HUMAN DIGNITY, SOCIAL INDICATORS AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Abstract: The European Union includes amongst its National Action Plans for Social Inclusion goals the achievement of levels of living (including incomes) which guarantee human dignity, but it measures its goal achievement in terms of income inequality statistics or social assistance benefit levels. The first of these yardsticks is not based on empirical evidence of the incomes needed to achieve social inclusion, and evidence of the adequacy of social assistance for social participation in most states is at best equivocal. Further, the governments of member states are expected to include the NGOs representing people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in drawing up the National Action Plans, but (in the UK at least) there is no evidence that such people’s views about the income levels needed to guarantee their human dignity have ever been sought, even though they have expressed their need for higher incomes.

The paper addresses this disparity between goal and methods. It points to confusions between measures of inequality trends and social inclusion goals. It suggests a research agenda for discovering human dignity standards and relating them to household income levels, recognising the difference between poverty measurement and governmental minimum income standards. The disparities could be reconciled, but only if governments face the need to address the inadequacy of incomes within their social inclusion policies.

“Nobody who has not been through it can understand it. Terror, atrocities, oppression – that’s all words. Statistics don’t bleed. Do you know what counts? The detail. Only the detail counts …” Arthur Koestler (1943), Arrival and Departure, Jonathan Cape, London, p 75.

Introduction: the argument of the paper.

The subject of this discussion paper concerns the social indicators which are used to measure the extent to which the EU’s member states attain the goal of ensuring personal disposable incomes sufficient to enable everyone to experience what their societies identify as human dignity, as part of larger programmes to ensure social inclusion.

The argument is simple, but it has many ramifications. The EU has set a goal which is expressed in terms of social values and qualitative judgements. The criterion by which it measures this goal attainment is quantitative and does not embody these social values. It is therefore irrelevant for this purpose, whatever other arguments there may be in its favour.

Methodologists in the poverty industry ought therefore to seek quantitative measures which embody the social values and reflect the qualities which the goals require, and which can also satisfy...
the requirements of social indicators. In principle this may not be difficult, since a range of tested methods already exist both for discovering by reliable survey methods what population samples consider to be the attributes of human dignity and social inclusion, and the disposable income levels (allowing for all methodological adjustments) at which this can be achieved.

The problem is now more complicated than it may have seemed, since the EU requires governments to include representatives of people experiencing poverty and exclusion to be involved in the preparation of the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion. The scope of the subject of social exclusion and programmes for inclusion is far broader than the specific subject of income adequacy for human dignity, and discussion of the latter often becomes diverted into other aspects of the former. Such NGOs have their own political agendas, and there are questions about how far, in each country, the NGOs can be said to represent all those in poverty there. This raises further problems about the roles of lived experience versus learned expertise in the articulation of salient issues and their measurement for social indicator purposes.

Emerging research findings from both consultation with people in poverty and population sample surveys suggest that poor people want more money, and that in marketised societies such as exist throughout Europe, adequate incomes are the most important single factor in enabling the experience of human dignity, social inclusion and participation. The EU’s persistent focus on income inequality and evasion of adequacy measures is thus puzzling if it is serious about ever achieving its goals, even if it can easily be explained in political terms.

The question then is, what available means can be used to establish adequacy measures and to derive social indicators which could be developed for the intended purpose. It must be noted that a measure is not necessarily suitable for use as an indicator, and an indicator emphatically is neither a governmental minimum income standard nor a template for social assistance benefits. These are all distinct constructs, even if their meanings are related at some levels. The paper suggests a few aspects of a possible research agenda, but there are many more and obviously the matter demands further discussion. That is the aim of the paper.

Note that the ramifications of the argument are very extensive, and it would be impossible to include them all in a discussion paper for reasons of space if nothing else: a full treatment would need a book. Some of the associated issues are discussed in this paper (those which my observations suggest are the most usually confused), but some are not, just as possibly relevant references may be omitted, particularly where I expect that readers will be familiar with well-known research methods and findings. However, I shall be glad to have gaps of this kind brought to my notice if they should be filled.

**HUMAN DIGNITY AND SOCIAL INDICATORS.**

*The EU goal of social inclusion.*

If social inclusion is to be made a reality in Europe and if social exclusion is to be overcome, then everybody must have power over all the resources needed in their societies to achieve these goals. If the members of every household are to be able to live, as European and other official statements have phrased it, ‘in a manner compatible with human dignity’¹ and to achieve a level of living which enables the poorest to ‘appear in public without shame’², then they need adequate incomes. This is not to say that they do not need the other things which the social exclusion discourse emphasises, since that embraces more than income level alone, but adequate incomes come first (the argument why this is so is pursued below). This therefore requires EU Member States to ensure that everyone has access to ‘a wage sufficient to enable them to have a decent standard of living’³ and also to ‘adequate social protection’.⁴ Adequacy here means ‘a sufficient income to lead a life with dignity

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¹ EC 1992, para (6).1.C.3, and elsewhere since.
² UN 2002, p 42.
³ EC 1989, para 5.
⁴ EC 1989, para 10.
and to participate in society as full members”. Note that the issue is the level of income and not its source.

There are many similar examples in the internationally endorsed statements about human values and rights to welfare (see the appendix for a selection). For instance, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, Article 25, states that “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, … and the right to security in the event of … lack of livelihood beyond his control”, rights reconfirmed by the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, as well as in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. What does the right to security mean if it does not include an adequate income? And what is adequacy if it is not sufficient for decency and dignity, for health and welfare?

Policy-makers have to work over a very broad field. Governments have a vast battery of methods available to them to combat poverty, if they have the political will. Some of these potential methods may be excluded from consideration for political reasons, for example Keynesian labour market management, or radical redistribution of real incomes through taxation and collective spending. Whatever methods are adopted, the problem remains that if the goal is the promotion of social inclusion and the eradication of exclusion and poverty (however broadly one defines those terms), and if the long-standing European human values and rights quoted above are to be implemented, then the EU member states’ governments will have to consider not only what resources are needed to achieve these goals, but how much of the income resources are needed to achieve dignity and inclusion. How much is enough? What is adequate? How can this be embodied in social indicators?

Why money matters.

Social inclusion, as the term is understood in Europe, is unachievable without adequate money incomes. This is a testable and refutable assertion, and as it has often been tested and never been refuted I shall take it as a scientific fact, however unwelcome it is politically. Opponents of this assertion should answer the challenge of demonstrating an empirically-verifiable public conception of social inclusion which omits market inclusion (other than in religious communities). As a recent press release from the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung put it in its opening sentence, summarising the findings of a cross-national study of living conditions in 28 old and new EU countries, “Was braucht der Mensch für ein gutes Leben? Diese Frage beantworten die Europäer einhellig: ausreichendes Einkommen, Unterstützung durch die Familie und Gesundheit” [‘What does a person need for a good life? Europeans answer this question unanimously: sufficient income, family support and health’] (WZB 17 June 2004). Of course other factors matter as well as adequate incomes. But adequate incomes matter first.

Adequate income is the clean water of poverty policy.

The human dignity of social inclusion demands equal access to the outcomes which any society identifies as minimally acceptable for everyone. Just as all policies for good health are predicated on the availability of clean water and are vitiated in its absence, so if we are talking about life in modern marketised economies, which is the case in Europe, all policies for social inclusion and against poverty must start from adequate incomes and are vitiated in their absence. Just as all health policies go on to assume that the relevant contributing factors are many and interactively complex (physical environment, nutrition, culture, social environment and services, psychological well-being), so all poverty policies are equally broad in scope, especially if the concept is taken to include forms of social exclusion.

In all marketised modern industrial societies the only people who can avoid what European culture treats as poverty without having an adequate personal disposable income are the inhabitants of religious or ideological communities, and they compensate and substitute by having adequate

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5 EC 2002, p 27.
6 Of course these should really be called anti-poverty policies, but the convention, which I follow in this paper, is to omit the anti-. If the parallel with ‘anti-illness means health’ policies is pursued, then the correct term for anti-poverty policies is welfare policies, since having welfare in its broad sense is the social counterpart of having health in the physical sense. But the term welfare probably has an even more disparate variety of meanings than does the term poverty.
collective resources to meet their needs. Those who deny the primacy of an adequate income are very rarely, if ever, prepared to argue for the alternative primacy of the solidaristic, non-cash community. Even politicians who deprecate the emphasis placed on income adequacy by some parts of the poverty lobby are never prepared to argue for the massive investment in public collective resources, free at the point of receipt, which would be needed to make any impact on poverty as it is experienced. The logical conclusion of this approach would be that all socially-recognised needs had been met by collectively financed provision, and that the existing levels of cash income would have to play the role of no more than discretionary pocket money. This point cannot be stressed too strongly, and it needs to be repeatedly emphasised, especially in the face of the political and other evasions into ‘social exclusion’ discourse which treats income adequacy as a subsidiary issue, low on the list of priorities.

My starting point is that it is perverse for anyone to argue that having an adequate personal disposable income is not a necessary foundation, even if it is arguably not always sufficient. To suggest that it is sufficient implies that markets can supply all needs in all aspects of human life, which is not normally the case in Europe (in USA, perhaps) and could be undesirable in anything but a totally atomised and individualised society – hardly even a society. But for any poor individual in a deprived environment, having enough money to buy out of it may seem to them to be a sufficient solution to their poverty. Since many people do see the issue individualistically like this (a motive force for gambling), it has to be taken seriously by those who claim to respect what people in poverty themselves say is their problem, even if we non-poor may analyse the wider social issues more collectively.

However, when we see that non-poor people normally achieve social inclusion and avoid exclusion without any complementary interventions, we are reminded that for individuals to possess an adequate income is not only necessary but can be sufficient on its own to achieve government objectives, if it is large enough. Even non-poor people who may experience discrimination and exclusion on the grounds of their age, ability, gender, sexuality, ethnicity or similar categorisations, rarely do so if they are very rich. Indeed, the ideology of market choice which is fundamental in Europe is usually justified on the assumption that enough money can buy you out of most social problems. Whatever the need for a broad range of interventions may be, the implementation of guaranteed adequate incomes is therefore indispensable, and the time is long overdue for a review of methods to identify and measure them.

I therefore make no apology for insisting that all poverty discussion must start from what an adequate income means, and for what, for how long, for whom, and from whose perspective, and how it can be achieved politically for all inhabitants of a state, wherever it goes after that. And to talk about adequacy is not to talk about anything very comfortable – as Adrian Sinfield has pointed out, who boasts about their adequate holiday? It means good enough for the purpose, but not more.

This paper is therefore solely focused on the EU requirements for an income sufficient for social inclusion. It follows from this that governments need social indicators which would help them to know what income adequacy is in their own contexts and circumstances. The paper is not about all the other valid associated or non-marketised aspects of social inclusion and of their appropriate measures and social indicators. Many factors may be important but adequate incomes come first.

To insist on the fact that adequate incomes are a necessary precondition of inclusive and participatory citizenship does not deny that many other resources may have a complementary role in combating exclusion. What is clear is that if individuals and households do not have adequate and reliable incomes over time, then all the other interventions and resources which the EU is promoting are not sufficient in themselves to achieve the intended objective of social inclusion. Those who argue (as many do when debating social exclusion) that adequate income is only one among many factors which have to be dealt with, and by no means the first, seem to have missed the point, or are evading it in the debate, perhaps for political reasons. They would have to show how people in poverty can experience the human dignity of social inclusion if they do not have incomes sufficient for market inclusion.

The question for those who construct EU social indicators is, then, how steps towards social inclusion can be measured if there are no indicators of adequacy, that is, the income levels at which it

7 Discussed further in Veit-Wilson 1999b.
can be achieved (naturally varying in each country just as income inequality does). The challenge in the EC’s Joint Report on Social Inclusion (2002 p 27) to member states to guarantee ‘an adequate income and resources to live in human dignity’ cannot be met as long as the EU has neither measures nor social indicators of household incomes sufficient for this specified purpose.

‘Statistics’ – counting low incomes and exclusions but not measuring adequacy for dignity.

Government purposes for social indicators. What the EU wants to measure is how many people are in poverty and exclusions by some stipulative (Humpty-Dumpty, prescriptive, normative) definitions of poverty and exclusion, so that it can see what changes take place over time. That is a fully-justified purpose, and naturally for such abstract comparisons the use of invariable standards can be as justifiable as the case for variable ones, over time and place. That is not the point even if a lot of people think it is – I have argued against the UK’s method chosen, but not against the purpose. What is at issue is the confusion between these stipulative approaches for one set of purposes and, for other purposes, the use of empirical approaches.

The EU approach has been clearly stated in the various documents relating to the social indicators which its Indicators Sub-Group investigated and reported on, and which have been adopted (Atkinson et al 2002; Nolan 2003). It wanted a wide range of intervention and policy outcome measures, not of inputs of the means by which to achieve them. They should be internationally comparable and as far as possible meet international standards already adopted by the UN and OECD. Low income (not poverty) is recognised as the first of the Primary Indicators, but this is measured by (as Nolan summarised it, p 80) “the most obvious and widely-used indicator of poverty, namely the percentage falling below income thresholds.” The threshold chosen is 60 per cent of the national equivalent median household. Nolan continued that “The Indicators Sub-Group emphasized that this was to be seen as a measure of people who are ‘at risk of being poor’, not a measure of poverty”, and gave good reasons why the group had come to the conclusion that income flows alone were inadequate and unsatisfactory indicators of outcome levels of living (see for instance the list in Andreß 2003 p 118). In other words, the entirely justifiable purpose of measuring EU trends in inequality and poverty risks by outcome measures of income distribution has no necessary connection with the completely different purpose of offering comparable standards of the adequacy of disposable incomes to avoid poverty in national context.

Thus the extensive debate and published literature on the use of social indicators to act as benchmarks against which to assess progress towards EU goals in combating poverty and social exclusion and promoting social inclusion is not at issue. This debate must not be confused with the completely separate issue of whether there should also be a social indicator of income adequacy to meet those goals, which is what needs discussion.

Surprisingly, EU staff (and research collaborators) may not realise this. In 1992 the EC recommended Member States to combat social exclusion by ‘fixing the amount of resources considered sufficient to cover essential needs with regard to respect for human dignity’. In 1998 it published its evaluation of how far this recommendation for governmental minimum income standards had been achieved, but this was only in terms of the levels of social assistance (minimum income) schemes in those countries which have them. This was perverse, since social assistance benefits are known to be political constructs aimed at best to alleviate poverty, but they are rarely up to the level of what some states have as their governmental minimum income standards (MIS), let alone what people experiencing poverty and exclusion (this descriptive phrase is abbreviated to PEPE in this paper) or the population as a whole would consider sufficient for human dignity. To be blunt, social assistance has no necessary connection with human dignity at all, and reports show its administration often negates it. What is particularly significant is that the EU did not choose to measure progress towards its human dignity goal in terms of income inequality, which it otherwise uses as its preferred low income measure.

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8 From Lewis Carroll’s Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There (1872) – Humpty Dumpty told her scornfully, “When I use a word, it means just what I want it to mean – neither more nor less.”
The UK government seems to face a similar problem of incomprehension of the difference between inequality and adequacy. Following its consultation on the subject, the DWP decided to measure its progress towards the government’s promise of abolishing child poverty, by using a composite tool. This will count the numbers of children in poverty as being those who live in households whose equivalised income before housing costs is 60 per cent or less of the median compared with 1998/99 (corrected for inflation) and compared with today, and who lack certain goods and services identified as deprivation indicators, and have an income below 70 per cent of today’s median household income (DWP 2003). Whatever the arguments for and against governments stipulatively choosing what they want to call poverty and measuring the extent of that construct, this has nothing to do with the completely different question of what society as a whole can be discovered empirically to identify as income poverty and what best measures it and the resources needed to avoid it.

It is however unclear if the UK problem is official incomprehension or if it is political evasion. In a private group discussion in 2004, UK Department for Work and Pensions policy officials responded to requests for income adequacy standards by emphasising that the UK government has now agreed on how to measure poverty (the child poverty standards mentioned above), and implying that they considered the question as closed. Neither time nor context allowed me to probe whether this answer was based on the responsible officials not understanding that a standard for one purpose was unsuited to another purpose, or on fully understanding the difference but covertly maintaining all UK governments’ traditional refusal to acknowledge that adequacy standards are even conceivable, let alone feasible. This is in spite of the fact that other EU countries do recognise the feasibility of income adequacy standards, and they maintain governmental minimum income standards (see Veit-Wilson 1998), but it is not clear how far such MIS actually reflect the income levels which scientific evidence shows are on average needed to achieve inclusion as it is defined.

The reluctance to face the issue of income (in)adequacy and the diversion into income inequality may be a problem not only at the UK but also at the EU level. The well documented change in Eurospeak terminology from poverty to social exclusion in the 1980s reflected a deliberate politically-driven expedient shift in discourse from politically-sensitive structural causes to politically-anodyne victim consequences. But even if the poverty research industry has to use the exclusion discourse in order to communicate with political authorities, that is no reason for colluding with the thought control it requires. At the objective factual level which is the basic ground of poverty research, the structural causes of poverty in the maldistribution of resources, the inadequacy of incomes, still remain, whatever the current politically preferred discourse.

What inequality is poverty? If any particular measure of inequality is to act as a measure of adequacy, it must have independent empirical justification showing that adequacy of income for a life with dignity and participation as a full member of society is in fact achieved on average at that equivalised household income inequality level. This assumes that all other levels of ‘power over resources through time’ (as Richard Titmuss expressed it) are held constant. The adequacy or sufficiency of a bundle of disparate disposable resources to achieve specified ‘human dignity’ levels of living can be disaggregated in each country or region into what combination is required there for that end, and it is likely that the combination and the precise income levels will vary from one place to another and over time. Within that bundle, there is an average disposable income level which would meet the test of adequacy in that society, time and place, and in principle this could also be expressed as a percentage of the appropriate current income distribution.

However, there is as yet no evidence that 60 per cent or any other percentage of equivalised mean or median incomes is adequate in any country to implement the EU values and meet EU goals, let alone in all of them. If there were independent empirical evidence about adequate income levels and they were expressed as a percentage of the national median, that could be acceptable, but the research needed to provide such evidence is sparse (for the UK, see the extensive research which David Gordon and his colleagues have published over the past decade, in the references and elsewhere). There is much academic research which suggests a merely tenuous relationship between inequality measures and deprivation (some of it referenced in Andreß 2003), and in the UK even official research shows that while what the DWP calls hardship is extensive (62%) in households with incomes below a version of the HBAI poverty measure, it also exists significantly in households with higher incomes (24%). But 40 per cent of low income households reported none of the specified
hardships (Vergeris and Perry 2003 p 86). Perhaps this shows how hard it is to equate a statistical point on the income distribution with the disposable income needed for the human dignity of not having to experience hardship.

Not only was the percentile of income distribution which was chosen in the UK completely arbitrary and politically biased not to reflect evidence of adequacy but to maintain statistical continuities, but even income flow measures do not correlate well with level of living outcomes. The methodological issues of the overlaps have been discussed in a number of recent publications, suggesting that the relationships may be present but they are unclear. Research by David Gordon and others has suggested that this may be in part because of the time lag effect – current income flow levels do not represent past asset stock accumulations or depletions. The matter demands much more detailed investigation before the current distributive percentile to choose for an ‘experienced poverty’ measure can be identified, or methods adopted to modify it as conditions change. It may need a more sophisticated measure.

Like the question of what social exclusion do people take to be poverty, and which people and why, so the question of what degree of inequality is to be taken as poverty and why, as intolerable by those who experience being that unequal and not only by government, needs to be clarified before discussion continues on this topic. Income inequality statistics exist but that is no reason for choosing them over more relevant alternatives which could equally exist if there were the political will to collect them. Or is this a case of the methodologists losing their keys in the ditch but looking for them under the street lamp because the light is better?

In a forthcoming relevant paper on poverty indicators and measures, Paul Spicker points out that these can be used to act for each other, but that “like a good measure, a good indicator will follow the pattern of the thing it indicates” (Spicker 2004). This cannot be said of using inequality as an indicator of poverty. What would happen if EU countries managed to squeeze the lower end of the income distribution to eliminate the under-60 per cent tail, and the other indicators showed that the social problems of exclusion persisted, as evidence suggests they may well do at higher income levels than 60 per cent?12 What if the evidence showed that even the median income population suffered what they see as the social exclusions and deprivations of human dignity which are at issue, as they do in some countries? Would the EU claim to have abolished poverty, as the UK government proposes to do? That would be an abuse of language and disrespect to the people still experiencing poverty, and, to the extent that the research community colluded in the claims, a serious academic and scholarly fault. The only indicator of any value is that which refers to the subject at issue, which in this case is some form of socially-excluding deprivation poverty and not some aspect of income inequality.

In principle, the empirical income inequality measure which would equate with adequacy is that at which a statistically significant majority of the population do not suffer the wide range of exclusions and do experience the variety of inclusions which both the governments and the populations specify as being the relevant indicators of those conditions. The specification of the indicators of inclusion is not problematic – it already exists – but the correlations with the levels of household income inequality have yet to be carried out. If such work were carried out, it would help to distinguish between those excluding conditions which were correlated with disposable incomes and those which are not, findings which themselves would be a step towards better problem identification and policy targeting. One would expect to find that some excluding conditions would have no correlation with income, while others might have a broken, stepwise (threshold) or continuous relationship. In the latter case, judgement would have to be exercised by the relevant respondents (not just government officials but people experiencing poverty and exclusion, or the population as a whole) on what the problematic thresholds of the condition were. The aim should be to establish, in each country and time, at what disposable household income levels, what percentile on the income distribution, households of differing sizes and compositions actually achieve what they define as not suffering from Mack and Lansley’s (1985) "enforced lack of socially defined necessities" or other social exclusions, and do achieve what they define as human dignity. I have argued elsewhere about a number of other indicators of deprivation which might also be productively examined to see at what points on the income scale they become intolerable, to those who experience them as well as

12 A similar question is posed by EAPN in the editorial, Network News 103, Nov-Dec 2003, p 2.
The analogy with nutrition and RDAs. Methodological objections are often raised about the feasibility of discovering usable and comparable adequacy measures, chiefly because of the complex variabilities of patterns of living and social expectations, and of market costs. The health analogy is again instructive here. It seems that all the methodological arguments which can be raised against the possibility of finding reliable and practicable indicators of income adequacy can be raised with equal strength against the possibility of finding scientifically well-founded and credible indicators of dietary adequacy, the minimal or optimal levels of the wide variety of essential nutrients which humans have to consume for good health. Yet for more than a century natural scientists have had no reservations in discovering and constructing scales of recommended daily allowances (RDAs) of a range of essential nutrients, applicable to human beings wherever they are. Naturally adjustments have to be made for variability in age, sex and activity and for household consumption equivalisations if relevant, as well as for wide variation in the nutritional constituents of the food consumed, but at the end the public is presented with RDAs which are treated as credible and upon which a large industry of dietary supplements makes massive profits.

Such scientific estimates are based on the best information at the time when they are made and are liable to adjustment as knowledge changes. Scientists have disagreed about their findings, and different national research institutes have arrived at differing estimates. But the many reservations one may have about the conclusions have not stopped them being used for decades by national governments and by international agencies as reliable indicators of the nutritional status of individuals, households and populations.

Nutritional status is an outcome of eating patterns; the input is the actual dietary consumed. An RDA is an abstraction; good health is palpable. A common objection to using the health analogy is that cash income is the input and social inclusion the outcome. But this misses the essential point that, in the income example, the palpable outcome is having been able to make market choices and arrived at the level of social inclusion deemed minimally acceptable (human dignity level), and the abstract indicator of the capacity (power over resources) to achieve this outcome is an adequate income measure. An adequate income indicator is thus no more or less invalid as a device for measuring this outcome than a bundle of RDAs is as a device for measuring the assumed average nutritional status required for good health.

An apposite example is the use of RDAs by UK governments for more than half a century in their National Food Surveys (whatever the current name for the household surveys in which they are conducted). UK governments have had no reservations about using RDAs to calculate the average nutritional status of households in the population. They publish findings which show what the estimated nutritional intake of households is, according to size, composition, status, income and other variables. As long ago as 1954, Peter Townsend pointed out that if the UK government could discover and report that, on average, households with dependent children were deficient in one or more essential nutrients, then it must be equally capable of discovering at what average income level households actually achieved the recommended intakes.14 Such income thresholds could then act (making all necessary allowances for spending patterns) as a form of empirically-based adequate income indicator. However, UK governments still steadfastly refuse to publish this information.

Other countries, too, carry out similar periodic national nutritional surveys, so there cannot be any serious principled objection to carrying out Townsend’s proposal on an EU wide basis, and this forms one of the suggestions below. However, the point here is that if the search for nutritional indicators can be carried out credibly, it is in principle no more problematic methodologically to search for credible empirically-based income adequacy indicators, to compare with income inequality indicators. If the EU social indicators experts can justify an arbitrary distributive income percentile as indicating households at risk of poverty, then with greater justification they could choose the household income level at which a majority of the population achieve a dietary intake sufficient for

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14 Townsend 1954.
good health as the social indicator of income adequacy, if dietary adequacy can be shown to be a good proxy for inclusion in other spheres as well.

**Causal chains.** Is a nutritionally inadequate diet an input, or is it an outcome of other factors, such as available income and spending priorities? It is used as an indicator of political concerns such as obesity, which could be seen as an outcome – or is it an input to increased morbidity and premature mortality? It is easy to get lost in the terminological and conceptual thicket and to forget that inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes are all parts of complex chains or systems in which one outcome is the input to another process with its own effects and outcomes. Policy interventions and outcomes in child socialisation, education, occupational training, the labour market and pensions are examples, but there are many more. The arguments are reviewed in the paper on “The mismatch between income measures and direct outcome measures of poverty” by a New Zealand Ministry of Social Development official (Perry 2002) who quotes Ringen (1987 p 161f) “We need to establish … that people live as if they were poor … because they do not have the means to avoid it”. Income inequality or outcome measures cannot do this; income adequacy indicators could point to it.

The suggestion that the EU’s social indicators should measure only outcomes implies a non-existent static situation, while the lived reality we ought to be addressing is dynamic. Concentration on the EU’s social indicators of outcomes as if they were goals achieved diverts attention from adequate incomes as both an output of government income maintenance policy but equally an input to further goals of having such a policy. Establishing what are adequate incomes and achieving them is no less an output which can be measured than are many of the other social indicators which the EU experts have established, and the selective view which accepts one and rejects the other must be questioned. Canadian researchers who tried to find out empirically at what level of incomes deprivations were overcome commented that “The material in this report provides additional information about the connection between low income and children’s well-being – information that until now, no one has discussed in relation to establishing the ‘proper’ poverty line” (Ross and Roberts 1999, Introduction). They concluded that unacceptable inequality is the income level which fails to ensure roughly equal life chances for all children. That, too, could be a matter for European researchers to investigate empirically and for the EU to implement, if the member states had the political will. But as long as they lack it, social indicators which treat income poverty as an unsupported percentile will not provide governments with the signposts, the measures or the tools they need to overcome exclusions based on inadequate market access.

It thus seems that the EU is using too few social indicators of poverty. Perry concluded that:

> In measuring and reporting on poverty, both income and deprivation or other outcome measures should be used … The two sorts of measures are conceptually different and the empirical evidence shows that they are tapping into quite different underlying groups. … To use one measure on its own to report on poverty trends is highly likely to give a misleading picture of what is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon. (Perry 2002 p 121.)

Ross and Roberts also posed the question, “What if producing healthy children was the central objective of anti-poverty efforts?” A question for further discussion must therefore be, if producing human dignity and social inclusion were the EU objective, would demonstrably adequate incomes continue to be omitted from among the essential factors demanding social indicators?

**MEASURING HUMAN DIGNITY – FROM WHOSE PERSPECTIVE?**

*Why does the question of perspectives matter in policy debate just now?*

In the context of the argument about social indicators of human dignity, the first question is whether income adequacy is a concern introduced only by academic critics like myself, or whether PEPE have identified income adequacy as a central problem themselves. It is a simple question, but the treatment of the subject has become so confused that the ground has first to be cleared.

The study of the abstract concept of poverty and the industry of theorising about it, recording it and prescribing what to do about it are full of emotive words and stuffed with bloodless statistics – hence the choice of epigraph. It is clear that the poverty words – and there are many synonyms – often
do not correspond to the statistics used to measure them, and the theories often do not lead to the enforceable solutions which they imply. Poverty industry academics have not yet made a political impact on this confusion, and some even seem to share it. In the mean time, the suffering of poverty continues.

Even if this problem of epistemological disparity and incompatibility is an old one and has often been examined, it now has new policy topicality because the EU, in its requirements for the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAPs), has set out objectives for income adequacy in terms of unenforceable\textsuperscript{15} abstract human dignity qualities, while still using statistical indicators or political measures to monitor goal achievement, as discussed above. Further, the EU requires governments to involve PEPE in the preparation of the NAPs. The UK government’s Participation Working Group’s plan for preparation for the 2005 NAP set the aims out as follows –

\textbf{F.2 Overall aim:}

9. To enable people in poverty to participate in the development of the UK NAP 2005 and beyond by establishing a real partnership between people living in poverty (women, men, children from all different backgrounds) and government at all levels in order to improve the anti poverty policy and practice described by the NAP.

\textbf{F.2.1 Objectives:}

\begin{itemize}
  \item To improve the NAP by greater involvement of people living in poverty;
  \item To ensure that the experiences of people living in poverty inform policy and practice.
\end{itemize}

\textbf{F.4 Measures of success:}


In the UK, and I suspect in other EU countries as well, the question for discussion should be how PEPE can be involved in such a way that that their views of how to ensure human dignity are implemented by their governments, not only in their NAPs but their enforceable income maintenance policies. Leaving aside all the well-rehearsed prior discussion of poverty semantics and research methods and measures; insisting that the subject demands both/and responses, not either/or; agreeing that there are many other aspects which may be relevant – what has to be addressed is how to arrive at indicators of the levels of adequate disposable incomes which the men, women and children experiencing poverty, deprivation and exclusion agree are sufficient (other things like collective resources and services being equal) both to buy themselves out of the poverties, deprivations and exclusions which are identified in and across society as unacceptable, and also to allow them “to lead life with dignity and to participate in society as full members” (EC 2002 p 27).

\textit{“Nobody who has not been through it can understand it. ... Only the detail counts...”}

People experience the detail; academics generate statistics. There is an increasing body of current literature on the role of PEPE in determining the purpose, nature, design and outputs and outcomes of poverty research. In the UK, such participatory approaches are discussed particularly by writers such as Fran Bennett, Paul Beresford, and Ruth Lister, in a number of publications. These concerns have been important for decades if not centuries. One of the strands in this literature draws on the longstanding attempts by those affected by a condition or label to combat the power of professionals and bureaucrats, for instance in the medical field, in medical research and administrative practice. Another strand draws on metaphysical or ideological beliefs in human equality to combat oppression, discrimination and neglect. A further strand focuses on the organisation and articulation of the voices of PEPE. All strands are concerned with bringing about change in the current situation of the powerlessness of PEPE, intolerable to those suffering from it \textit{but not necessarily to those benefiting from it}. This reservation must never be forgotten, since the literature shows that while the concern is not new, little of it has been directly concerned with involving PEPE in determining questions not just of what income adequacy means but at what levels it is achieved, which is at issue.

\textsuperscript{15} See the comments on justiciability in the appendix.
Values. Much of this literature discusses the dehumanising objectification and categorisation of PEPE and criticises the assumption by non-poor people, the politicians, experts and professionals, that their power justifies their pre-emption of the right to define the problems and their solutions. It addresses very broad and deep issues.

The subject of the need for researchers to respect the autonomy, integrity, dignity and agency of the people experiencing a problem whom an outsider proposes to study or impose something on, whether scientific, medical, political or social in some other way, is an old one, even if it has not been as widely recognised in the past by power holders as it should have been. Not only does it raise issues about the golden rule (don’t treat others in ways you wouldn’t accept being treated), it raises issues of metaphysical belief about the value of all human beings (never treat others as objects but only as subjects as valuable and valid as yourself). There are ideological consequences about equality which would seem logically to follow from these \textit{a priori} value standpoints, but they are followed very inconsistently.

Although it is generally assumed that the values associated with this question are egalitarian, it is often overlooked that they need not be so. Some subscribers to metaphysical (sometimes religious) beliefs consider ‘essential’ human equality is compatible with considerable inequality in the social, political or economic systems, even tolerating material poverty provided that everyone is ‘integrated’ into or ‘included’ in society (the Mrs Alexander\textsuperscript{16} or Georg Simmel\textsuperscript{17} version). In another, Orwellian, version, all humans are theoretically equal but power holders claim the needs of the collectivity (whether \textit{Animal Farm} elitist greed or a historicist interpretation of the public interest) outweigh the needs and interests of the research subject/s, with consequences for the ways in which they are treated.

If the values determine that the people experiencing the suffering are to be accorded human dignity by being respected and listened to, then if they themselves say that their principal problem is their lack of adequate incomes with which to achieve social inclusion, this expression of their views must by the very same token be respected and acted upon politically, even if such action is politically undesirable to those non-poor people who claim social inclusion does not require adequate incomes first. So what do PEPE actually say on the subject when they have the chance to express their views?

The survey of living conditions in the 28 EU member states (quoted above) found that across their populations income adequacy was considered most important. A body of previous research has shown that people currently in poverty do not hold significantly different values and aspirations from the wider populations among whom they live, but even if that were not so, recent consultations among PEPE carried out by the UK’s Department of Work and Pensions have supported this view.

The point about participatory research is the question of what aspects of the poverty life experience, the detail of suffering, are salient to those who suffer it. Questions about the experience seem to evoke responses about the problems and the direct suffering, but not necessarily about the more remote causes of it or their proxies, such as lack of some calculated level of disposable income. Much depends methodologically on how the problem is presented or the question is phrased. What is noticeable is that the DWP consultations with PEPE for the purposes of measuring child poverty (MCP) and the NAP both found that inadequate incomes were reported as a serious issue.

The DWP’s \textit{Preliminary Conclusions} Report on MCP (May 2003) gave a number of examples of responses, as well as summarising what they were. Considering that the role of low income was played down in a document which took the breadth of the concept of poverty as given and whose purpose was not concerned with evidence for an income maintenance programme but with tools for counting people, it is notable that children’s lists of ‘what matters as well as money’ (p 16) gave purchasable items as all eleven of the ‘goods’ groups of items, and one (fuel) out of ten collective ‘services’ areas of provision. Of the nine ‘other’ experiences which mattered, which included such intangibles as friends, love, health, responsibility, happy life and freedom, one referred directly to income (‘being able to pay the bills/pay off debt’), while ‘sport and exercise’ also has its economic aspects for most people. The parents’ views of what poverty is similarly stated that

\textsuperscript{16}“The rich man in his castle,/ The poor man at his gate,/ God made them high and lowly/ And ordered their estate.”

\textsuperscript{17}Poverty is only problematic in the socially-excluded pauper status, disregarding the ‘ordinary’ poverty anyone ‘socially included’ may experience (1908).
“poverty is about not having money, and the things that everyone takes for granted. It is about not having …” (p 22) and there then follow five goods items (all dependent on income) and three service aspects of which one, ‘leisure’, is in its conventional cultural manifestation, also dependent on income (even if it need not be). Only the four other intangibles (health, self-esteem, respect and support) need not depend on disposable income, even if evidence suggests some aspects are generally correlated.

Similarly, the DWP’s volume of Annexes to the report UK National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2003-2005 (July 2003) sets out not only the DWP’s Participation Working Group Plan’s overall aims, objectives and measures of success in Annex F, which were quoted above, but many direct quotations from “What People with Direct Experience of Poverty Have Said” (Annex E), at both the DWP’s and the Social Policy Task Force’s own ‘NAPinc’ awareness seminars. These statements include –

“There is a strong view that a living income is crucial to families’ ability to help themselves and to their ability to change and develop over time”; “… there is still a need for better financial support for bringing up children for people on benefits as well as people in paid work”; “Some young people just cannot work and need higher incomes through the benefit system if poverty is to be seriously tackled”; (on the Minimum Wage) “Low wages do not give people dignity as workers – they abuse their value as people”; (older people said) “The overall concerns are with income adequacy …. The state pension is inadequate to live on …” (DWP April 2003 pp 78-83).

This suggests that it is not ‘missing the point’ about the breadth of the notions some people hold about the word poverty if the conclusion is drawn that for most people, whether currently poor or not, poverty does in the first place mean a lack of an adequate disposable income for human dignity and social inclusion. The problem to be solved is then not what are all those other associated ideas, but what income levels are needed on average to avoid the poverty identified by its victims, and how to derive a viable social indicator.

**Who are the people experiencing poverty and exclusion?**

This question is a central concern of the literature which discusses how to counter the marginalisation of PEPE in poverty research and policy (see especially the recent contribution to the literature, Fran Bennett’s and Moraene Roberts’s *From Input to Influence: Participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty* (2004). It arises in the context of research into poverty (who knows best what that is) and selective, socially stratified and targeted government policy on poverty and exclusion (who knows best what the experienced problems are and what can acceptably be done about them). However, the question of who the PEPE are does not itself affect the choice of social indicators, but it is relevant to the argument over the extent to which it should be the whole population or only PEPE who are to be consulted or surveyed for problem identification and material.

Given the political impotence of individuals acting as such, the normal political idiom is to express the constituency of the PEPE in terms of its organisations. Indeed, when the UK government has to consult PEPE it inevitably thinks it has to go to organisations, as it has to find individuals to consult and they have to have plausibility as being in some way representative of a constituency. At the EU level, such national organisations are represented by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN). The associated organisations are generally either composed of the residents of deprived areas, or of people in groups identified by temporary or permanent marginality to the labour market which gives rise to poverty risks. Naturally such individuals have first hand experience of matters relating to their identification (local knowledge; group characteristics), but the individual members of either of such groups may or may not be income poor as well as being deprived in terms of their identifying characteristics, which do not usually include income poverty as such. If they are not, they may have experienced income poverty in the past, but not necessarily so. There is a literature on the status and limitations of generalisability of local knowledge, as well as of the status of currently non-poornpoor intermediaries (representatives and spokespeople) which calls into question the degree to which their expressions of opinion on income poverty are any more privileged than those of other outsiders who have studied the issues.
What is incontrovertible is that the individual members of such organisations who have first hand experience and who have been consulted do identify income poverty as of prime importance to their social exclusion. EAPN expressed this in its manifesto for the NAPs in 2001, in answer to the question ‘so what do we mean when we say we want to fight poverty and social exclusion?’ as “Give everyone a minimum income to live in a manner compatible with human dignity and enable them to participate in society”.

The findings of two kinds of research have questioned the assumption that income poverty is a problem only for those living in deprived localities or to those currently in high-risk categories. The ecological fallacy refers to the finding in the UK that most income poor people do not live in deprived neighbourhoods, and most people in such neighbourhoods are not income poor (as it is currently defined). Similarly, dynamic research has shown that those who are currently income poor are only a small part of all those who have experienced poverty at some period of time in their lives. There is a good deal of movement across the official boundaries of some sort of poverty, even if it is often not far above them. For instance, in the ten years 1991-2001, nearly half the UK population spent at least one year in a household with low income by the HBAI measure, while only two per cent of the population experienced this kind of low income throughout those ten years (fifteen per cent experienced low income for at least half of the decade).\(^\text{13}\) While similar dynamic findings were reported in Germany, these findings may however not apply to the same extent in all other EU countries, especially those with sections of the population who suffer extreme discrimination (such as the Roma).

**Whose standards of income adequacy?**

If the question concerns the EU inclusion policies, there can be no argument about the involvement of organisations of PEPE, but if it concerns the technicalities of constructing social indicators of income adequacy for human dignity, there is a strong case for using methods which apply the dignity standards demanded by the population as a whole. This case nevertheless has still to be argued whenever there is a confusion between reporting the current experience of poverty and deriving the normative standards against which the target for abolition will be set.

If we want an egalitarian society in which the standards applicable to the worst placed are no worse than anyone in society would accept if they had to experience them (a Rawlsian question), then it is logical to use as criteria of adequacy for human dignity and social inclusion the standards which the whole of society considers a tolerable minimum for itself, and not simply those which PEPE at the moment would consider tolerable. In the income maintenance field, this justifies the use of social survey sample poverty research methods as currently practised. These include the direct deprivation indicator methods, in which the population determines the key indicators of deprivation and the income thresholds are statistically derived correlates, as well as the indirect proxy methods in which populations estimate their threshold incomes for ‘just making ends meet’. Another indirect method based on the deprivation indicator approach combined with household income and expenditure data is budget methods, though these offer a range of possible levels of living depending on the standards of acceptability used to determine the inputs (such as the Family Budget Unit’s Low Cost but Acceptable, or Modest But Adequate budgets). Budget methods have more credibility when they are constructed by those who have experience of the kinds of household and levels of living in question (see Middleton 2000). But such approaches have to be examined carefully, since they raise major questions about the degree of stratification of standards in a society, and those whose vision of society is hierarchical may tolerate lower normative standards of living for others than they would do for themselves. This may then impact on the argument about social indicators of income adequacy.

**THE PROBLEM AND THE INDICATORS.**

The EU Social Indicators team stated clearly that “an indicator should identify the essence of the problem and have a clear and accepted normative interpretation” (Atkinson et al 2002 p 21). The problem is that the EU has set income adequacy goals in terms of human dignity and the relevant populations have said that human dignity demands adequate incomes. The issue could not be clearer – the EU must therefore find an indicator which can act as a signpost, milepost or goalpost (merely

metaphors, to be chosen by preference) as a defensible proxy for the goal to be achieved and progress towards it, to place beside the income inequality indicator which cannot play this role.

**What research needs to be done to arrive at an EU social indicator of income adequacy?**

If we want an income adequacy measure, we shall have to return to the four invariable questions, adequate for what, for how long, for whom and who says? The answers to the two latter questions must – in an inclusive society – be for everyone according to the standards of dignity held by the majority of the population for themselves. The answer to ‘adequate for what’ has already been set by the EU’s goal of human dignity, social inclusion and participation, all of which can be empirically tested, and the question of duration must therefore also be life long.

The answers to these four questions must not be confused with the answers commonly given in countries with dominantly hierarchical standards when posed in the context of setting governmental minimum income standards or when social assistance benefit levels are at issue. The answers then commonly are: for low material levels of living; temporarily while earnings are absent; only for people without any other income flows or asset stocks; and according to standards set by the non-poor who believe they may have to pay for the benefits out of their taxation. It is easy to see why those who want to avoid involvement in these value arguments confine their recommendations to neutral indices such as income inequality, but the EU social indicator of low income inequality reflects only the likely income poverty risk. It appears to be superficially neutral on income adequacy for social inclusion, though it is widely abused as if that is what it indicates.

Any one of the wide range of available direct and indirect income poverty measures is unlikely to be suitable on its own for use as a cross-national social indicator of income adequacy which, as Spicker emphasises (2004), is a measure of a trend (and must therefore point in the right direction) and not of one precise factor – though it is worth looking to see if one clear factor can be found to act reliably and robustly as a proxy for the whole trend. Thus it will be worth looking for the material for the social indicator of income adequacy in the same fields as have already been well-cultivated for poverty measures. It could derive from official statistical sources similar to those used for the current inequality indicator as long as the problem of quantifying the ‘human dignity and inclusion’ value has been solved. Research must therefore be done to explore what this means in each EU country and at what average income levels it is achieved, possibly expressed as a percentage of the income distribution. I omit discussion of the issues of equivalisation and other statistical manipulations, since they apply whatever is done and are not peculiar to the problem in hand. The regular sample surveys of household income and expenditure, assets and experiences which are now customary in most countries or in the form of the ECHP or the EU-SILC might also be exploited.

It may be that not one but several social indicators of income adequacy are needed for different dimensions of inclusion, both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative statistical measures could include the income levels at which average households are found to gain market access to a healthy diet as customarily available and consume the full battery of RDAs, or the income levels at which reasonably healthy or average living outcomes are achieved in that country in terms of morbidity and mortality rates, or, to take a different aspect of life, educational attainment rates. A variety of possibilities justify exploration, perhaps using statistical modelling techniques. Qualitative measures might be based on the majority’s conceptions of human dignity and social inclusion, and – as with deprivation indicator research – then use the statistically derived average income levels at which people feel that they experience what society defines as human dignity and social inclusion.

The issue of political credibility must also not be overlooked. The income levels which may be indicated by such research findings may be a lot higher than current governmental minimum income standards, let alone social assistance benefit levels, but they would give substance to the social indicators which could be derived from them in ways which are lacking at present. The EU team rightly stated that “Overall, the indicators must have intuitive value. They should produce results that seem ‘reasonable’ to Europe’s citizens”, but they went on to declare that “A poverty indicator that showed over half the EU population to be poor would be regarded as grossly inflated” (Atkinson et al 2002 p 21). The latter statement may be correct about the response, but may be misleading about the accuracy of the finding. There is nothing implausible in the notion that *by the human dignity and social inclusion standards of the EU population* (not those of policy makers alone) more than half the population of some countries in Europe do not have disposable incomes which allow them to reach
the standards applicable in their countries. If this were found empirically to apply, it might be because of the economic and political situations in some countries, but it must on no account be dismissed as incredible or even ‘impossible by definition’ (a conceptual confusion typical among those who cannot distinguish facts from values) simply because some politicians or policy makers do not want to hear the message which people are telling them.

**Conclusion.**

In this paper I have tried to address the persisting problem that movement towards the EU goal for incomes sufficient for human dignity and social inclusion is not being measured by the social indicator in use, and the EU requirement that the views of PEPE should be included in drawing up the NAPs must play a role in answering the question. In Europe those views are that higher incomes are essential, though the question to what level they should be raised has neither been asked nor answered as it should be. The answer to that question may not be the same as the answer to the question of what social indicator of income adequacy for social inclusion should the EU adopt, but the EU should not adopt an indicator which gives national answers lower than those given by PEPE there. If the research proposed gives higher answers, then they should be used in considering the appropriate social indicator or it will lack credibility.

The paper will doubtless provoke arguments (it aims to do so) and objections. However, since the paper does not dispute that poverty and exclusion are often treated as being about far more than money incomes, nor that there may be a case for income inequality indicators, I hope that these issues will not be raised as objections to the search for an income adequacy indicator. Another common objection in such discussions, that ‘no government would be willing to pay benefits at such levels’, is irrelevant since this paper is not about the uses of adequacy data in setting governmental minimum income standards or income maintenance benefits, which are different subjects, but about poverty measures and indicators and their sources and rationales in public experiences, behaviours and opinions. One could add that social assistance benefits are not paid at EU income inequality levels either, or there would be few if any poor people in the EU. But that is not what the paper is about.

If the object of a social indicator is to help governments to see how far they have got towards the social or political goal to which it points, then the goal of “guaranteeing a sufficient income to lead life with dignity and to participate in society as full members” demands a better indicator than any currently in use. What would do the job properly is what ought to be discussed.

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D. Gordon et al (2000), Poverty and social exclusion in Britain, York: JRF.
C W Mills (1959), The Sociological Imagination, New York: OUP.
The right to an income sufficient for social inclusion is asserted in many EU and other official international statements. Similar terms such as ‘standard of living’ or ‘resources’ must, in marketised economies, equally be taken to mean adequate incomes. This appendix summarises some of these statements, since they form the background to the claim in the paper that the constant EU rhetoric of the need for income adequacy should be complemented by one or more social indicators which reflect how far that goal is being attained. The summary is prefaced by comments on the idea of social rights and a reservation on their justiciability.

“At the core of social rights is the right to an adequate standard of living: UNDHR article 25; CESC article 11; CRC article 27. The enjoyment of these rights requires at a minimum that everyone shall enjoy the necessary subsistence rights – adequate food and nutrition rights, clothing, housing and the necessary conditions of care.” (Eide 1997 p 122)

“Inclusion values and principles within the European social model. … These principles are briefly described as follows: (a) The guarantee of human dignity for social welfare claimants and beneficiaries. This is a principle derived from the function of general and categorical minimum income schemes applied at national, regional and local level. It is strongly connected with new perspectives about the role of minimum standards and the supplementary coverage they provide.” (Amitsis 2003 pp 169-170)

“Social rights constitute a defined state objective that compels the legislator to adopt all the more advanced (and appropriate) social measures that are in compliance with these rights. … Legislators are not free to abrogate social rights to which they themselves have given specific substance. In this sense, the defensive aspect of social rights is legally enforceable.” (Stergiou 2003 p 196)

**Justiciability**

The term refers to the capacity to test in the courts the enforceability of stipulated rights, such as those human social and economic rights quoted in the appendix. The subject has a large and growing literature, not further cited. The chief aspect covers whether the existing legislation gives rights to the practical form of whatever the abstract right refers to.

This paper’s concern with the implementation of the EU’s challenge to member states to show how they will guarantee ‘a sufficient income to lead life with dignity and to participate in society as full members’ demands, first, that the level of this income can be specified (allowing for case variation). The obligation of the government to pay that level of income (through benefits and/or wages, etc) would be what the court is asked to adjudicate.

The recent paper by Nigel Johnson (2004) on the application of the UK’s Human Rights Act 1998 comes to a gloomy conclusion: “The Convention rights that were incorporated into British law by the HRA are over 50 years old and were never designed to provide social and economic rights for the citizen” (p 113). In considering the detail of rights which would include an adequate income, Johnson writes that “While the UK has signed up to these human rights documents, so far the government has chosen only to incorporate into law the more limited civil and political rights and not to give parity of treatment to social, economic and cultural rights” (pp 115-116).

The situation in a few other European countries is slightly more helpful to poor people. In Germany, the 1961 Federal Social Assistance Act requires benefits to be set at levels which conform to the requirements of human dignity, and what that means can be and has been tested in the administrative courts. One has to note that the German idea of human dignity is not egalitarian, but it needs more than minimum subsistence. The right is tempered by what is in effect a less-eligibility provision. I do not know if negotiated wage rates in Germany have threatened this right. Similarly in

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20 EC 2002, p 27.
Sweden, the 1981 Social Services Act requires the social assistance system to ‘assure the individual of a reasonable level of living’, and what the meaning of reasonableness is has often been tested in the courts, which usually refer to the National Consumer Board’s budgets. It is also relevant to note that the Swedish Taxation Board used these budgets as the basis of guidelines to the minimum income below which no deductions could be made by the courts because they would damage a person’s welfare. A similar provision applied in Norway.\(^{21}\)

In these three countries, the governments had long accepted the principle that the state had a responsibility to ensure that everyone’s income was minimally adequate for some idea of a dignified level of living (the idea of adequacy being based on a governmental minimum income standard), and consequently the application of the principle was justiciable. No UK government has ever accepted the principle, at any rate not to the extent of being able to specify what minimal level of living the social assistance system was supposed to support.\(^{22}\) Indeed, a Junior Minister in the current government, a former social policy researcher, called the search for a scientific measure of poverty “social science fiction rather than social science fact”\(^{23}\), overlooking that his government encourages the use of many precise indicators of imprecise social phenomena. However, it is the reality of the suffering that poverty causes which should drive the search for better indicators and justiciable rights.

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> 25. Everyone has the **right** to a standard of living **adequate** for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care … and the **right** to **security** in the event ….

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**Council of Europe: European Social Charter 1961.**

> 13 (1) to ensure that any person who is without adequate resources and who is unable to secure such resources either by his own efforts or from other sources, in particular by benefits under a social security scheme, be granted **adequate assistance**, and …

**Council of Europe: Revised European Social Charter 1996.**

> 30. With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the **right** to protection against poverty and social exclusion, the parties undertake: to take measures … to promote the effective access of persons who live or risk living in a situation of social exclusion or poverty … to … social … assistance.

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> 7. … the **right** of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work which ensure, in particular: (a) Remuneration which provides all workers, as a minimum, with: (i) Fair wages … ; (ii) A **decent** living for themselves and their families in accordance with the provisions of the present Covenant; …

> 11. (the **right**) to an **adequate** standard of living for himself and his family, including **adequate** food, clothing and housing, …

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\(^{21}\) These findings are reported in Veit-Wilson 1998.

\(^{22}\) See the research reported in Veit-Wilson 1999a.


1. … an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person … (is) entitled to participate in … and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realised.

Communication from the Commission concerning its action programme relating to the implementation of the Community Charter of basic social rights for workers. COM (89) 568 final; Brussels, 29 November 1989.

5. Social protection: Recommendation on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in the social protection systems. (p 28).

The resolution of the Council of Social Affairs Ministers of 29 September 1989 concerning social exclusion states that the existence of a means guarantee is a fundamental component of the fight against social exclusion.

In an opinion of 16 September 1988, the European Parliament for its part requested the Commission to promote the introduction of a minimum integration income as a factor for the integration of the poorest citizens of the Community.


5. Workers shall be assured of an equitable wage, i.e. a wage sufficient to enable them to have a decent standard of living.

10. Every worker of the European Community shall have a right to adequate social protection and shall, whatever his status and whatever the size of the undertaking in which he is employed, enjoy an adequate level of social security benefits.

Persons who have been unable either to enter or re-enter the labour market and have no means of subsistence must be able to receive sufficient resources and social assistance in keeping with their particular situation.

25. Any person who has reached retirement age but who is not entitled to a pension or who does not have other means of subsistence must be entitled to sufficient resources and to medical and social assistance specifically suited to his needs.

Council Recommendation of 24 June 1992 on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection schemes (also known as the Minimum Income Recommendations); 92/441/EEC.

(2) Whereas respect for human dignity is one of the fundamental rights underlying Community law, as recognised in the Preamble to the Single European Act;

(6) … whereas the right of the least privileged to sufficient, stable and reliable resources should therefore be recognised …;

1. Hereby recommends Member States:

A. to recognise the basic right of a person to sufficient resources and social assistance to live in a manner compatible with human dignity as part of a comprehensive and consistent drive to combat social exclusion, and to adapt their social protection systems, as necessary, according to the principles and guidelines set out below;

B. to recognise this right according to the following general principles: 3. every person who does not have access individually or within the household in which he or she lives to sufficient resources is to have access to such right (… subject to conditions);

C. to organise the implementation of this right according to the following practical guidelines:
1. (a) fixing the amount of resources considered **sufficient** to cover essential needs with regard to **respect for human dignity**, taking account of living standards and price levels in the Member State concerned, for different types and sizes of households;

2. granting, to people whose resources taken at the level of the individual or the household are lower than the amounts thus fixed, adjusted or supplemented, differential financial aid to **bring them up** to these amounts;

3. taking the necessary measures to ensure that, with regard to the financial support thus granted, the implementation of the regulations in force in the areas of taxation, civil obligations and social security takes account of the desirable level of **sufficient** resources and social assistance to live in a manner **compatible with human dignity**;

D. to **guarantee** these resources and benefits within the framework of social protection arrangements.

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**Council Recommendation of 27 July 1992 on the convergence of social protection objectives and policies; 92/442/EEC;**

1. Hereby recommends that Member States should:

   A.1.a … **guarantee** a level of resources **in keeping with human dignity**.

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**Revised Social Charter of the Council of Europe 1996 article 30.**

… the **right** to protection against poverty and social exclusion.

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**Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union 2001.**

34 (3). In order to combat social exclusion and poverty, the Union recognises and respects the **right** to social and housing assistance so as to ensure a **decent** existence for all those who lack sufficient resources …

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**European Commission, Joint Report on Social Inclusion; Employment and Social Affairs 2002.**

Page 27 (5) Guaranteeing an **adequate** income and resources to live in human **dignity**. The challenge is to ensure that all men, women and children have a **sufficient** income to lead life with **dignity** and to **participate in society as full members**.