

Local Action Requires Local Intelligence

A Proposal that the Central Statistics Office provides Labour Force Data on District Electoral Divisions covered by Partnership Companies and Other Relevant Designated Areas on an Annual Basis

The rationale for this proposal is based on the observation that the establishment of locally based initiatives in Ireland - notably Area Based Partnership Companies and Local Employment Service Networks - has not been accompanied by a corresponding investment in generating reliable and timely labour force data to support effective local planning and development actions. This is evident in the reliance of Area Based Partnership Companies and other local initiatives on the CSO's Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS) as their main source of reliable data and in their varied efforts to supplement the SAPS through local surveys. As is indicated in the introduction to the *Ballymun Employment Report 2K* there are considerable deficiencies associated with reliance on the SAPS and local surveys. Among the major deficiencies arising are the following:

- the considerable time interval associated with the availability of SAPS data (intervals of five years with a time lag of two / three years);
- the incompatibility of Census categories relating to labour force status and categories used in the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS): and,
- the methodological weaknesses of many local surveys and their lack of comparability with SAPS data, other national sources of data (e.g., the QNHS), and with each other.

The lack of reliable and timely data on a range demographic, socio-economic, employment status and social indicators within a timeframe consistent with the planning and review of local actions constitutes a major barrier to strategic planning and review as well to meaningful evaluation of local action. The existing situation – in the event of no action being taken – will be repeated in the context of the new RAPID initiative.

It was in response to the above situation that the demonstration project reported in the *Ballymun Employment Report 2K* was undertaken. The aim of this demonstration project was to show that it is possible to generate relevant and timely labour force data at a local level that is directly comparable to national and regional statistics. The methodology used replicated the procedures and concepts of the QNHS within the four District Electoral Divisions (DEDs) covered by the Ballymun Partnership. Details of the procedures, questionnaire, and results are available in the report itself. More salient to this proposal, however, is that the report demonstrates the value and

possibilities deriving from the availability of reliable, relevant and timely labour force data at a local level. A key question arising is - should the approach piloted in Ballymun be adopted by other Area Based Partnership Companies and undertaken in areas designated under RAPID.

Given the logistical, methodological as well as cost effectiveness issues associated with adopting and replicating the approach used in Ballymun, it is recommended that the most effective approach to remedying what can be called "the local intelligence deficit" is to request the CSO to extend the coverage of the QNHS to areas designated for special local initiatives. Essentially this would require that the CSO include designated areas within the framework of their undertaking of the QNHS and provide an annual report on these areas comparable to the current QNHS Report. It is our view that the availability of such a report would make a substantial and cost-effective contribution to the local planning and review processes undertaken by local agencies and in the context of RAPID.

It should be emphasised that we are not recommending any modification or distortion of the sampling procedures used in the QNHS. What is being recommended is that, in the context of undertaking the QNHS, DEDs designated for special initiatives to be undertaken by Area Based Partnership Companies, Local Employment Service Networks or under RAPID be identified and included for surveying and that a *separate* report be prepared on the basis of the data collected in these localities. This would be a parallel and complementary exercise to the ongoing undertaking of the QNHS.

It must be recognised that the additional numbers of households to be interviewed as well as the associated data processing would require additional resources. However, as there are approximately 156,000 households interviewed annually for the QNHS – some of which will be resident in designated DEDs - the level of additional resources to ensure the inclusion of all designated DEDs would not be substantial. Moreover it would generate significant value added in terms of ensuring effective planning, delivery, targeting, and evaluation of local initiatives. It would also ensure that, for the first time, there would be data available on a timely basis to report on and assess the effectiveness of actions in designated disadvantaged areas on both an aggregate and individual DED basis.

Philip O'Connor
Dublin Employment Pact
November 2002

