



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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REVISED FORWARDING OF A TEXT

from : The Social Protection Committee
to : Coreper/Council (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs)
no. prev. doc. : 14110/00 SOC 470
Subject : **Fight against poverty and social exclusion: common objectives for the second round of National Action Plans**
– **Endorsement**

Delegations will find enclosed a report from the Social Protection Committee, including its suggestions for revised appropriate objectives for the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

Pursuant to the Lisbon and Santa Maria da Feira European Councils, the Council adopted in October 2000 a set of "appropriate objectives" for the fight against poverty and social exclusion, which were subsequently endorsed by the Nice European Council in December 2000. They formed the basis for the first two-yearly National Action Plans, which in turn contributed to the Joint Council/Commission Report on Social Inclusion submitted to the Laeken European Council in December 2001. The revised objectives are intended for the second round of this exercise which has now started, aiming at a new Joint Report for the Spring European Council of 2004. The objectives are accompanied by an explanatory note and an introductory note.

The United Kingdom delegation has entered a parliamentary scrutiny reservation.

The Council is invited to endorse the report and the revised objectives.

OBJECTIVES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

– Explanatory Note

In line with the outcome of the informal meeting of the Employment and Social Affairs Ministers in Kolding in July 2002 the Social Protection Committee has prepared this report on the appropriate objectives which should underpin the preparation of the second round of National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion in 2003. In preparing this report the Committee has taken into account the conclusions of the European Round Table Conference held in Aarhus on 17th and 18th October 2002.

It is the Committee's view that the existing Common Objectives which were agreed at the European Council of Nice in December 2000 have proved balanced, robust and viable. There is thus no need to make major changes to the objectives. The emphasis at this time should be on continuity and on consolidating and building on the progress that has been made with a view to further increasing efforts to advance the social inclusion process launched at the European Council of Lisbon in March 2000.

There are, however, three substantive areas where we would consider that changes should be made to the Common Objectives to further highlight their importance. These are:

- in line with the conclusions of the Barcelona European Council to stress the need for Member States to set targets in their National Action Plans for significantly reducing the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 2010;
- to emphasise the importance of taking the role of gender fully into account in the development, implementation and monitoring of National Action Plans;

- to highlight more clearly the high risk of poverty and social exclusion faced by some men and women as a result of immigration.

We have incorporated changes to the Nice objectives which reflect these three important issues in the attached annex.

We further consider that at this stage the two year cycle of National Action Plans should be maintained and that the next plans should be prepared for July 2003. This would then provide the basis for the preparation by the Commission and the Member States of a new Joint Report on Social Inclusion to be submitted to the Spring European Council of 2004.

OBJECTIVES IN THE FIGHT
AGAINST POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

- Introductory note

1. Political guidelines laid down by the European Council

At the European Councils in Lisbon and in Feira, the Member States of the European Union took a major initiative by making the fight against poverty and social exclusion one of the central elements in the modernisation of the European social model. The Heads of State and Government agreed on the need to take steps to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by setting suitable objectives to be agreed by the Council by the end of the year. They also agreed that policies for combating social exclusion should be based on an open method of coordination combining national action plans and a programme presented by the Commission to encourage cooperation in this field.

The European Councils in Lisbon and in Feira made the promotion of social cohesion an essential element in the global strategy of the Union to achieve its strategic objective for the next decade of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. It also set a goal for full employment in Europe in an emerging new society which is more adapted to the personal choices of women and men.

This initiative follows from the inclusion, through the Amsterdam Treaty, of the fight against exclusion in the provisions relating to the Union's social policy (Articles 136 and 137 of the Treaty).

2. Multi-dimensional approach

Poverty and social exclusion take complex and multi-dimensional forms which require the mobilisation of a wide range of policies under that overall strategy. Alongside employment policy, social protection has a pre-eminent role to play, while the importance of other factors such as housing, education, health, information and communications, mobility, security and justice, leisure and culture should also be acknowledged.

It is necessary, therefore, to mainstream the objective of fighting poverty and social exclusion into relevant strands of policy, at both national and community level.

Employment is the best safeguard against social exclusion. In order to promote quality employment it is necessary to develop employability, in particular through policies to promote the acquisition of skills and life-long learning. The implementation of the objectives to which the European Union has committed itself within the European Employment Strategy will, therefore, make a vital contribution to the fight against exclusion. Economic growth and social cohesion are mutually reinforcing. It is a precondition for better economic performance that we create a society with greater social cohesion and less exclusion.

Social protection systems also play a key role. In this context, the national social assistance and minimum income schemes are important instruments in social protection policy. It is vital, in the context of an active welfare state, to create modern systems of social protection which promote access to employment. Retirement pensions and access to health care also play an important role in the fight against social exclusion.

The new knowledge-based society offers great possibilities for reducing social exclusion, both by creating the economic conditions for greater prosperity and by opening up new ways of participating in society. The emergence of new information and communication technologies constitutes an exceptional opportunity, provided that the risk of creating an ever-widening gap between those who have access to the new knowledge and those who do not is avoided. The Lisbon Council directed that exclusion from the information society should be prevented and that it was necessary to pay special attention to the needs of people with disabilities. The implementation of the Commission's action plan "E-Europe 2005 – an Information Society for all", approved by the Seville European Council, as well as the "2003 European Year for Disabled People" should contribute to the achievement of this objective.

In line with the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council, setting appropriate objectives should also involve promoting a better understanding of social exclusion; mainstreaming the promotion of inclusion in Member States' employment, education and training, health and housing policies; and developing priority actions in favour of specific target groups (for example, minorities, children, the elderly and disabled), with Member States choosing amongst those actions according to their particular situations.

3. Arrangements for implementation

Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty respectively give to the Community the task of promoting equality between men and women and of ensuring that all its activities aim to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between men and women. It is therefore necessary to ensure that a concern for gender equality is mainstreamed in all action to be taken to achieve the stated objectives, in particular by assessing the implications for both men and women at the different stages of the planning of, decision-making on and monitoring of that action.

The implementation of this approach must take account of the principle of subsidiarity. Combatting social exclusion is first and foremost the responsibility of Member States and their national, regional and local authorities, in cooperation with the full range of the bodies concerned, in particular the social partners and NGOs. Furthermore, the nature of the response depends particularly on the nature of national social protection systems and social policies.

Applying the open method of coordination to the fight against social exclusion, in line with the principles defined in the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council, will allow for both coherence and diversity of action at national level. Policies in pursuit of the objective of fighting social exclusion and poverty can vary in nature, and in their implications for Member States and their target groups. Differences in approach between Member States in dealing with these problems will result in solutions and priorities reflecting their individual circumstances.

The open method of coordination will continue to combine national action plans with the Community action programme to encourage cooperation between Member States to combat social exclusion. In this context, it would be desirable for the Member States to present their second national action plans by July 2003. The Social Protection Committee will play a key role in following up this initiative. On employment matters, it will work closely with the Employment Committee.

4. Continuing Implementation of the Lisbon European Council's conclusions

The objectives set at the European Council of Nice have proved robust and viable. The priority now is to build on and consolidate the progress that has been made with a view to further increasing efforts to advance the process launched by the Lisbon European Council. In the light of this, the Council, having regard to the guidelines defined by the Lisbon and Feira European Councils and taking account of the conclusions of the European Councils of Laeken and Barcelona, proposes to the Copenhagen European Council that the common objectives and implementation arrangements endorsed at the European Council of Nice should be confirmed with the addition of amendments which emphasise the importance of setting targets, the need to strengthen the gender perspective in national action plans and the risks of poverty and social exclusion faced by immigrants. Thus the Council proposes to the Copenhagen European Council:

- the following objectives, detailed in the annex hereto:
 - to facilitate participation in employment and access by all to the resources, rights, goods and services;
 - to prevent the risks of exclusion;
 - to help the most vulnerable;
 - to mobilise all relevant bodies;

- the following arrangements to pursue these objectives:

The Member States,

will continue to pursue the objectives of fighting social exclusion and poverty;

will underline the importance of mainstreaming equality between men and women in all actions aimed at achieving those objectives by taking into account the gender perspective in the identification of challenges, the design, implementation and assessment of policies and measures, the selection of indicators and targets and the involvement of stakeholders;

are invited to develop their priorities within the framework of those overall objectives and to present a second national action plan by July 2003 covering a period of two years;

are invited to set targets in their National Action Plans for significantly reducing the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 2010 and in doing this to draw, as appropriate, on the commonly agreed indicators endorsed at the Laeken European Council;

in order to make it possible to monitor the policies set out here, are also invited to develop, at national level, indicators and monitoring mechanisms capable of measuring progress in regard to each of the objectives elaborated in their national action plans.

The Commission,

with a view to a joint report, is invited to present, on the basis of the national action plans to be prepared by the Member States, a summary report identifying good practice and innovative approaches of common interest to the Member States.

The Member States and the Commission

are invited to work together in the context of the Social Protection Committee to prepare a Joint Report on Social Inclusion for submission to the Spring Council of 2004;

are invited to continue to cooperate at European level in order to bring about a better understanding of the problem of exclusion, to promote exchanges of good practice, including on targets and indicators, and to seek to further develop common approaches and compatibility in regard to these issues. The Action Programme adopted by the European Parliament and the Council will continue to support that cooperation.

OBJECTIVES IN THE FIGHT
AGAINST POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

1. To facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services

1.1. Facilitating participation in employment

In the context of the European employment strategy, and the implementation of the guidelines in particular:

- (a) To promote access to stable and quality employment for all women and men who are capable of working, in particular:
- by putting in place, for those in the most vulnerable groups in society, pathways towards employment and by mobilising training policies to that end;
 - by developing policies to promote the reconciliation of work and family life, including the issue of child- and dependent care;
 - by using the opportunities for integration and employment provided by the social economy.
- (b) To prevent the exclusion of people from the world of work by improving employability, through human resource management, organisation of work and life-long learning.

1.2. Facilitating access to resources, rights, goods and services for all

- (a) To organise social protection systems in such a way that they help, in particular, to:
 - guarantee that everyone has the resources necessary to live in accordance with human dignity;
 - overcome obstacles to employment by ensuring that the take-up of employment results in increased income and by promoting employability.
- (b) To implement policies which aim to provide access for all to decent and sanitary housing, as well as the basic services necessary to live normally having regard to local circumstances (electricity, water, heating etc.).
- (c) To put in place policies which aim to provide access for all to healthcare appropriate to their situation, including situations of dependency.
- (d) To develop, for the benefit of people at risk of exclusion, services and accompanying measures which will allow them effective access to education, justice and other public and private services, such as culture, sport and leisure.

2. To prevent the risks of exclusion

- (a) To exploit fully the potential of the knowledge-based society and of new information and communication technologies and ensure that no-one is excluded, taking particular account of the needs of people with disabilities.

- (b) To put in place policies which seek to prevent life crises which can lead to situations of social exclusion, such as indebtedness, exclusion from school and becoming homeless.
- (c) To implement action to preserve family solidarity in all its forms.

3. To help the most vulnerable

- (a) To promote the social integration of women and men at risk of facing persistent poverty, for example because they have a disability or belong to a group experiencing particular integration problems such as those affecting immigrants.
- (b) To move towards the elimination of social exclusion among children and give them every opportunity for social integration.
- (c) To develop comprehensive actions in favour of areas marked by exclusion.

These objectives may be pursued by incorporating them in all the other objectives and/or through specific policies or actions.

4. To mobilise all relevant bodies

- (a) To promote, according to national practice, the participation and self-expression of people suffering exclusion, in particular in regard to their situation and the policies and measures affecting them.

- (b) To mainstream the fight against exclusion into overall policy, in particular:
- by mobilising the public authorities at national, regional and local level, according to their respective areas of competence;
 - by developing appropriate coordination procedures and structures;
 - by adapting administrative and social services to the needs of people suffering exclusion and ensuring that front-line staff are sensitive to these needs.
- (c) To promote dialogue and partnership between all relevant bodies, public and private, for example:
- by involving the social partners, NGOs and social service providers, according to their respective areas of competence, in the fight against the various forms of exclusion;
 - by encouraging the social responsibility and active engagement of all citizens in the fight against social exclusion;
 - by fostering the social responsibility of business.

