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# Forty Years of EU Influencing Social Policy in Ireland – a Glass Half Full?

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**Title:** Forty Years of EU Influencing Social Policy in Ireland – a Glass Half Full?

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## ABSTRACT

This paper first introduces 'Europeanisation', a key concept to enable examination of EU influence, policy transfer and convergence. It then outlines the broad parameters of European social policy and historical developments in European social policies, politics and institutions, drawing particular attention to Ireland's contribution to shaping EU social policy. Thereafter, the article takes a chronological approach to focus on how EU policy and practice shaped the Irish welfare state and public administration of Irish social policy.

This article examines four phases of Ireland's EU membership and asks how Irish social policy was influenced in each of these stages and how Ireland influenced EU social policy. Stage one examines the 1970s to mid-1980s; stage two takes in the mid 1980s to the late 1990s; stage three reviews the late 1990s to 2007; and stage four relates to the post 2007 crisis era. The paper concludes that Irish social policy has been significantly influenced by EU social policy, and overall this influence has been largely positive, but also that Ireland has in turn influenced EU social policy and this influence has been mixed but also largely positive. Over time, through hard law and softer Europeanisation processes, there has arguably been some convergence in social policy across the EU and the EU has played some part in the modernisation of Irish social policy (O'Donnell, 2001; Adshead, 2005). The conclusion reflects on the future suggesting Ireland should seek to once again influence the EU towards a more progressive social direction.

**Key words: EU, Ireland, social policy, Europeanisation, poverty**

In 1973 Ireland joined the European Union (EU) as a laggard, with Irish GDP 64.2% of EU average GDP (CSO, 2004)<sup>1</sup>. With a relatively underdeveloped, patriarchal and familial social policy, Ireland was substantially behind mainstream European developments in social policy. Indeed the Irish welfare state was more commonly associated with a liberal or Anglo Saxon regime than the social democratic or continental regimes of existing European Community (EC) members. In assessing the impact of EU membership, it is impossible to separate out the EU as a causal factor from other variables including domestic politics, demographic, economic and social factors including exogenous phenomena deriving from processes of modernisation and globalisation. The Irish female employment participation rate, for example, had increased to 54.1% by 2012 from 42% in 2003 and 27% in 1973. Clearly, EU membership, while influential, was not the only factor influencing this trend. Forty years on from 1973, Ireland is more substantially more developed - - pre-crisis Irish GDP peaked at 145% of the European average in 2005 and was still 129% of the EU 28 average in November 2013 (Eurostat, 2014). Irish social policy is now significantly less patriarchal and less familial and EU social policy has had definite influence in this regard. At the same time, Irish social policy remains liberal in orientation, focused on poverty reduction rather than equality and increasingly affording a substantial role to the market to deliver social outcomes. Here again, the EU has had some impact. This would suggest that the influence of the EU on

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<sup>1</sup> GDP per capita expressed in purchasing power parity.

Irish social policy is significant and multi-vectorised but complex, ambiguous and even contradictory.

This article first introduces 'Europeanisation', a key concept to enable examination of EU influence, policy transfer and convergence. It then outlines the broad parameters of European social policy and historical developments in European social policies, politics and institutions, drawing particular attention to Ireland's contribution to shaping EU social policy. Thereafter, the article takes a chronological approach to focus on how EU policy and practice shaped both the Irish welfare state and public administration of Irish social policy. Four specific phases of Ireland's membership are identified which address how Irish social policy was influenced during each of these stages and also how Ireland in turn influenced EU social policy. Stage one examines the 1970s to mid-1980s; stage two takes in the mid-1980s to the late 1990s; stage three reviews the late 1990s to 2007; and stage four relates to the post 2007 crisis era. The article concludes that Irish social policy has been significantly influenced by EU social policy, and overall this influence has been largely positive, but at the same time that Ireland also influenced EU social policy and this influence has been mixed but largely positive. Over time, through hard law and softer Europeanisation processes, there has arguably been some convergence in social policy across the EU and the EU has played some part in the modernisation of Irish social policy (O'Donnell, 2001; Adshead 2005). The conclusion reflects on the future suggesting that Ireland should seek to once again influence the EU towards a more progressive social direction.

### **EU social policy – a brief background**

While the values of equality and peace clearly permeated the founding fathers' vision of the European Union, social policy was never a core competence of the EU. Rather the idea of a

social Europe and a Europe of social policy only emerged slowly after 1957 as the pace of European integration quickened, sometimes at the behest of member states and frequently encountering resistance from at least some member states. Depending on the nature of policy, the configuration of Irish domestic politics and the orientation of Irish EU Commissioners, Ireland sometimes promoted and at times resisted European social policy.

The concept of 'Europeanisation' helps us examine how domestic change can be caused by European integration and suggests such influence happens via different causal processes (van Vliet and Koster, 2008). Convergence in employment policy, for example, is influenced through the European Employment Strategy (ESS) which includes processes of peer review, mutual learning, targets and annual reporting. Wider social expenditure and investment decisions are influenced through the broader political economy context. In Ireland's case, the convergence criteria attached to preparation for Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and, later, the modalities of the Eurozone crisis have over time promoted less social expenditure. Johnson (2010) argues 'it is not implementation instruments but a country's model of development and political priorities which ultimately determine whether the overall objective of poverty reduction can be met'. Before discussing the more micro process of social policy, it is worth recalling that the impact of the EU on Irish social policy is above all influenced by EU economic policy and the macro EU model. Core projects like the single market or EMU have had long lasting and deep impacts on the possibilities for social investment, social protection and social policy in national member states. The political economy of Europe can, of course, have positive impacts on social policy primarily by promoting growth, jobs and revenue to fund social policy; whether or not such growth is distributed equally is a matter for domestic politics. However, key fault lines of the EU economic model and the Euro project have had negative impacts on Irish social policy. We have seen how fiscal volatility

and appropriate EU or domestic coordination has impacted on domestic social policies. The predominantly low interest rate regime associated with EMU was inappropriate to peripheral development needs and fed into the Irish boom and bust cycle (Murphy and Kirby, 2011). Thus the biggest limit on social inclusion and to what can be achieved through EU social policy is the macro political economy of Europe.

That said, the primary focus for this article is more direct EU impacts on Irish social policy. Much social policy influence is contextual. The impact on equality, for example, is often normative and political. Other influences are more tangible and substantive, for example, investment in Irish third level technical education was directly financed through the European Social Fund (ESF) while advances in Irish gender equality were a legislative requirement under European directives. Many major EU initiatives like Cohesion funding had direct substantive and indirect contextual impacts. EU social policy legal competence has been limited to advancing mobility of the European labour force and gender equality within the labour market (and hence these are often the empirical focus of this article. Some resistance to increased EU social policy competence is political, but resistance is informed by the principle of subsidiarity and/or national sovereignty). Poverty and inclusion were not core EU competences and extension of such competence was strongly resisted. Mangan (2010, p. 55) observes of the Council Recommendation of 27 July 1992 on the convergence of social protection objectives and policies which stated: 'because of the diversity of the schemes and their roots in national cultures, it is for Member States to determine how their social protection schemes should be framed and the arrangements for financing and organising them'. Thus the competence of the EU in areas of social security and social protection is limited to adopting directives setting minimum requirements for member states' systems (Article 153). Employment competences of the EU are limited to encouraging cooperation

between member states and to supporting their action, excluding any harmonisation (Article 149 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). The focus has been on freedom of movement and enabling internal migration through systems to recognise professional qualifications, coordinate social security benefits, national regulations on access to professions, EURES cross-border vacancies and job applications and simplification of transferring unemployment benefits to seek jobs in member states. These EU policies are reflected in Irish social policy reforms in these areas. Some Irish reforms, however, seek to limit the domestic impact of EU social policy, for example, the 2004 Habitual Residence rule sought to limit access to Irish social security to those who can prove a substantial residence connection to Ireland, thus mitigating or narrowing the potential impact of EU legal obligations in this area.

Many social policy remits can only be progressed through 'soft' approaches, such as shared learning and support for innovative approaches and pilot schemes. The article addresses 'hard' social policy legislation in the form of regulations, directives and European Court of Justice decisions, but it also explores how the EU influences social policy through softer 'recommendations' and processes. The range of social policy examined here emerged primarily from Directorate General V (DGV), the directorate with responsibility for social policy and employment, 'a heterogeneous collection of mainly politically weak organisations arranged around social and civil dialogue' (O'Connell, 2010). Since the early 2010s responsibility for gender and equality issues has been transferred to DGX with responsibility for Justice. Other DGs concerned with agriculture, climate change, etc., also have capacity to influence social policy. Various EU institutional processes support enhanced social dialogue, including over the years, the Social Policy Forum (1990s), the Social Platform (2000's), the more recent Poverty Platform as well as a range of research groups, monitoring observatories

and data gathering processes. EU social policy is directly funded through Structural Funds and Social Inclusion budgets and promoted through the work of the Social Protection and Employment Committee. Key governance processes are managed under the Open Method of Co-ordination of monetary, pensions, employment and social inclusion policy. Since 2013, social policy and social inclusion objectives are processed through the European Semester and coordinated in the Social Investment Package.

### **Phase one – 1970s to mid-1980: Catching up and Contributing**

Immediately prior to its accession to the EU, Ireland made key domestic social policy changes to secure EU membership and further adjustments once membership was achieved. This meant significant modernisation of Irish political culture and policy administration, substantial advances in social policy, and in particular advances in gender equality, equal pay and - over the decade - an end to direct discrimination in the social security system (O'Donnell, 2001). Without doubt, EU subsidised social and structural funds occasioned significant levels of social investment in Ireland, with the total amount exceeding €17 billion (Considine and Dukelow, 2012, p. 183). Much of this aid has been filtered through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). However, as the major beneficiaries of CAP were a small number of large farmers and agri-business companies, the impact was to maintain or even increase income inequalities (O'Brennan, 2010; Mary C. Murphy and O' Brennan, this issue ). Laffan and O'Mahony (2008, p. 37) note that while the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) was less generous than anticipated, nevertheless it had substantial impact. EU funding shaped vocational training (Institutes of Technology) and public employment services (AnCo), and Irish bureaucrats quickly adapted to modernise Irish approaches and exploit the potential of the ESF. Over-dependence on EU funding for key infrastructural developments could bias development of key institutions. Boyle (2005) makes



a strong case that, directly or indirectly, EU structural funding perpetuated fundamental weaknesses in key policy areas including labour market policy and training. EU funding, for example, influenced FÁS to work as a ‘Swiss army knife, jack of all trades but masters of none’. Adshead and Robinson (2009) argue that such funding created or shaped a dominant Irish attitude towards the European Union, summed up in their image of a ‘begging bowl’ mentality. EU funding enabled avoidance of hard choices, such as the necessity to raise revenue for key investments in national development and so shaped the emergence of the low-tax Irish model (Kirby and Murphy, 2011).

Through funding and policy norms, the EU impact on poverty policy was significant, but this was an area where Ireland also influenced EU policy. Paddy Hillary was appointed EU Commissioner of Social Affairs in March 1973 and played an active role in the development of the Social Action Programme. This Irish input was crucial in securing specific EU level measures to combat poverty. In Ireland in 1971 the Council for Social Welfare, newly established by the Catholic bishops of Ireland, organised a conference on poverty in Kilkenny. Here Ó Cinnéide estimated that 24% of the population was poor, and this awareness shaped the context in which Ireland entered Europe (Brown, 2013). International shifts in awareness of poverty were also reflected in EU responses to social issues at the 1972 Paris Summit (Brown, 2013). The domestic legacy of all this was significant, impacting on definitions of poverty and social exclusion, but also on approaches to tackling poverty as they evolved in partnership-based anti poverty programmes. Ireland established the National Committee on Pilot Schemes to Combat Poverty (NCPSCP) in 1975 (abolished in 1980 and re-established as the Combat Poverty Agency in 1986 before its re-abolition in 2009). Mernagh (2013, p. 1) reflected on the Irish and European Anti-Poverty Programmes (1973–1980) as ‘radical’ in their stress on long-term structural reform, requirement for re-

distribution of resources and power in society, and basic changes in social, economic and political systems.

Despite limited EU competence, the range of European measures to address gender equality in the workplace has been significant. From the 1957 Treaty of Rome to various directives including Equal Pay (1975), Work Conditions (1976), and Parental Leave (1996), to this day, EU directives continue to promote gender equality related to working time, part-time work, adoptive leave, etc.. These legal directives were and are often resisted by Irish governments. The 1979 Social Welfare Gender Equality directive is instructive regarding the Irish approach to implementing EU social policy. Irish women had a long journey through domestic and European courts to counter official delay in administration of gender equality in the Irish social security system and did not achieve justice until 1986 (Byrne and Leonard, 1997). This gave Irish government time to put in place a series of restrictions to minimize the implications of such a move for male employment (Laffan and O'Mahoney, 2008), but even then the Irish government chose to alleviate men with compensatory payments for having to ensure gender equality - a practice that was also found to be illegal. Nonetheless, in 1973 women's earnings as a percentage of men's was 47%, a gender pay gap of 53%. This had shifted by 2012 to a gender pay gap of 14%, convincing the National Women's Council of Ireland that Ireland's membership of the EU has played a significant role in advancing Irish gender equality (O'Connor, 2014).

It is possible to overplay the influence of the EU on gender equality in Ireland and many accounts of women's mobilisation at the time make little reference to Europe, rather they stress the ideational influence of the United Nations Decade of Women as a basis for Irish

campaigns and emerging Irish feminism. However, the Irish women's movement had to fight hard against a state that was extremely reluctant to sign up to the initial tranche of equality legislation at accession, and it was pressure from Irish 'femocrats' that forced the state to transpose EU legislation (Cullen, 2008). Certainly accession to the EU coincided with a period of active feminism and EU anti-discrimination law provided the framework for feminist demands which sped up the process of legal reform. Indeed a 1984 analysis showed that after farmers, women had benefitted most from EU entry (Laffan and O'Mahony, 2008, p. 39).

### **Phase two - mid 1980s to the late 1990s: Progression and Regression**

The period from the mid 1980s to the late 1990s includes the Treaty of Maastricht, preparation for EMU and the related 'Maastricht criteria'. Alongside these macro changes were smaller initiatives like the Poverty 2 (1985-1989) and Poverty 3 programmes (1989-1994). For Ireland, this period occasioned access to EU structural funds which offered some important financial assistance during the 1980s recession. This was a period of progressive change in the EU vision for social policy. The EU Social Charter and the Delors<sup>2</sup> initiative, the EU Commission White Paper on Social Policy, were adopted in 1989 and 1994 respectively. From the perspective of Irish NGOs, this was a period of democratic energy, with the development of a rich social policy infrastructure in Europe and Ireland, for example, European Anti-Poverty Networks were established across the EU, Ireland included, in 1990. The Second European Poverty Programme, which ran from 1985 to 1989, occasioned policy learning which informed the partnership based institutional framework for community development and local development in 1992 (Considine and Dukelow, 2012, p.

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Delors was President of the European Commission from 1985 to 1995 and supported many social policy initiatives within the EU.

184). A second Irish Commissioner for Social Affairs, Pádraig Flynn, served from 1993 to 1999 and made less of a decisive impact on EU social policy than his predecessor. While some remember him as a male chauvinist who had to controversially relinquish the role of equality chair, others acknowledge his commitment as Social Affairs Commissioner to gender mainstreaming (Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 2000). Irish public servants and civil society activists also made positive contributions to EU social processes over this period.

1989 was a watershed year for social policy in the EU. Under the French Presidency of the Council of the EU, the September 1989 Council of Ministers adopted a 'resolution on combating social exclusion' which prompted a new multi-dimensional understanding of poverty. Social policy data gathering capacity was expanded with the establishment in 1990 of the European Observatory on National Policies to Combat Social Exclusion, which set up the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) survey in 1994 which in turn led to the 2003 establishment of the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), now a regular feature of the work of the Irish Central Statistics Office. The Irish-based Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) was at the forefront of research on poverty, providing authoritative estimates of the extent of poverty and transforming the debate about measuring poverty throughout Europe.

1992 saw the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht with its Agreement on Social Policy (including the UK opt out) and a more significant focus on 'combating of exclusion'. The Irish government negotiated an abortion protocol exempting Ireland from more progressive reproductive rights, evidence of the Irish State resisting EU influence on Irish sexual morality (Connolly, 1999, p. 86). A 1992 Recommendation for a Minimum Income Guarantee recognised the basic right of a person to sufficient resources and to live with human dignity

and proposed guidelines to govern provision of minimum income schemes within domestic social protection systems. Walsh (2010, p. 69) notes the practical impact of the recommendation in that member states had to undertake periodic reviews of minimum income provision as was done in Ireland in 1992 and 2009. A key initiative in this period, which Ireland again influenced, was the concept of National Action Plans against Poverty (NAPS) and later national plans for social inclusion (NAPincl). Irish actors launched this idea on the EU stage with the 1995 publication of the Irish National Anti-Poverty Strategy. This was announced by the Irish Minister for Social Welfare (Prionsias de Rossa) in the United Nations Summit for Development at Copenhagen in 1995 and launched in Ireland in 1997. This introduced key concepts like ‘national targets’ and ‘poverty proofing’ into multi-dimensional areas of policy. The chart below outlines the key changes over decade in the process of producing these action plans. The first round of NAPS (2001-2003) were developed in the EU-15, subsequently these became the Joint Report on Social Inclusion (2004-2005), and National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion which were produced from 2006-2008 in the EU-27 and annually to 2010. Irish academics continue to contribute to this process as part of EU Networks of National Independent Experts on social inclusion related issues.

### **Phase three - 1997-2007: Co-ordination of Social Policy and Lisbon 2000**

The period 1997-2007 saw a marked shift from the social democratic Delors period to the more liberal Lisbon Growth and Competitiveness agenda. In the context of chronic unemployment, the 1994 EU summit in Essen had adopted a European Employment Strategy (ESS) which was to use an ‘Open Method of Co-ordination’ (OMC), a two year cyclical process, with common objectives, common targets, peer review and lessons for the next round of policy-making. In 1997, the Treaty of Amsterdam gave a legal basis to the OMC

methods of shared policy-making. Over time, this process was adopted in a range of social policies including social inclusion, pensions, health and poverty, and soft governance mechanisms intensified the Europeanisation of social policy (Johnston, 2010). In 2000, a Social Inclusion Strategy was launched as part of the Lisbon Council with the objective of making a decisive impact on poverty by 2010. This OMC governance strategy for poverty and social exclusion had four key objectives; to facilitate participation in employment and access by all to the resources, rights, goods and services; prevent the risks of exclusion; help the most vulnerable; and mobilise all relevant bodies. The system works in a two year cycle by agreeing EU level common policy objectives and policy indicators, requiring member state national action plans and monitoring and reporting on progress through peer review at the European level and a Joint EU Report summarising progress in each member state.

In Ireland, various domestic political structures emerged to enable anti-poverty and social inclusion planning and Irish engagement in OMC processes. Institutional mechanisms included a relatively high powered Irish Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion, chaired by the Taoiseach. This met regularly and was supported by various structures at administrative level, including an Inter-Departmental Policy Committee and the establishment of a team in the Department of Social Welfare (subsequently called the NAPS Unit and later the office for Social Inclusion). It was also supported by the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) which was in 2009 merged into the parent department's Office for Social Inclusion. The plan recognised the need for inter-departmental co-ordination and the appointment of departmental liaison officers. There were important monitoring and evaluation mechanisms including the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) which had a specific reporting role on progress in implementing the NAPS and the CPA which oversaw an evaluation of the NAPS process (both were early victims of the post-2007

economic crisis). Partnership was a key principle and the structures enabled participation of the community and voluntary sector and other social partners, users of services, National Anti-Poverty Networks and those with first-hand experience of poverty. The implementation and monitoring of the strategy was to happen through structures at local and regional levels which were to include the development of local anti-poverty strategies, as well as information and communication of the strategy to the public service and the general public and as the provision of research and up-to-date, reliable data.

Equality is central to the EU narrative and this has influenced national discourse and dynamics. Laffan and O'Mahony (2008, p. 255) note how many groups look to the EU to progress rights. The 1997 Amsterdam Treaty non-discrimination laws were transposed into Irish law by the 1998 EEA and Equal Status Act 2000. EU Directives on Anti-Discrimination in Employment and on Race and Ethnic origin have also influenced Irish policy debate. Barry (2008) points to the impact of EU equality directives on Irish legislation for gender equality in the workplace and on the social welfare system. By 2014, over thirty pieces of domestic Irish legislation with a bearing on gender equality had their origins in 13 EU directives (O'Connor, 2014). Villa and Smith (2013) describe the early days of the ESS as the golden age for gender equality in the EU when EU instruments like Gender Mainstreaming were promoted through EU level networks like Equinet (network of national equality bodies). However, McGauran (2005) argues that despite gender mainstreaming of the Irish National Development Plan, such mechanisms changed little in Irish public policy, Irish bureaucratic or political culture. The Treaty of Nice (2000) and Lisbon Agenda marked a more neoliberal frame to the economics of the EU and the OMC continued with reformulated objectives focused on social cohesion, employment and transparent governance. However, behind the rhetoric lay a disconnect from social Europe as the OMC is more linked to promoting the

competitiveness driven economic project of the EU, Irish anti-poverty groups reflect this disconnect made it harder to make the OMC relevant to social policy objectives (Murphy, 2010; Hanan, 2010).

#### **Phase four – 2007-: Europe in Crisis and Ireland in Crisis**

The December 2007 Treaty of Lisbon contains explicit reference to ‘social exclusion’ and also incorporated the Charter of Fundamental Rights. EU social policy was further advanced through a 2008 Commission Recommendation on Active Inclusion which aimed to facilitate the integration into sustainable quality employment of those who can work and provide resources which are sufficient to live in dignity, together with support for social participation, for those who cannot. Politically, this recommendation was an important signal that social policy in the EU would differ to the mutual obligations work-first model of activation offered by more Anglo Saxon and OECD rhetoric. However, the crisis exposed the fault-lines of this European vision. The politically powerful pushed towards a less social Europe with a greater stress on addressing fiscal deficits within a low tax and low expenditure economic governance framework. The crisis also exposed issues of core–periphery relations and imbalances. EU institutions, the European Commission and the European Central Bank, in the 2010 Troika, directly and negatively impacted on Irish social policy. Subsequent responses to the crisis have occasioned deeper European policy coordination through the European Semester. Domestically, the Irish Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Affairs has been critiqued for the irregularity of its meetings<sup>3</sup> and the lack of utilization of poverty and equality proofing mechanisms (EAPN, 2013), as well as the lack of urgency in respect to the social impact of the crisis. The 2013 Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU had little

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.oireachtasbrief.ie/people/taoiseach/cabinet-subcommittee-on-social-policy-taoiseach-defends-record/>



impact on the overall macro-economic framework of austerity, although it did influence three EU social policy responses to the crisis, namely the European Youth Employment Guarantee, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) and the Social Investment Package (SIP) (EAPN, 2013).

SIP was launched under the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU in early 2013 and has been likened to a new social policy paradigm. Irish academic Nolan (2013), however, argues that social investment is employed for political or rhetorical purposes to at times construct a narrow economic rationale to frame the debate about the future of social spending. He acknowledges social investment arguments that social spending underpins productive capacity and economic growth. SIP relies on existing social architecture and funding mechanisms for ESI, including the *Europe 2020* social targets, the OMC, knowledge banks, data strategies and stakeholder consultation. Allocation of EU cohesion funding will be closely aligned with the European Semester and particularly with Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) in National Reform Programmes. These are highly likely to shape future Irish social policy. Seen positively, the focus on preventative investment in SIP could leverage greater social investment in Ireland. Recommendations for preventative investment in Early Childhood Education Care are particularly important for Ireland as are EU benchmarks and EU Barcelona targets for Irish childcare policy (O'Connor, 2014). However, for Irish governments, accessing ESF for labour market programme SIP conditions may require greater levels of sanctions in Irish activation policy.

## **Conclusion**

EU social policy has clearly influenced Irish social policy. However, its influence is filtered and diluted by domestic policy processes. Overall the EU influence is mixed, it has been a

source of progressive policy ideas, however, and the political and bureaucratic elite also look elsewhere for policy ideas (Kirby and Murphy, 2011). EU social processes, particularly the budgeting, planning and evaluation requirements of EU funding, has influenced how social administration is practiced and the culture in Irish public services and NGOs (Sabel and Zeitlin, 2007; Laffan and O'Mahony, 2008). However, there appears less institutional impact than might be expected in the Irish political culture and policy-making processes (Murphy and Kirby, 2011). FÁS, for example, were a significant recipient of EU funds but faced serious questions about corporate governance and accountability for outcomes (Boyle, 2005).

It is unclear how much Europeanisation has progressed through OMC and peer review processes (Adshead, 2005; Armingeon, 2007). Such processes work by conditioning domestic political actors like political parties and social partners in social policy-making processes so the extent of EU normative influence depends on which actors (unions, political parties, NGOs) participate in national peer review processes and whether such participation is meaningful. Van Vilet and Koster (2007) observe that Ireland participated least of EU member states in peer review sessions from 1985 to 2003 and received the least number of council recommendations (suggesting low levels of Europeanization). From the perspective of the Irish NGO and anti-poverty community, EU processes presented opportunities to leverage outcomes from domestic policy. An EAPN (2010) examination of the efficacy of the OMC notes less than meaningful processes of participation by key stakeholders, particularly people experiencing poverty. Murphy C. (2010) observes that the process is difficult to make work but has some essential features, including targets and time-scales, a focus on the vulnerable, and effective data gathering and monitoring strategies. There is insufficient integration between micro social policy and macro-economic policy, with little attention to the quality of jobs.

Cullen (2014) describes the EU as a supranational political opportunity structure for domestic interests and argues the Irish state's record on the implementation of EU policies on gender equality can be characterised as 'a mixture of resistance and benign neglect' (2014, p. 2). She argues Irish feminists, lacking a strong political resource capacity in unions and political parties must resort to leveraging transnational lobbies and brokerage with supranational actors to press for change. The same analysis can be applied to Irish anti-poverty and equality NGOs, although as Cullen (2014) observes, such tactics limit public discursive power and capacity to promote social policy dialogue.

Villa and Smith (2013) note how the post-2007 economic crisis has caused a fundamental policy reformulation of all aspects of EU social policy including gender equality. Barry and Conroy (2013) outline the Irish implications of austerity and show how Irish people suffered significantly over the crisis with austerity hitting women and families with children harder than most. Reflecting the lack of domestic engagement with gender equality, the Irish government made no gender related comment to the EU 2010 consultation on *Europe 2020*. The current EU policy on gender equality is articulated in the Commission's Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015 and the Council's European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020) which reflect the reality that gender equality is not mainstreamed into Irish domestic or EU employment policy.

The future of EU and domestic social policy is increasingly read from economic policy and the political rhetoric of the SIP shows evidence of such alignment. Social targets are at once integrated into, but residual to economic and fiscal targets. While still emerging, further extensive EU coordination of taxation and fiscal policy has potentially positive and negative

implications for Irish social policy. If a low tax Ireland is forced to converge toward the average EU tax model, this may have positive repercussions for funding Irish social policy. On the other hand, an EU banking policy with no retrospective sovereign debt relief does not augur well for Irish social policy. Good social policy requires banking and fiscal union capable of automatically transferring funds to member states suffering from asymmetric economic shocks or high unemployment. The social policy values of the *Europe 2020* strategy are reflected in the five 'headline targets' to be achieved by the end of the decade. Progress is being made in Ireland reducing the early-school leaving rate to 9.7% and unemployment to 11.6% (both below the EU average), however there is less progress on poverty and inequality with the Irish AROPE rate the second highest in Europe in 2012 (CSO, 2014).

Hanan (2013) argues, in looking forward to the future, that there is much we can take from the past forty years of Irish membership of the EU. There are lessons from NAPS on how to advance proofing and mainstreaming instruments in all aspects of social policy and equality. There are lessons on how to maximise the multiple sources of ESF resource training and community initiatives. Enhanced EU social competence in minimum standards in policy areas like services and income may protect member state investment in social infrastructure. There is a need to mainstream social inclusion into the fiscal coordination strategies of the European Central Bank and so give teeth to the poverty targets in *Europe 2020* and to continue to support gender mainstreaming. The global economic crisis and the specific problems of the Eurozone have posed challenges to the future of the European Social Model. A social vision of the EU seems impossible if nested in a neoliberal economic model that understands 'good fiscal policy' as low tax and low government expenditure (Hermann, 2007). EU processes governing the process of determining National Reform Programmes and Country Specific Recommendations could undermine democracy (EAPN, 2013). Public

participation and deliberation are necessary to overcome challenges of political legitimacy and to deliver a politics that is capable of addressing crises and supporting an alternative sustainable European economic governance strategy. Social policy above all requires a rebalanced Europe. Economic integration has become an increasingly important motor of social policy reform and there is greater awareness of how existing social policies at national level, or the absence of certain EU-level provisions, might impede the economic project (Fraser, 2013). However, the EU maintains the 'soft' law approach for social policy compared to the 'hard' approach to the economic/financial dimension of the EU. The challenge is to ensure a 'hard' social dimension of EMU both at EU and domestic levels.

While it is not a surprise to conclude that the EU has influenced the last forty years of Irish social policy, a perhaps more surprising finding is the degree to which Irish political and policy actors have influenced the last forty years of EU social policy. Brown (2013, p. 37) observes the need to rekindle the scale of political will and ambition evident in the 1973 period when poverty, social action and solidarity became part of the EU agenda, a time when Ireland, as a new member state, led the debate about EU social policy. Thompson (2008) finds the Commission's policy position is generally closer to the position of the home member state of the relevant commissioner. Will the new EU Irish Commissioner, appointed in July 2014, match the legacy of the 1973 Irish Commissioner of Social Affairs and have the vision to argue, in the interest of all EU members, to reinvigorate the EU social model.

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