Child Poverty in Northern Ireland

Lesson Ideas
December 2019
Introduction

The overall aim of this lesson idea is to raise awareness of human rights and to be an educational resource for use in a post primary setting in Northern Ireland. Use of the lesson ideas is at the discretion of the education provider.

It is important at the outset to prepare students to discuss sensitive or controversial issues. A safe and positive learning environment which enables students to participate with confidence can be empowering. Agree strategies to use to ensure respectful yet challenging discussions:

NI Curriculum Links:

LLW Strands
Human rights and social responsibility, Equality and Social justice

Local and Global Citizenship
Identify and exercise their rights and social responsibilities in relation to local issues.

Develop their understanding of the role of society and government in safeguarding individual and collective rights.

Some of your students may have personal experience of the issue under discussion and may find participation in these discussions difficult. Create a safe and positive environment. Agree strategies in advance. See notes on teaching sensitive issues.
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This section gives you a breakdown of the relevant human rights, and any laws associated with this particular human rights issue. It also provides background information you may find useful.

Relevant Rights:

- Right to an adequate standard of living and to social security
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 25
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 7, 9, 11
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Article 26
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), Article 28
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Teachers’ Notes and Background Information

Child poverty is on the rise across Northern Ireland.

• ‘Poverty in Northern Ireland is widespread and deeply damaging to the life opportunities of people across society’. UN Special Rapporteur Professor Philip Alston 2018

• 370,000 people live in poverty, around one fifth of the population- made up of 110,000 children, 220,000 working age adults and 40,000 pensioners. Poverty in Northern Ireland 2018 Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The rights of people living in poverty are often compromised as poverty can impact on many aspects of life.

How is poverty defined?

Poverty can be defined in many different ways. Commonly used methods of measuring poverty are:

• Relative Poverty is the most commonly used measure in the UK. A household is in relative poverty if its income is below 60% of the median household income after taxes and benefits.
• Poverty excludes people fully participating in society.
• Absolute poverty uses the same calculation as relative poverty (60% below the UK median income) but uses income figures from 2010/11 to give a constant measure over time.
• Relative and absolute poverty can be measured before or after housing costs. After-housing costs are most commonly used because this is what people are left to live on after meeting their essential accommodation costs.
• Material deprivation is measured by whether people can afford certain essential items and activities. Material deprivation measures generally ask respondents about the ownership of items regarded as ‘necessities’ by a majority of the population.

• The indicator adopted by the Social Protection Committee measures the percentage of the population that cannot afford at least three of the following nine items:
  - To pay their rent, mortgage or utility bills;
  - To keep their home adequately warm;
  - To face unexpected expenses;
  - To eat meat or proteins regularly;
  - To go on holiday;
  - A television set;
  - A washing machine;
  - A car;
  - A telephone.

• The Households Below Average Income Report (HBAI) bases material deprivation on questions about whether people have access to 15 basic items or services that are a good indication of quality of life. These include having a damp free home, being able to pay regular bills and seeing family or friends at least once a month. People are deemed to experience material deprivation if they lack at least 3 or 4 of these items. Material deprivation captures the consequences of long-term poverty on families rather than the immediate financial strain that many families can experience.

• Minimum income standards – these look at the cost of goods and services required by households in order to reach an acceptable standard of living.

• The Age UK 2015 definition is a good basis for understanding poverty and its impact: “When a person’s resources are not enough to meet their basic needs and allow them to take part in society. This could mean struggling to cover food and energy bills, watching every penny spent, worrying that nothing is set aside for a sudden emergency such as the cooker breaking down, or being unable to afford the cost of transport needed to visit a friend or go to a social club.”
What we do

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission’s job is to make sure government and public authorities protect the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland. We advocate that Northern Ireland should maintain the highest standard of human rights.

We also consider the policies and plans that government and other organisations develop, and tell them if we think there could be a problem and we try to help them improve it. We are experts in human rights law, we monitor international treaties and listen to discussions in places like the United Nations.

We promote awareness of human rights through education, training and research.

In its Annual Statement to Government each year the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) makes recommendations on tackling poverty.

We also report on this issue to the United Nations including to the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.
Activities

Learning Intentions: to know and understand
The following activities aim to help pupils;

• Explore the concept of poverty in Northern Ireland and gain insights into the lives of those living in poverty

• Understand that poverty is a social injustice which impacts the rights to an adequate standard of living.

• Learn about the right to an adequate standard of living and consider actions that to promote these rights

• Understand the role of the NIHRC in promoting and safeguarding these rights.

Pupils will;

• Learn about what constitutes poverty in Northern Ireland

• Think about how poverty impacts young peoples’ daily lives, their health, education and general well being

• Consider how human rights are compromised by poverty and discuss the role governments, groups and individuals can play in alleviating poverty

Activity One - Watch the Video
youtube.com/watch?v=1yiZJTIIyNc&t=34s

Video Script
“Poverty is not something most of us think about as a human rights issue, It’s hard to concentrate on anything including education when you are cold and hungry. It’s hard to play simple sports when you have worn out shoes. It’s hard to always miss out because you can never afford it. Living in poverty takes away a child’s right to live in dignity.

Article 25 from the UDHR says everyone has the right to an adequate standard to living which includes food, clothing and shelter.

Think again about poverty. Think again about human rights.”

Discussion

• Discuss how it might feel to be the boy in the video?

• What do you think it is like to;
  - Get up and ready for school in a cold house with little if any food?
  - Go to school with others who have plenty?
  - Come home to a cold home with little to eat?

• What feelings and thoughts do you think are going through his head?

Look at the UNCRC and identify which other rights may be impacted by his lack of food, decent shelter and adequate clothing. E.g. right to education, right to rest and leisure.

In small groups come up with short extracts/scenarios from his day (e.g. going to the shop after school with no money, changing for PE with worn trainers, bringing a note home about an expensive school trip) and prepare either dramatizations/scripts/cartoon strips or pictures to illustrate how it might feel and how it might affect his human rights more broadly. Share with each other.

E.g. Right to education, healthcare, participate in cultural activities?


**Activities (continued)**

**Activity Two - Poverty tree (Cause & Affect)**

**Whats needed:** Image of the issue tree provided

In groups ask students to use an issue tree to talk about and record the ‘root’ causes of poverty in Northern Ireland and the effects which are the ‘branches’.

Allow them some time to share their thoughts. Note that some factors may appear both at the root and in the branches. E.g. mental health issues can lead to poverty which can contribute to mental ill health.

- Think about who has responsibility for dealing with various issues?
- What role to individuals, groups, NGOs and governments take in relation to any of the issues raised?