019a).

Legislation (not the Act previous to the legislation) requires consultation to be carried out with representatives of Māori, and with children and young people, as part of developing the Wellbeing Strategy.

The engagement with the Māori community was through community workshops (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2019b). Those with children and young people were carried out by the Office of the Children's Commissioner and Oranga Tamariki (Ministry for Children) and are also published in a report. This was a mixture of an online survey, face to face interviews and focus groups. The interviews and focus groups were used to get the views of children and young people who were thought to be facing challenges in their lives. This included those living in poverty, in state care, with a disability, from rural areas, with refugee backgrounds, who identify as LGBTQI+, or who have received a mental health diagnosis (Oranga Tamariki and the Children's Commissioner, 2019).

It is also possible to get a sense in New Zealand of how the evidence collected has been used. This is because the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy has a summary of key findings relating to each of its areas. The Strategy also includes links to the reports that have been produced on the basis of this evidence. If other governments have produced similar reports, these were not discussed or referenced in the strategy or action plans.

Conclusion

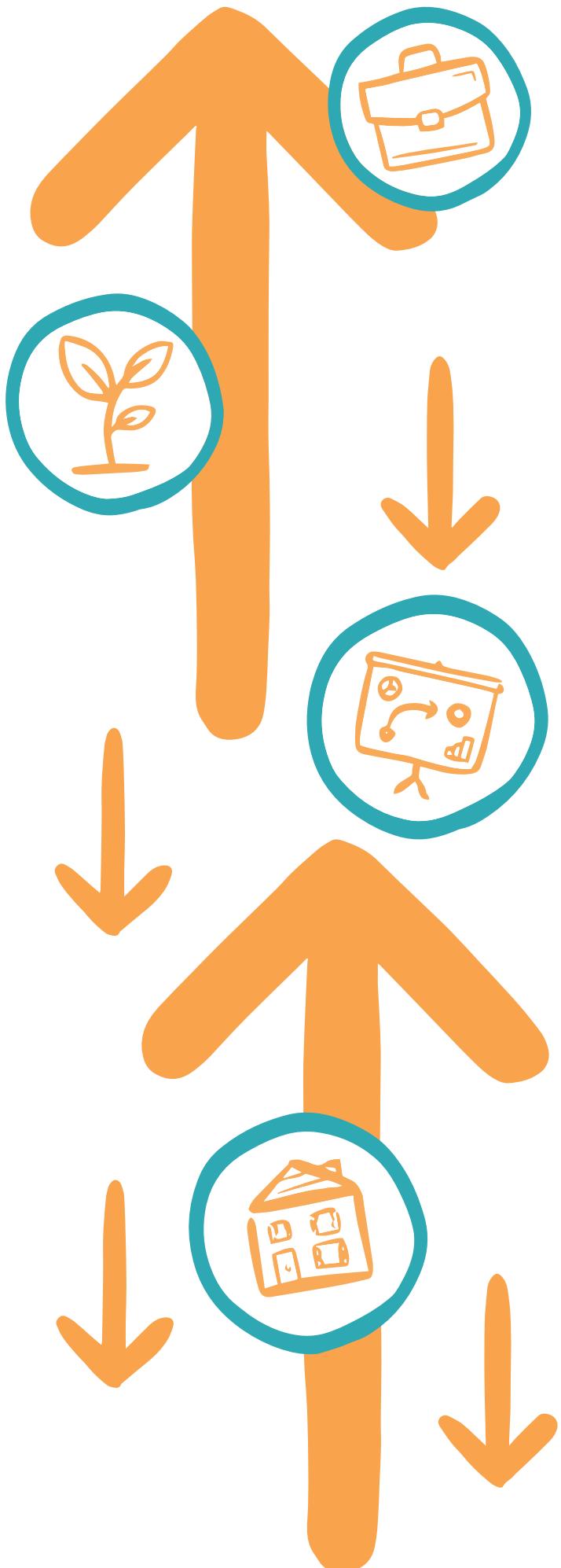
In thinking about what might constitute an 'effective' involvement of people with lived experience of poverty, we offer three questions for consideration.

First, people with lived experience can have the opportunity to speak, but to what extent is this taken into account as plans are developed and decisions made?

In particular, where do the structures that enable involvement, whether direct (such as an advisory group), or indirect (through intermediaries), lead? Are they channels for communication or dead-ends?

Second, time is of the essence, both in the sense of when in the process people with lived experience are involved and whether there is enough time to allow involvement to unfold in a constructive way. In particular, is there enough time to allow reflection and dialogue, or is involvement in practice just a one-off chance to express an opinion? Our conclusions about what constitutes an effective strategy would imply the former.

Third, what sort of information and insight is a government looking to obtain from people with lived experience of poverty? In our view, the focus of the involvement for people with direct experience should be around the details of plans and proposals, not because these 'little things' are unimportant but because, as 'the basic concerns of life', they are all-important.⁹ People with lived experience are experts, and as such, are among those best placed to ensure that anti-poverty actions are well-planned and well-implemented.



⁹ By way of example, nothing was more important when child tax credits were introduced 20 years ago than the 'detail' that the money should go not into the pocket but into the purse.

Annex 2: Documents consulted

Canada (Toronto)	
Strategy document	<u>To Prosperity: Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2015-2035, 2015</u>
Action plan	<u>Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy: 2019-2022 Action Plan, Oct 2019</u>
Work plan	<u>2019-2022 Poverty Reduction Strategy Work Plan</u>
Government progress report	<u>TO Prosperity: Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy -2016 Progress Report and 2017 Work Plan, Nov 2016</u>
Community progress report 1	<u>Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy, Year 1 Report to Community, 2016</u>
Government progress report	<u>TO Prosperity: Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy 2017 Report and 2018 Work Plan, Nov 2017</u>
Community progress report 2	<u>Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2017 Report to Community</u>
Monitoring	<u>Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy Monitoring and Evaluation Framework</u>
Independent research	<u>What to Expect from Toronto's Poverty Reduction Strategy: Lessons from the Global South, 2019</u>

Germany (Baden-Württemberg)	
Strategy	<u>Die Strategie des Ministeriums: Starke Kinder Chancenreich</u>
Network Evaluation	<u>Bilanzierung: Strategien gegen Armut – Präventionsnetzwerke gegen Kinderarmut und für Kindergesundheit</u>
Statistical background	<u>Poverty in Baden-Württemberg</u>

Spain (Castilla La Mancha)	
Strategy	Estrategia contra la pobreza, 2017–2020
Action Plan	Plan Integral – De Garantías Ciudadanas de Castilla-La Mancha
Monitoring Report	Estrategia contra la Pobreza y la Desigualdad Social de Castilla-La Mancha
Independent report/review	Red de inclusión social – Pilotos de integración socio-laboral

New Zealand	
Strategy	Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018
Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy	Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy
Action Plan	Child Poverty, measures, targets and indicators, DPMC
Government Review	Wellbeing Budget 2020, Child Poverty Report
Independent Review	18,400 children lifted out of poverty
Independent Review	Child Poverty Monitor 2020, Technical Report, NZCYES and University of Otago

Scotland	
Strategy	Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017: an overview
Action Plan	Every child, every chance. The Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018–22, The Scottish Government
Action Plan Guidance	Developing A Local Child Poverty Action Report: Guidance
Government Review	Every child, every chance. The Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan First year progress report 2018–19
Government Review	Every child, every chance. The Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan Second year progress report 2019–20
Independent Review	Child Poverty Delivery Plan progress: Scrutiny by the Poverty and Inequality Commission

Acknowledgements

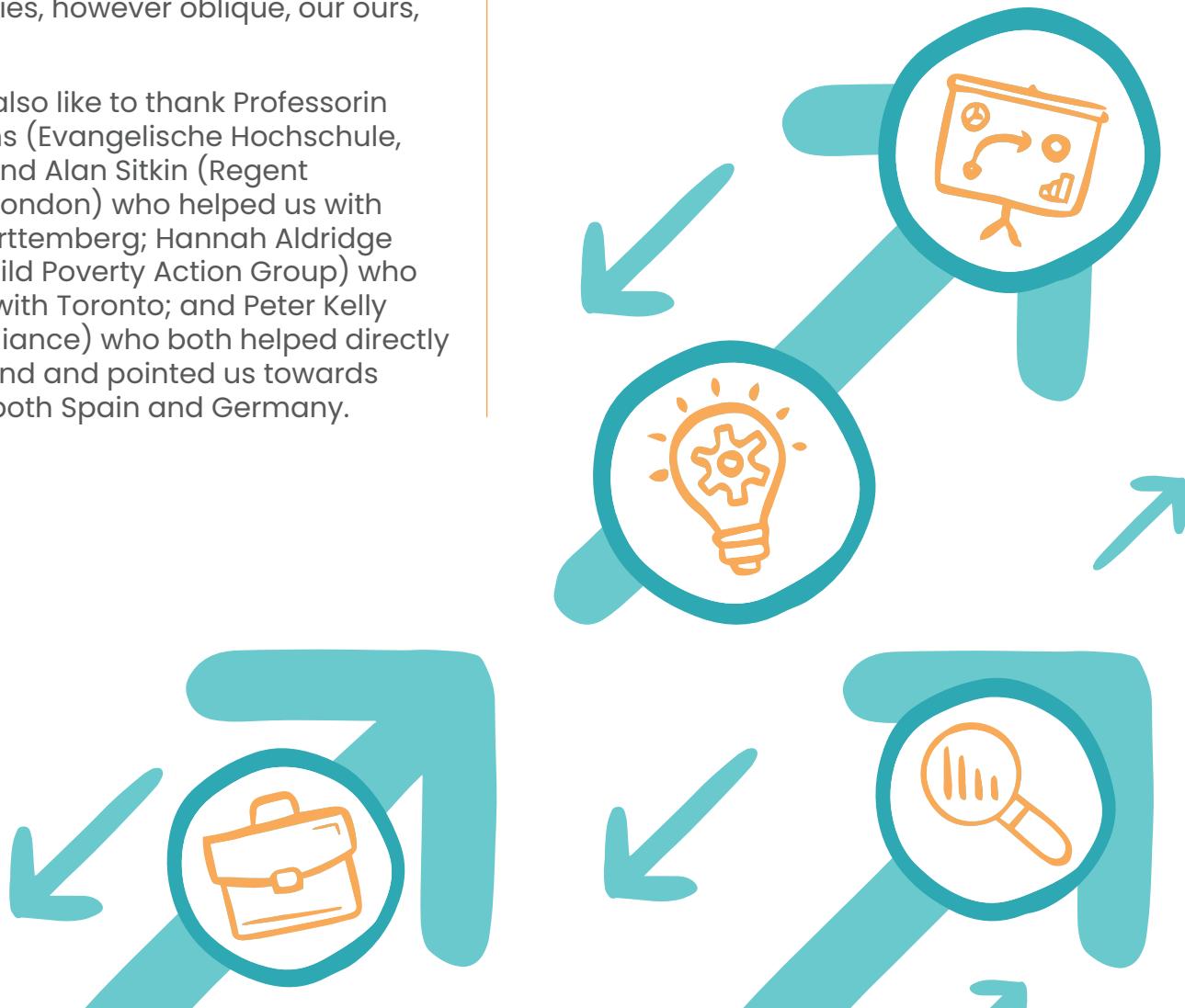
This report has rested heavily on the wisdom and insight offered to us by the experts on the five strategies who spared us their time at short notice. The report would not have been possible without them and we thank them accordingly. They are: Leticia Henar (Fresno Consulting) for Castilla La Mancha; Ricardo Tranjan (The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives) for Toronto; Holger Hoffmann (Diakonie-Baden) for Baden Württemberg; Kristie Carter (Child Poverty Unit, New Zealand government) for New Zealand; and Stephen Sinclair (Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, Glasgow Caledonian University) for Scotland. As we stress in the report, the judgements that it has sometimes been necessary to pass on the strategies, however oblique, are ours, not theirs.

We would also like to thank Professorin Katrin Toens (Evangelische Hochschule, Freiburg) and Alan Sitkin (Regent University London) who helped us with Baden-Württemberg; Hannah Aldridge (now at Child Poverty Action Group) who helped us with Toronto; and Peter Kelly (Poverty Alliance) who both helped directly with Scotland and pointed us towards experts in both Spain and Germany.

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The responsibility for the accuracy of this report, including any errors or misunderstandings, lies with the authors alone.



Report Authors

Peter Kenway is director and co-founder of the New Policy Institute and has led its work on poverty and exclusion over many years.

Carla Ayrton is a senior researcher at NPI, specialising in quantitative and qualitative methods.

Charithra Chandran is a research analyst at NPI.

Irene Tortajada is an independent social policy researcher who has previously worked for the Poverty Alliance.

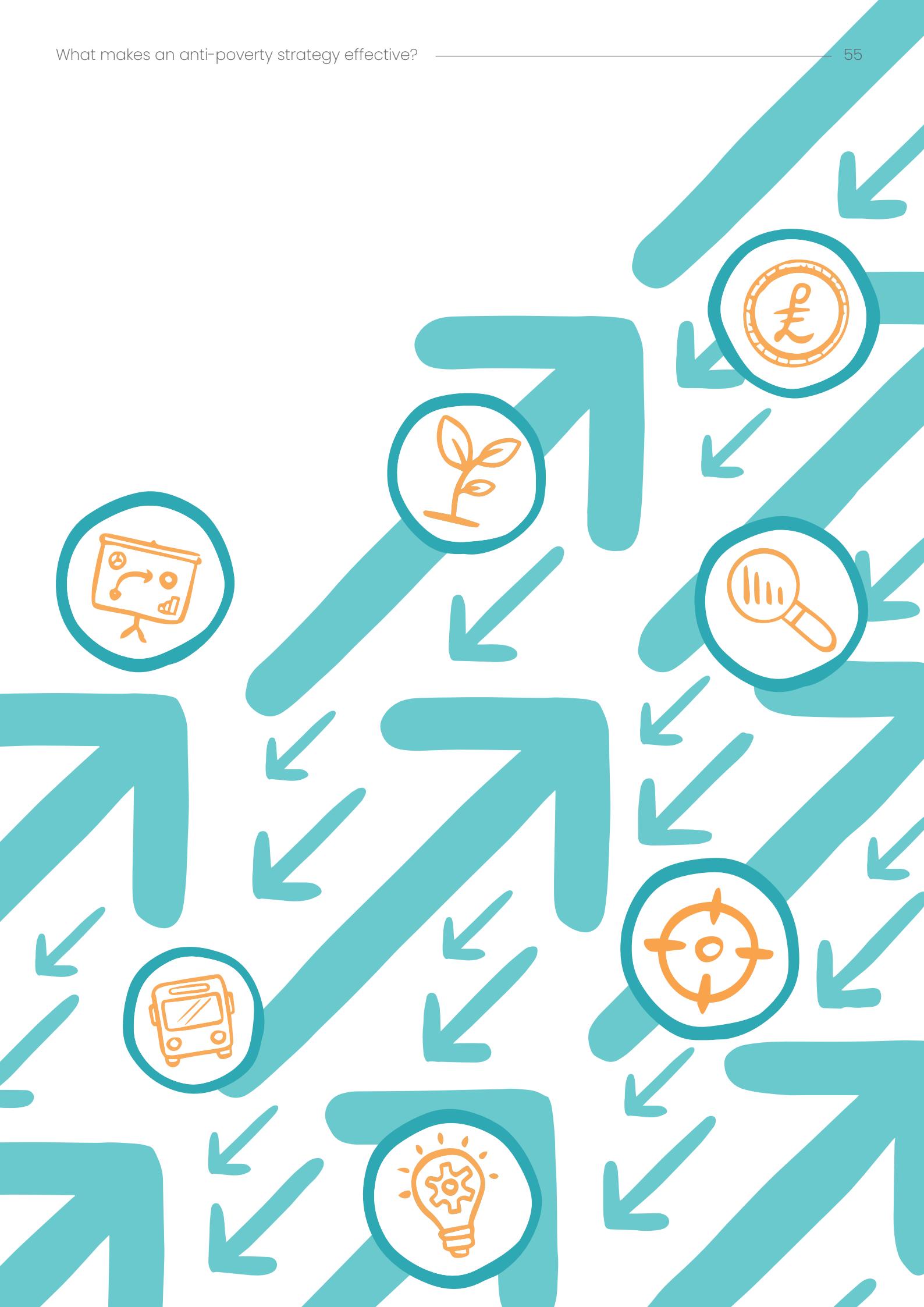
For further information please contact:

Wales Centre for Public Policy

+44 (0) 29 2087 5345

info@wcpp.org.uk







Wales Centre for Public Policy

Cardiff University
Sbarc/Spark
Maindy Road
Cardiff
CF24 4HQ

 www.wcpp.org.uk

 029 2087 5345

 info@wcpp.org.uk

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