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**Final Synthesis Main Report of the
Evaluation of the EU Programme to
promote Member State co-operation to
combat social exclusion and poverty**

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The European Commission - Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG, Unit Inclusion, Social Policy Aspects of Migration, Streamlining of Social Policies commissioned The Tavistock Institute, in consortium with ECWS and Engender, to conduct the "Evaluation of the Programme of Community Action to Encourage cooperation between Member States to Combat Social Exclusion (2001-2007)".

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the Community Action Programme to encourage member states to combat social exclusion. The Programme was established as an element of the Open Method of Coordination for the Social Inclusion Process initiated by the European Council in Lisbon in 2000 and encompassing the Nice Common Objectives, the Laeken Common Indicators, the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion and the Joint Inclusion Report¹. (Further details may be found in Appendix 2 to this report.) This evaluation began in 2002 and completed in July 2006. This report covers activities undertaken under the aegis of the Programme until end of May 2006.

The overall aim of the evaluation was to assess the Programme's achievement in terms of its objectives, with overarching evaluation questions including to what extent does the programme and its actions contribute to:

- Improving the understanding of social exclusion and poverty with the help in particular of comparable indicators
- The development of a mutual process of co-operation and learning among stakeholders
- Developing the capacity of actors to address social exclusion and poverty effectively
- The mobilisation of stakeholders, particularly in view of enlargement
Against the criteria of relevance, utility, effectiveness, efficiency and EU value added.

To this end, the evaluation started from the Action Programme and looked towards the strategy.

In relation to this overall aim of the evaluation, the following indicators or evaluation questions have been identified, from evaluation hypotheses:

- Is there a better understanding of the key issues based on common indicators and shared learning?
- Do key actors – individuals, groups and communities – co-operate and engage in a mutual learning process?
- Do key actors across different levels (strategy, programme and actions) know how to act more effectively against poverty and exclusion?
- Have innovative approaches emerged, particularly through co-operation?
- Are the different key players at the various levels engaging actively in a process of dialogue?
- Has real change been achieved in policies addressing social inclusion?

For the evaluation, a range of data capture methods and approaches have been used over time. At the heart of these methods and approaches is intensive field work, supported by documentary review. The methods used are complementary to one another and provide the necessary triangulation to answer evaluation questions.

¹ Decision no. 50/2002/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 7 December 2001, OJ L10 of 12.01.2002

2. PROGRAMME CONTEXT AND INTERVENTION LOGIC

The Programme was established as an element of the Open Method of Coordination for the Social Inclusion Process initiated by the European Council in Lisbon in 2000 and encompassing the Nice Common Objectives, the Laeken Common Indicators, National Action Plans for Social Inclusion and the Joint Inclusion Report².

The role of the Action Programme in the OMC for Social Inclusion was:

- to facilitate the implementation of the new process in terms of supporting, strengthening and further developing the key elements of the Open Method of Co-ordination on social inclusion – Common Objectives, NAPs, Joint Reports, Common Indicators;
- to strengthen the necessary instruments, e.g. through thematic studies, comparative data (for example from the EU-SILC) and exchanges of experience, which have been identified as supporting the process, and
- to facilitate the involvement of the relevant key actors as a pre-condition for the success of the process.

The overall aim was translated into a set of three distinct but interconnected objectives, which reflect the political mandate introduced at the Lisbon Summit:

- improving the understanding of social exclusion and poverty with the help in particular of comparable indicators;
- organising exchanges on policies being implemented and promoting mutual learning, *inter alia* in the context of National Action Plans with the help in particular of comparable indicators;
- developing the capacity of actors to address social exclusion and poverty effectively, and to promote innovative approaches, in particular through networking at European level, and by promoting dialogue with all those involved, including at national and regional levels.

Revised policy context since June 2005

The 2005 interim evaluation report³ included the policy context for the Community Action Programme as it was evolving up to and including June 2005 (see Appendix 2). Since then a number of policy developments have taken place, not least the launch of new common objectives and common indicators concerning social protection and social inclusion. Specifically, in March 2006, the European Council adopted a new framework for the social protection and social inclusion process. This encompasses a new set of common objectives⁴ which comprises three overarching objectives relating to the OMC for social protection and social inclusion as well as objectives for each of the three policy areas of social inclusion, pensions and health and long-term care (see box below). As of 2006,

² Decision no. 50/2002/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 7 December 2001, OJ L10 of 12.01.2002

³ Tavistock Institute, Engender and ECWS, (2005), Evaluation of the Programme of Community Action to combat social exclusion. Interim Report

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/2006/guidelines_en.pdf

these three policy areas, i.e. (i) eradicating poverty and social exclusion; (ii) providing adequate and sustainable pensions; and (iii) ensuring accessible, high quality and sustainable health and long-term care, provide the new framework for the OMC process.

New Common Objectives

The overarching objectives of the OMC for social protection and social inclusion are to promote:

- a) social cohesion, equality between men and women and equal opportunities for all through adequate, accessible, financially sustainable, adaptable and efficient social protection systems and social inclusion policies;
- b) effective and mutual interaction between the Lisbon objectives of greater economic growth, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and with the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy;
- c) good governance, transparency and the involvement of stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of policy.

The following objectives apply to the different strands of work:

A decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by ensuring:

- d) access for all to the resources, rights and services needed for participation in society, preventing and addressing exclusion, and fighting all forms of discrimination leading to exclusion;
- e) the active social inclusion of all, both by promoting participation in the labour market and by fighting poverty and exclusion;
- f) that social inclusion policies are well-coordinated and involve all levels of government and relevant actors, including people experiencing poverty, that they are efficient and effective and mainstreamed into all relevant public policies, including economic, budgetary, education and training policies and structural fund (notably ESF) programmes.

Adequate and sustainable pensions by ensuring:

- g) adequate retirement incomes for all and access to pensions which allow people to maintain, to a reasonable degree, their living standard after retirement, in the spirit of solidarity and fairness between and within generations;
- h) the financial sustainability of public and private pension schemes, bearing in mind pressures on public finances and the ageing of populations, and in the context of the three-pronged strategy for tackling the budgetary implications of ageing, notably by: supporting longer working lives and active ageing; by balancing contributions and benefits in an appropriate and socially fair manner; and by promoting the affordability and the security of funded and private schemes;
- i) that pension systems are transparent, well adapted to the needs and aspirations of women and men and the requirements of modern

societies, demographic ageing and structural change; that people receive the information they need to plan their retirement and that reforms are conducted on the basis of the broadest possible consensus.

Accessible, high-quality and sustainable healthcare and long-term care by ensuring:

- j) access for all to adequate health and long-term care and that the need for care does not lead to poverty and financial dependency; and that inequities in access to care and in health outcomes are addressed;
- k) quality in health and long-term care and by adapting care, including developing preventive care, to the changing needs and preferences of society and individuals, notably by developing quality standards reflecting best international practice and by strengthening the responsibility of health professionals and of patients and care recipients;
- l) that adequate and high quality health and long-term care remains affordable and financially sustainable by promoting a rational use of resources, notably through appropriate incentives for users and providers, good governance and coordination between care systems and public and private institutions. Long-term sustainability and quality require the promotion of healthy and active life styles and good human resources for the care sector.

Based on these common objectives national strategies for social protection and social inclusion, the first reporting round of which is due in September 2006, will have to specify how they will address the challenges identified under each pillar. Reporting on these strategies will be based on a set of “Guidelines for preparing national reports on strategies for social protection and social inclusion”⁵ which has been agreed between Member States and the Commission at the March 2006 meeting of the SPC. The aim is to provide a common approach to Member States’ National Reports, which will thus include information on all four elements of the framework, as specified in the new common objectives. Specifically, each national report should include a common section assessing the social situation and presenting the overall strategic approach for modernising social protection and social inclusion policies as well as three thematic plans covering social inclusion, pensions and health care. These plans should be forward-looking, with prioritised national objectives translating the common objectives into national plans.

Although they would normally cover a three-year period, this first round will exceptionally cover a two-year period (2006-2008). They are expected to feed in, as appropriate, the National Reform Programmes due in October 2006. As in the past, on the basis of these national strategies, the Commission will draft a Joint Social Protection and Social Inclusion Report for Council/Commission adoption prior to the 2007 Spring European Council. Member States will not be required to submit national strategies in the intervening (“light”) years. During these years,

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/2006/guidelines_en.pdf

the OMC will focus on in-depth analyses on specific issues as well as on dissemination of policy findings.

This new and streamlined OMC framework was put forward in a Commission's Communication⁶ in December 2005. This sought to build on the Nice objectives for inclusion and the Laeken objectives for pensions and to bring together under new common objectives the existing OMCs in the fields of social inclusion and pensions as well as the current process of co-operation in the field of health and long-term care. The primary aim of the streamlined OMC was to promote effective and co-ordinated policy making in the related fields of social protection and inclusion as well as to focus more on policy implementation and visibility⁷ of the OMC process itself. In addition, such streamlining is expected to foster greater interaction with the revised Lisbon Strategy and the re-launched Sustainable Development Strategy⁸. It is also expected to enable greater involvement of stakeholders as well support and facilitate learning and exchange of good practice by, *inter alia*, integrating it into the evaluation and reporting process. Finally, it will contribute to greater transparency and more simplified reporting procedures.

In June 2006, the SPC adopted a set of common indicators⁹ for the social protection and social inclusion process that will be used within the context of the new monitoring framework. It is envisaged that indicators will be applied to the monitoring of the three overarching objectives of the OMC for social protection and social inclusion and will draw on the analysis presented in the common overview of the National reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion and in "part 1" of the supporting document to the Joint SPSI report. These indicators comprise the overarching portfolio of indicators and are complemented with three strand indicators, each representing one particular pillar, i.e. eradication of poverty and social exclusion; provision of adequate and sustainable pensions; and provision of accessible, high-quality and sustainable healthcare and long-term care.

Significantly, the ISG has agreed on a broad common methodological framework for the development of both the portfolio and the three strand indicators portfolio. Although, this framework builds on the methodological principles related to the Laeken indicators, it departs from the original framework in two ways. First, in order to better reflect the action and impact of policies the choice of indicators is not limited to outcome indicators. Secondly, the new framework introduces a degree of flexibility in terms of how strictly the criteria are applied, notably allowing for the inclusion in the list of "commonly agreed national indicators" based on commonly agreed definitions and assumptions. All indicators¹⁰ should

⁶ COM (2005) 706 final, 22.12.2005

⁷ This was agreed at the informal EPSCO meeting in Villach.

⁸ COM(2005) 658 final, 13.12.2005

⁹ Portfolio of Overarching Indicators and Streamlined Social inclusion, Pensions, and Health Portfolios, D (2006), 7.6.2006

¹⁰ The ISG has agreed to flag the indicators and statistics included in the different overarching and strand lists according to how they should be used. The following three categories (EU, National, Context) aim at warning the user of the specific purpose and limitations of each indicator in the list. Each portfolio would contain: (i) Commonly agreed EU indicators contributing to a comparative assessment of Member State's progress towards the common objectives. These indicators might refer to social outcomes, intermediate social outcomes or outputs; (ii) Commonly agreed national indicators based on commonly agreed definitions and assumptions that provide key information to assess the progress of Member States

aim at providing a comprehensive and efficient tool for the monitoring of the common objectives.

In addition, in the new framework for social protection and social inclusion exchange of good practice and mutual learning will be given more prominence and be better integrated with reporting and evaluation. To this effect, the planned PROGRESS budget line will provide assistance for conducting such exchanges across the whole OMC spectrum.

Related to the above is the fact that the role of the Structural Funds has also been increasingly considered crucial as regards social inclusion¹¹. Specifically, although the EU Structural Funds, and in particular the ESF, have provided an important contribution to social inclusion measures in the Member States, this support has in many cases not been consistently linked with the EU wide objectives and more importantly the NAPs/incl. Indeed, the streamlined OMC starting in 2006 is thought enable one to better link inclusion policy planning with Structural Funds programming. This would, in turn, strengthen the impact of Structural Funds and raise the visibility of their contribution to social inclusion policy in the Member States.

Another recent development has been the publication of the evaluation of OMC processes in the areas of social protection and social inclusion¹² which, *inter alia*, further highlighted the need to streamline and integrate the two processes as well as to increase the OMC visibility in general.

Finally, it should also be noted that the importance of social inclusion was again underlined in the Presidency conclusions¹³ from the 2006 Spring Council. Specifically, the conclusions explicitly mentioned the Social Agenda and stated that social inclusion and social protection must be strengthened in order for the European social model to be sustainable. They also mentioned the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion and announced that the Commission and the Council will produce similar reports prior to every Spring Council. In addition, there was a call for Member States to "take necessary measures to rapidly and significantly reduce child poverty, giving all children equal opportunities, regardless of their social background" as well as to develop "policies that make it possible to combine working life with children and family life", including "affordable care for children and other people in need of care". The latter is closely related to the need to address the challenges of demographic change in Europe. Finally, the conclusions also referred to the need of

in relation to certain objectives, while not allowing for a direct cross-country comparison, or not necessarily having a clear normative interpretation. These indicators are especially suited to measure the scale and nature of policy intervention. These indicators should be interpreted jointly with the relevant background information (exact definition, assumptions, representativeness); (iii) Context information: Each portfolio will have to be assessed in the light of key context information, and by referring to past, and where relevant, future trends. The list of context information proposed is indicative and leaves room to other background information that would be most relevant to better frame and understand the national context.

¹¹ SEC(2006) 410, 23.3.2006

¹² SEC(2006) 345, 8.3.2006

¹³ Presidency Conclusions of European Council 23/24 March 2006, 7775/1/06 Brussels, 18.5.2006

increasing the employment rate of young people, e.g. through the Employment Youth Pact.

3. PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION AND ACTIVITIES

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the evaluation data on how the programme has been implemented to date. It includes summary findings from the actions and programme financing, from programme management and programme complementarity with other EU programmes and initiatives. (For evaluation questions and methodology see Annex 1.)

3.2. Assessment of actions and financing

3.2.1. Strands, Actions and Financing

This section reports on the individual programme actions in terms of their progress and summary findings (full reports can be found in Appendix 2). Actions of the programme are developed within three Strands, each with a set of objectives and budget line, as follows:

Programme financing (See also Appendix 6: Financial Analysis)

The financial framework for the Programme is Euros 75 million (see Appendix 6). To the end of 2005 the budget utilised was Euros 59 729 743. An expenditure of a further Euros 24 300 000 was forecast for 2006, showing an overall increase in the total budget.¹⁴ While the commitment to the Programme is a political one, the impact achieved through advancing the understanding of poverty and social exclusion, the thematic knowledge generated and the range of actors mobilized across the EU suggests the Programme is good value. Against the Third Poverty Programme which ran from 1989 to 1993 at a cost of ECU 55 million, the Programme is more highly targeted on actors in a position to make more difference. Utilisation of the Programme budget of 89% in 2002, 91% in 2003, 95% in 2004 and 94% in 2005 suggests considerable efficiency.

Summary Findings on financial management

- The Programme is making efficient use of the funding available though efficiency could be considerably improved by greater capitalisation of results,
- There is a fairly even spread between different strands, providing effective underpinning to the different Programme objectives

¹⁴ EC Employment and Social Affairs DG *Community Action Programme to combat Social Exclusion (2002-2006) Draft Annual Workplan 2005* Doc SEP 13/04rev

3.2.2. Collection of statistical data – European Survey on Income and Living Conditions

The development of statistical information through an EU-wide survey – the European Union Survey on Income and Living Conditions or SILC, is intended to promote a better understanding of social exclusion and poverty based on the Common Indicators adapted at the Laeken summit to track progress towards the Nice Common Objectives

EU SILC, a new instrument, bringing together income and living conditions, is being developed within this Programme to meet strategic requirements (outlined in detail in Appendix 3), including the tracking of the common indicators, alongside other reference sources.

24 out of the 25 MS in the newly enlarged EU are currently implementing the survey until 2010, including all 15 of the “old” MS and nine of the EU 10. The Czech Republic is not participating at this stage but Norway and Iceland are participants.

The SILC project has been launched progressively in the different MS:

- In 2003 in six MS (BE, DK, EL, IE, LU, AT) together with Norway (on the basis of a “gentleman’s agreement”
- In 2004 on the basis of regulation No. 1177/2003 in the remaining EU 15 MS (with the exception of Germany, Netherlands and UK)
- In 2005 all 24 participating MS have undertaken the survey.

All MS involved have piloted the SILC operation prior to launching the main survey. For the “old” MS 15, the pilot data collection was carried out in 2002 on a sample of 200 households. The main objectives were to test the questionnaire, to evaluate the response rate, to test the possibility of collecting gross income at component level in the survey, to integrate the SILC project in the National Statistical system (if applicable) and to study how to extract income components from registers and combine it with survey information (in those MS where registers are in use). The corresponding micro-data were transferred to Eurostat together with an evaluation report in 2003 and revisions for improvement made. For the new ms 10, the pilot data collection took place in 2004 and in two stages. As this is the first time these MS have undertaken a panel survey, two waves of data collection were carried out to test the capacity of these countries to trace people over time.

The results of the cross-sectional element of the survey have been transmitted on time and analysis is on target. Some delays have been encountered in relation to the longitudinal element. It should be noted that the longitudinal element involves keeping in contact with the sample, which can pose problems, especially where administration is by sometimes new statistical offices.

The data for the countries that piloted SILC in 2003 has been able to be revised in the light of learning from the 2004 survey, so that some trends have already begun to emerge in these countries.

Timeliness in EU SILC is designed to match strategic planning cycles, through the cross-sectional data producing results at N+ 24 (rather than the N+41 achieved by its predecessor EHCP). Nevertheless, the results from full participation will not be seen within the lifetime of the Programme.

EU SILC Costs

The Survey is co-financed by the European Commission for the first four years. Costs of the survey derive from three different sources:

- Eurostat (on B5-6000 (B20004-29.020100.01))
- DG EMPL (on B3-4105 B2004-04.040202.01)
- Member States

Eurostat and DG EMPL contribute equal amounts in each of the five years of EU SILC's development. MS contributions are based on a formula developed by Eurostat which takes into account the estimates of costs by MS and the total sums available. From this total subventions varying in amount are made to member states which take into account their local capacity. These can cover staff costs, travel and subsistence for interviewers, equipment including computers and software, consumables and other direct costs for example to Research Institutes to undertake tasks.

Table 3.1 Costs of EU SILC

	€ Million				
	2004 (2003 budget)	2005 (2004 budget)	2006 (2005 budget)	2007 (2006 budget)	2008 (2007 Budget)
Eurostat	3,362	6,181	5,995	6,001	2,564
DG EMPL	3,362	6,181	5,995	6,001	2,564

Source: Eurostat

Summary Findings on EU SILC (see Appendix 3 for details)

- EU SILC is groundbreaking in linking income and living conditions across 24 MS and robust in providing both cross-sectional and longitudinal data to enable cross-country comparisons to be made in MS progress towards the Common Objectives by the Common Indicators
- There are outstanding limitations in the data provided by SILC with respect to some vulnerable groups due to the household based method and by small sample sizes
- In relation to improving the understanding of poverty and social exclusion between Member states, the comparability of the data needs further assessment. The analysts involved have had to balance the need for broad comparability with the need to develop ownership within Member States.

- Different capacities of MS national statistical offices have been noted, particularly in relation to the comparability of data. There are indications from the data that MS statistical offices may not all have developed capacity for developing, understanding and interpreting statistics within the frame of poverty and social exclusion. Capacity of national statistical offices in relation to social exclusion and poverty is however increased through participating in EU SILC.
- A high degree of co-operation between Member States has been developed through this EU SILC, which can be seen especially in the work of the EU SILC Taskforce. This co-operation is associated with and underpins the co-operation between member states in relation to developing the Common Indicators and supports their co-operation in relation to the Common Objectives.
- The mobilisation of actors, institutions and systems can be seen mainly in relation to analysts in MS national statistical offices and in the development of relationships beyond the Programme at the member state level, especially in relation to MS representatives on the Indicators Sub Group of the Social Protection Committee
- Progress in the development of statistical information through EU SILC is on target and considered effective by all respondents, supported by documentary analysis. In particular the participation of all but one MS is secured together with their statistical capacities.
- Timeliness, a key issue in relation to the strategy is considerably improved by EU SILC over previous surveys. However there is still a considerable gap between data generated and when it can become available for policymaking.
- The limitations of the Common indicators, particularly using the indicator of 60% median income in Central and East European countries has been raised
- There is some concern among MS at the location of EU SILC within this Programme, which raises issues of appropriate oversight of a highly technical development.
- The costs of EU SILC are seen as reasonable by most MS Statistical Offices and as value for money by MS policy respondents
- EU SILC provides high European added value. It can be seen in the broad comparability between MS which is being generated and in increasing transparency about levels of social exclusion and poverty between and, more importantly, within MS. However, there are many shortfalls in relation to specific groups, especially those living in institutions or the homeless, such shortfalls also increased due to the small sample sizes.

3.2.3. Studies

Thematic studies within this Programme provide for the promotion of innovative approaches and the development of thematic studies to contribute to the understanding of social exclusion, in order to address common issues in connection with policy developments in Member States.

Activities carried out within this strand of the Programme include:

- Country specific studies undertaken in relation to candidate countries, commissioned and completed during 2003 and
- Studies related to themes which have applicability across MS or across a subset of MS, commissioned from 2003 onwards
- Co-operation with OECD regarding pensions indicators

Country-specific studies

In all 11 studies were commissioned under this restricted call (see table 5.2). Of these, candidature resulted in accession as part of the new EU 10 MS in May 2004 in nine cases (Bulgaria and Romania due to join in January 2007). Of the EU 10, therefore, all but the Czech Republic benefited from specific studies.

Thematic studies

A total of eighteen calls for tenders have been launched since the start of the Programme, with a further four currently planned (May 2006). In total, 13 studies have been commissioned as part of this activity, and nine of these have to date produced final reports and held seminars. These include:-

- Policy Measures to Promote the Use of Microcredit.
- A Thematic Study Using Transnational Comparisons to Analyse and Identify what Combination of Policy Responses are Most Successful in Preventing and Reducing High Levels of Child Poverty.
- The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union.
- A Thematic Study Using Transnational Comparisons to Analyse and Identify Cultural Policies and Programmes that Contribute to Preventing and Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion.
- A Thematic Study to Analyse Policy Measures to Promote Access to Information Technologies as a Means of Combating Social Exclusion.
- A Thematic Study on Policy Measures Concerning Disadvantaged Youth.
- Policy Measures to Ensure Access to Decent Housing for Migrants and Ethnic Minorities.
- Regional Indicators to Reflect Social Exclusion and Poverty
- Co-operation with OECD and EMCOM in developing common methodologies for measuring pensions indicators

Summary Findings on Studies (see Appendix 3 for details)

- Thematic studies include some of a high standard with the potential to contribute new indicators and establish baselines of policy across MS or subsets of MS in response to emergent policy challenges, contributing to mutual learning and supporting the mobilization of key actors
- Country-specific studies are considered useful and timely for countries preparing for accession
- Co-operation in developing common methodologies and indicators have high potential for MS acceptance and important utility at the European level, though work on pensions was considered by some MS to be beyond the boundaries of this Programme
- Studies can contribute to developing the capacity of actors to address social exclusion and poverty by providing concepts and presenting debates about policy choices as well as documenting the range of possible actions within different policy contexts
- Studies' contribution depends on a range of factors including the participation in study seminars of appropriate actors, presentation focus and networking space to make sense of findings, the last an issue which has been successfully addressed by Programme managers
- Dissemination of study findings to appropriate or key actors remains problematic, for example in relation to MS policy specialists, despite step increases in dissemination activities by Programme managers, which limits the effectiveness and efficiency of this action
- Studies findings may lack transferability to specific MS contexts, which might be improved by engagement and ownership by appropriate MS actors.

3.2.4. Transnational Exchange Projects

The Transnational Exchange Programme (TEP) is part of Strand 2 'Policy cooperation and exchange of information and best practices' of the Action Programme on Social Inclusion. The objective of the Transnational Exchange Programme is to promote and support the organisation of exchanges and promote mutual learning between member states, EFTA and EEA countries. The purpose of promoting transnational exchanges as part of the Community Action Programme is to support the implementation of the Open Method of Coordination on Poverty and Social Exclusion and in particular the development and implementation of the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAPs/incl.)¹⁵.

¹⁵ Call for proposals VP/2004/004).

In 2002, a *first Transnational Exchange Programme* was launched under Strand 2 of the Action Programme. It was developed in two phases with phase I being a 9 months preparatory phase with the aim of supporting the creation of solid partnerships and the development of projects, for which some 65 projects were selected. Only partnerships selected to participate in phase I were eligible to apply for phase II of the Programme.

In 2003, a restricted call for proposals was launched for phase II. Under this call, partnerships could apply for funding for a maximum of a period of 2 years. Applications for phase II were expected to continue and build on the topic that they selected for phase I. The total budget for phase II was € 4,5 million per year whereby 20-30 actions were envisaged - funding was envisaged to be not less than €150,000 per project per year.

31 projects were selected and were receiving support for a two year period, with a maximum of 80% of the eligible costs. At the end of the first year (September 2004) Community aid was reviewed and was conditional upon consideration of the first year's work.

In November 2004, a call for proposals for a *Second Transnational Exchange Programme* was launched. This was the first call for transnational exchange projects to take place in an enlarged European Union and the last call for this kind of projects within this Community Action Programme. This Second Transnational Exchange Programme intended to go beyond the traditional partnership and to complement this dimension with evaluation of processes and policies, aiming to accompany and support more strongly the NAP/incl. process. A total number of 24 projects was selected for funding for a first year for a total amount of € 4.328.015. The projects started between August and November 2005.

Summary Findings on Transnational Exchange Projects (see Appendix 3 for details)

- More than 50% of the actors (both TEP I and TEP II) involved in the projects come from NGO/civil society related organisations; the rest is coming from research, academic and consultancy organisations (25% in TEP I and 18% in TEP II) and administrations (21% in TEP I and 27% in TEP II). The mix of NGOs, research organisations and policy makers is very valuable in terms of influencing policy. The involvement of policy makers is crucial in terms of enhancing chances to influence policy.
- In general TEPs are viewed as relevant learning, exchange and visibility tools. Some actors (both policy makers and NGOs) are less convinced about their relevance because their role as policy tool, linking with strategic developments at regional/national and EU level is questioned.
- TEPs provide added value in relation to: the transnational character of the projects; linkages of policy and practices through the project structure and project activities; exchange and learning at project level leading to knowledge creation and new activities.

- One of the main assets of the TEPs is their transnationality: it provides e.g. reflection, a new frame of reference, common understanding about transnational topics, acceleration of processes, mutual exchange and learning and better insights into diversity.
- Most learning is situated at the level of awareness raising and changing understanding. Only a few projects show evidence of implementation of learning. New knowledge has been developed in specific policy domains or in relation to mechanisms tackling social exclusion (e.g. the setting up and use of networks).
- TEPs are in general effective in achieving their objectives. In EU-10 countries, where organisations are not yet widely involved in the Exchange Programme, TEPs are a way of getting more knowledge about EU and EU policies.
- The contribution of TEPs to the Action Programme and to the OMC could be improved developing a better dissemination strategy and by cross-linking results of TEPs to other actions in the Programme especially those in the same policy domain.
- Cross linkages are evolving but the information that TEP actors have about other actions is still limited, despite the existence and improvements made to the EC website.
- Links between TEPs exist but are not structured or guided. The meetings at the level of the TEP and organised by the EC once a year are considered in general to be useful in receiving information from the EC; these meetings are limited in terms of real exchange.
- The dissemination of information and results of the TEP and their visibility as part of the Action Programme is identified as one of the main weaknesses of the TEP.
- Taking into account the exchange and learning that has taken place so far in the TEP, the ratio between costs and output is quite in balance.
- TEPs do contribute to improving the understanding of social exclusion and poverty; to the development of a mutual process of cooperation and learning among stakeholders; to the mobilisation of stakeholders and to a lesser degree to capacity building of actors.

3.2.5. Peer Review

The social inclusion Peer Review programme is an action within Strand 2 of the action programme. It is a mutual-learning process based on a systematic exchange of experiences and review of policies, programmes or institutional arrangements presented in the various NAPs/inclusion. The objectives of the Peer Review programme are to:

- Contribute to a more comprehensive and reciprocal understanding of Member States' policies in combating poverty and social exclusion, laid down in their National Action Plans.
- Facilitate the transfer of key policies, or of institutional arrangements, which have proved effective in combating poverty and social exclusion in their original context and are relevant to other contexts.
- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the policies and the strategies for social inclusion at present and future Member State and EU level, by learning from the experience in the Member States.

A peer review is an exercise where a country (host country) presents a good practice from its NAP/inclusion to selected decision-makers and experts from other countries (peer countries) who are especially interested in the policy area presented. Also involved are relevant national and European stakeholders, as well as European Commission officials. During what is generally a two-day period, peer review seminars (including site visits) allow an open and in-depth discussion on social inclusion good policies or practices and an examination of their transferability to other Member States.

Between January 2004 and May 2006, sixteen seminars had been conducted in 15 countries, and all Member States had participated at least three times as peer countries in a Peer Review seminar. Six more Peer Review seminars will be conducted in 2006 by the new team in charge of technical assistance to the Peer Review. By the end of the programme period, 22 Peer Reviews will have been conducted.

Summary Findings on Peer Review (see Appendix 3 for details)

- The Peer Review improves understanding of social exclusion and poverty. It is clearly relevant, useful and effective in relation to the OMC process, its contribution to common objectives and the key priorities identified in the social inclusion reports. It stimulates a continuous process of exchange between Member States on the NAP process.
- In terms of EU added value, it scores highly as it is enshrined in the OMC process and contributes directly to it. It is highly appreciated by participants who consider it to be the best or one of the best actions of the programme.
- The Peer Review is an example of mutual cooperation, which creates the conditions for learning to take place, and contributes to a community of practices that is particularly important for new Member States. Some examples of transfer of ideas have been identified as a result of the Peer

Reviews. In addition, participants have identified the usefulness of continuous bilateral contacts and exchanges.

- The selection process of good practices is based on very broad criteria process oriented rather than result oriented criteria, and considerable power is given to Member States to propose policies. This conforms well to the principle of subsidiarity and allows the Peer Review Programme to adapt to priorities of new Member States and thematic priorities identified in the Joint Reports.
- The Peer Review is clearly contributing to an exchange of experience, discussion on policy practices and identification of some elements for transfer. However, the Peer Review is contributing less to a thorough assessment of good policies leading to the transferability into Member States practices. Transferability aspects can be strengthened through the organisation of follow-up activities around a “clustering” of similar countries.
- Relevant national and European stakeholders participate in Peer Reviews, and it appears that the great majority of officials are in a key position to take back the knowledge from the review to feed into policy process. However, occasionally Member States face difficulties in appointing the right person to the Peer Review as information on the policy practice reviewed is not sufficient or because of external constraints such as language skills.
- EU-10 countries are involved as peer countries and have begun to host Peer Reviews. The Peer Review Programme has made adaptations in order to respond to the specific situations of these countries, and these have contributed to the involvement of new and accession countries. Nevertheless, some difficulties remain for new Member States to host a review.
- The outputs of the Peer Review are considered to be useful in terms of knowledge and learning but less in terms of complete transfer of models and policies. Dissemination of outputs is still mainly geared towards participants and actors involved in the social inclusion process. To improve take up by political players from different levels (national, regional, level), a stronger dissemination strategy is required so that the outputs reach key actors and policy makers more widely.
- The Peer Review is clearly cost effective for direct participants to a Peer Review.
- There are clear links between the Peer Review action and some other actions of the programme, notably the Key Networks, a few TEPs and NGEs.

3.2.6. Network of Independent Experts

The network of non-governmental experts (formerly called the group of non-governmental experts) is one action under strand 2 of the Community Action Programme. The network is composed of one independent expert from each Member State and associated countries. Its main roles are to undertake background work to assist the Commission in the preparation of the Joint Report, and to assist the Commission and Member States to monitor developments in relation to poverty and social exclusion.¹⁶

First contracts with experts to cover the EU-15 Member States were completed in spring 2003 and since then the network has been extended step by step. Since the Autumn of 2005 the Network covers all 25 Member States plus Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey.¹⁷

Since the beginning of 2006 the Network of Independent Experts and the Peer Review action have been integrated in one single sub-programme: "Peer Review and Assessment in Social Inclusion Policies" and a joint management of these actions by an external contractor has been established.¹⁸

Summary Findings on NGEs (see Appendix 3 for details)

- Since the Autumn of 2005, the Network of Independent Experts covers all 25 Member States plus Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey.
- The work of the independent experts has been largely successful: relevant, useful, effective and efficient, and with significant European added value in relation to the Social Inclusion process.
- The work of the experts' group is useful and effective in meeting the needs of Commission services in drawing the Joint Reports.
- In terms of EU-added value, the Network is making a relevant, useful and effective contribution to one of the elements of the OMC, the Joint Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, and thereby to the Social Inclusion Strategy.
- The action is contributing to increased information and knowledge amongst key actors in this process (DG Employment staff) – and to their capacity to carry out one of the EC's key tasks in the OMC, namely to assess the Member States NAPs. During its lifetime it has increased its potential - via publication of the reports - for raising knowledge about national policy development and implementation amongst a wider group of actors. There are examples that the reporting also has a certain influence on national policy debates and policy making.

¹⁶ Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion 2002-2006. Developing Strategic Priorities for Implementing the Programme in 2002 and 2003. REF.SEP 4/01 EN from 30.10.01

¹⁷ Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion. Implementation of the Work Plan for 2005. REF.SEP 02/06 EN

¹⁸ Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion 2002-2006. Minutes of the Programme Committee meeting held on 27th February 2006. REF.SEP 07/06 EN

- Cooperation – and potentially a process of learning – is being encouraged between the experts themselves, and between the experts and some other stakeholders directly involved in the Action Programme. The production and dissemination of the planned synthesis reports, bringing together the individual findings, might contribute further to mutual learning.
- By establishing a network of EU-wide expertise in the area of social inclusion and poverty the action has mobilised experts meanwhile across the EU-25, and beyond. The international and national links of the experts, and their involvement in national and international events, contributes to the European mobilisation of independent experts in the context of social exclusion and poverty
- There are links between the work of the independent experts and other European or national actions, partly due to the involvement of the EC country desk officers in more than one programme or policy, and, on the side of the experts, as some are involved in other national or European programmes.
- The Network was extended just in time to support work on the assessment of the new NAPs of the EU-10. Some difficulties, due to the fact that the enlargement actors involved were often “newcomers”, have been addressed by Commission services, by introducing shared responsibilities of an experienced and a new desk officer for one country.
- The work of the independent experts provides very good value-for-money.
- Methodological improvements have been made to overcome some weaknesses in the previous arrangements. Work programmes for the experts have been more specified and further guidance for the reporting shall be delivered by the new external management. Tools to strengthen the exchange on methods and approaches have been established. A “Voluntary Code of Conduct” has been developed to improve thoroughness of the reporting and lay the basis for a comparative assessment of policies.
- Improvements concerning linkages of this action to other actions in the Programme have been made. Awareness of the work of the independent experts has increased during the lifetime of the action. To what the merging of the Network of Independent Experts with the Peer Review action will contribute to increased synergies between these two actions can only be judged in the future.
- Concerning gender equality, the Commission is meeting its objective of 40% minimum level participation of women and men in expert groups. Gender balance has improved considerably in the lifetime of the action, through the recruitment of independent experts in the New Member States, the accession countries and Turkey.

3.2.7. National Awareness Raising Actions

National Awareness Raising Actions were launched as a measure under Strand 2 of the Action Programme during 2004. The measure forms part of a wider strategy to improve information and awareness about the EU's social inclusion process. Other proposed actions include ensuring adequate dissemination of programme results via the DG EMPL website on the social inclusion process, making the Peer Review better known to the media, and reinforcing relevant actions of the Key European networks and the TEPs.

The aim of the measure is to improve information and raise awareness among concerned stakeholders and the wider public about the EU social inclusion process within Member States and candidate and EFTA/EEA countries. The measure should help to mobilise support for, and promote the participation of all relevant actors in, the preparation, implementation of National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion (NAPs/inclusion) and Joint Inclusion Memoranda on Social Inclusion (JIMs). The awareness raising actions encourage national partnerships with relevant stakeholders including the media, national, regional and local authorities, NGOs, the social partners, and those directly experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

The first call for awareness raising actions (VP/2004/005) was published in April 2004.¹⁹ 134 proposals were received by the June deadline. The results of the selection procedure were presented to the Programme Committee at the end of September 2004. 14 projects – which will run until mid 2006 – have been funded, with a total financial commitment by the Commission of 788,641 Euro.²⁰

A second open call for proposals for similar actions (VP/2006/012), this time covering the whole social protection and social inclusion “streamlined” process, was published in April 2006, with a deadline of 30th June 2006 for submission of proposals. A total budget of approximately 2.600.000 Euros is envisaged, covering 10 to 15 projects.²¹

Summary Findings on Awareness raising actions (see Appendix 3 for details)

- The first call for National Awareness Raising Actions was launched as a measure under Strand 2 of the Action programme during 2004 to improve information and raise awareness, and to mobilise support for and participation of all relevant actors in the NAPs/incl and JIM process.
- 14 projects, selected from 134 proposals, were funded with a total financial commitment of 788 641,09 Euros. Almost half of the funded projects come from EU-10 MS and the accession countries.

¹⁹ Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion 2002-2006. Open Call for Proposals – VP/2004/05. National Awareness Raising Actions on Social Inclusion. Official Journal number C88 of April 2004; deadline for submission of applications of 4th June 2004.

²⁰ Social protection and social integration. Social protection and social inclusion: policy coordination. Open Call for Proposals – VP/2004/05. National Awareness Raising Actions on Social Inclusion. Compendium.

²¹ Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion 2002-2006. Open Call for Proposals – VP/2006/012. National Awareness Raising Actions on Social Inclusion and Social Protection.

- The rationale for the Awareness Raising Action is widely accepted by stakeholders. However, questions are raised about the design of the action, particularly in view of its objectives. The action is more likely to achieve the objectives of improving information and raising awareness on social inclusion issues, than to mobilising support for and participation in the Social Inclusion and NAP/JIM processes.
- Had the first call been more precisely focused on the NAP/JIM processes at national level, the proposals received, and projects funded, might have been more relevant to the European Social Inclusion process. The eligibility and selection criteria for the awareness raising actions reflect the importance of ensuring a link to, and even the involvement of, the NAP/JIM management, especially in relation to the objective of mobilising relevant actors in the process. A stronger application of these criteria would help in strengthening the effectiveness of the action.
- The vast majority of first call projects plan activities that will inform stakeholders. Few of them plan consultative activities, or activities that involve and mobilise stakeholders. The projects under the first call are therefore likely to be more effective in raising awareness about the EU social inclusion process and the fight against poverty, than in promoting the participation and mobilisation of actors in the process.
- The first call projects will mainly reach stakeholders at sub-national level, primarily civil society and regional and local authorities. Media, people experiencing poverty and the social partners are involved or reached to a smaller extent. Since only 10 out of 25 member states (and two accession countries), are reached by the projects, only a very small proportion of potential stakeholders are reached by the action. Most Member States and the great majority of regions are not touched by the actions. Moreover, there is a very low level of knowledge of the awareness raising projects by those involved in other actions of the Programme. Projects under the second call may, however, serve to complete some of the gaps in geographical and stakeholder coverage that could not be filled by the first call
- The funding arrangements result in a very partial coverage of countries and regions. Under the second call – despite a budget increase– the proposed number of projects will again result in only some countries (or regions) being covered. The extent to which the available budget is used efficiently and effectively - to reach out to countries, regions and stakeholders where increased awareness and mobilisation are more needed - must be questioned.
- The Awareness Raising Action is the only action in the Programme that supports purely national – as opposed to transnational - activities. The European added-value of this action is therefore in its contribution to reinforcing linkages between policies and actors operating at different levels (European, national, sub-national) and filling in key gaps in the awareness and mobilisation of stakeholders. However, the design and implementation of the action has not involved a real dialogue and partnership between the Member States and the European Commission, or with other actors (e.g. the Key European Networks). Such a joint

dialogue and partnership (on the objectives and design of the action) would have enabled the targeting of countries, regions and stakeholders where awareness and mobilisation are most needed to improve social inclusion and NAP/JIM processes, and the complementing of other information and mobilisation initiatives of Member States and key EU and national stakeholders.

- There are limited links between the awareness raising action and other actions of the Programme. The main linkage is via the involvement of the Key European Networks in the projects. EAPN in particular has played an important role in the setting up of some of the actions

3.2.8. European Networks

The European Networks are part of Strand 3 'Participation of the various actors and support for networking at European level' of the Action Programme on Social Inclusion. The objectives of the European Networks are to:

- Promote dialogue between various actors.
- Support relevant networking at European level between organisations active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, in particular non-government organisations.

The European Networks are intended to make an important contribution in the context of the Open Method of Coordination by:

- increasing understanding of the most concrete forms of social exclusion
- regular monitoring of the implementation of the national action plans at a level closer to their main beneficiaries
- encouraging greater awareness of public opinion of the European strategy, as well as ensuring that this strategy takes into account the experience of people experiencing social exclusion.

In 2002, the Commission called on European Networks, whose main purpose was to contribute to the fight against poverty and social exclusion, and whose membership was composed of organisations active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and were established in at least 12 Member States, to submit proposals with a view to obtaining a financial contribution to their running costs (Call for Proposals 2002/VP/007).

As a result of this, 5 networks were selected:

- EAPN: the European Anti Poverty Network, founded in 1990.
- FEANTSA: European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless, founded in 1989.
- Eurochild: a new organisation but developing its network from the existing network of the European Forum of Child Welfare.

- RETIS: Transnational Network for Social Inclusion, started up its activities in 2001.
- EPSP: European Public Social Platform (2002) a platform of 5 network organisations (ESN²², AER²³, Quartiers en Crise, CEMR²⁴ and Eurocities).

The support was foreseen for a maximum period of 36 months (until November 2005).

European Networks were asked to renew their contracts by the end of October 2004. At that time EPSP announced that, for internal reasons it did not intend to ask for further funding. As the co-financing of the running costs of the three year programme for European Networks came to an end, a new call for proposals for key European level networks of organisations involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion has been launched, with the deadline for submissions being the 17th of July 2005. The selection procedure was finalised by the end of September 2005 and the Committee was consulted on the selection procedure during its October 2005 meeting. Six grant agreements were finalised in November and early December 2005 for the support of:

- The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN),
- The European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA),
- The European Transnational Network for Social Inclusion (RETIS),
- Eurochild,
- Caritas Europe: a network of Catholic relief, development and social service organisations. Its activities are focused on issues related to poverty and social inequality, and issues of migration and asylum.
- The European Social Network: a network of directors of social services in Europe. Members are national associations or groups of directors of local authority social services, social protection and social welfare, politically independent of national, regional or local government (used to be part of EPSP).

The support is foreseen for a maximum period of 24 months, and will come to an end in November 2007.

The core funding is again limited to 90% of the expenditure eligible for support and this may only be reached under exceptional circumstances. The total budget for this call is € 3.600.000 per year (compared to 2.800.000 per year for the previous call VP/2002/008, of which € 2.792.631,29 was granted.

At the time of writing of the final evaluation report, a new call for proposals was launched, covering the period January 2007 – December 2007. The Commission and the Social Exclusion Programme Committee identified the need to ensure

²² European Social Network

²³ Assembly of European Regions

²⁴ Council of European Municipalities and Regions

support for work in networking and to increase the capacity of the organisations in other fields than those covered by the already selected networks mentioned above. This is felt particularly in areas such as e.g. micro-finance, transport related factors and social exclusion, impact of the knowledge based society and information and communication technologies on inclusion²⁵. The total budget made available under this Call is around 1.000.000 €

Summary Findings on Key Networks (see Appendix 3 for details)

- The relevance of the European Networks to the Action Programme is clear for many of the informants interviewed, because the objectives of the Networks are at the core of the Action Programme. They are considered to be an instrument for exchanging information between members of the Networks, making connections between organisations that would normally not cooperate, gathering experiences and know-how and developing knowledge, dissemination information outside the Networks, influencing policy through their involvement in the NAP/incl. process.
- The importance of the Action Programme to the European Networks is also recognised because through the Programme, the Networks and their members are put on the map.
- Some policy makers and actors involved in the Networks expressed during the survey of 2005 doubts about the relevance of the Networks because in some countries existing networks have already a strong presence and role in the policy cycle; because the visibility of the networks is questioned or because the voluntaristic character of the exchange is questioned. These doubts have diminished during the survey 2006. The Networks have developed in terms of stability, activities and their role and relevance became more apparent.
- The different roles and contributions of the Networks in and to the Action Programme and in the field of social inclusion in general, became more explicit throughout the Programme.
- Mobilisation of actors in the domain of social inclusion is considered to be a primary task of the European Networks, which they fulfil very well. Fieldwork informants considered Networks to be an excellent means of mobilising actors. The potential for mobilising various actors is great as a result of the involvement of large organisations, umbrella organisations and networks.

²⁵ Call for Proposals VP/2006/009 for the support to European Networks involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Budget line 04 04 02 02

- The mobilisation of key actors in the EU-10 countries by the Networks has only recently begun. The full potential of the Networks has not been reached; more effort is needed to make the networks more visible and to strengthen their role in the landscape of combating social inclusion. In the survey 2006 the role of Key Networks in policy development became even clearer. Networks are considered as important players in policy making.
- Different levels of learning can be identified at the level of the European Networks: exchanging and sharing experiences and knowledge at a basic level, creating understanding about specific areas of social inclusion and capacity building. Capacity building taking place as a result of the functioning of the networks is mainly addressing actors from NGOs and in some cases (regional/local) authorities. However, in general the emphasis was on awareness raising, exchange and dissemination of information and even on development of knowledge
- One of the main channels for influencing policies and systems is their involvement in the NAP/incl. The involvement of the Networks in the NAP/incl. process is considered to be crucial for the participation of civil society in shaping social inclusion.
- In general, the capitalisation of the influence and impact of the Networks could be improved and more documented. Successes are not always passed on to members, which would be a stimulus for deeper involvement.
- Compared to a year ago, more cross-linkages between the European Networks and other actions in the Programme can be identified.
- A substantial list with concrete outputs from the Networks can be presented, ranging from press releases, research results to tools.
- Constraints identified in relation to the Networks are lack of resources for the functioning of national networks, language issues and to keep the network alive amongst the members.
- In general, the Networks are effective in achieving their objectives; a weak link is the involvement of local actors and appropriate dissemination of information to this level.
- The European Networks have a role to play as a facilitator in the OMC process; the Networks may be conceived as resources and bodies of expertise.
- If the number and quality of outputs/outcomes is taken into account, there is a fair balance between outputs/results so far and budgets.

3.2.9 Round Tables and Presidency Events

'Events' are specified as the European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion and other events mostly held under the aegis of the country holding the EU Presidency at a particular time. They lie within Strand 3 of the programme which has as its objective "to promote dialogue with all the operators concerned".

The annual European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion is meant to be a key European awareness raising event, with a view to promoting dialogue between all stakeholders in the context of the OMC. This event is jointly organised by the Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission. The Round Table usually takes place around 17 October of each year in an attempt to coincide with the UN International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

Furthermore, one of the common objectives agreed by the Nice European Council (7-9 December 2000) was to *mobilise all actors*, including people who experience poverty to engage with the elements of the strategy. Every year, a meeting of people experiencing poverty (PEP) is organised under the Presidency of the Council. The main aim of PEP events, which draw largely on the EAPN experience and expertise in this area, is to enable people at risk of poverty and social exclusion to voice their views and to start taking active part in the Social Inclusion Process. The Programme will also cover other components of any event organised by the Presidency which relate to the European dimension of the fight against social exclusion.

Summary Findings on Round Tables and Presidency events (see Appendix 3 for details)

- Stakeholders conceive the main purposes of the events as to raise awareness about social inclusion issues and about the Social Inclusion process more in general; to put social inclusion themes on the policy agenda, to exchange information, knowledge and expertise and to strengthen networking between stakeholders.
- The main actors involved in the Round Tables are national authorities and (networks of) NGOs. The absence of the regional/local level is a weakness.
- Key in relation to the events is the knowledge sharing and the mobilisation of actors; the latter certainly in the beginning of the Programme. Learning is occurring, but it is contingent on other factors.
- The concept and the content of the events are assessed as interesting and useful. Round Tables are considered to be a big source of information as well as a wide space for establishing contacts. Furthermore, they create a space of debate between NGOs and government, including the EU level.
- The site visits organised in the framework of the Round Tables are considered to bring a considerable added value to these events.

- More generally, the voice of the people experiencing poverty has become more significant, which is seen, amongst others, as an achievement of the conferences on people experiencing poverty.
- These meetings are assessed as being very useful in giving a voice to people experiencing poverty and to involve them in policy processes.
- The link between the Round Tables and policy processes is not always clear. Programmes of the Round Tables do reflect on NAP/incl. processes, but it is not obvious how messages coming out of the Round Table are used in policy making. Informants tend to say that the link with national policy making is weak,
- Round Tables could be better used to disseminate results and experiences from the Action Programme as a whole; linking up with other actions could be done in a more effective and efficient way.
- One of the weaknesses of the Round Tables is their wide scope; a more focused approach could produce more purposeful outcomes and results. Another weakness mentioned by informants is the dissemination of the results of the events: this is in general limited to the participants.
- Some of the informants argue that in order for the events to have an impact, follow-up activities should be organised, which is already the case in some instances.

3.3 Programme management

This sub-section considers the management of the Programme in supporting the Programme meetings its objectives, including its governance and decision making arrangements, the information system and communications and the extent to which the Programme is able to mobilize actors appropriately. This section draws mainly on data from SEP Committee members, SPC members and Programme managers, as well as from documentary review and observations of SEP Committee.

3.3.1 Governance and decision making²⁶

As a result of the Lisbon Council of 2000 which, *inter alia*, introduced OMC in the area of social inclusion, the Commission was invited to present a relevant initiative with a view to encouraging co-operation between Member States in this field. The Commission put forward its proposal for a Community Action programme in June 2000. This was then adopted by the Parliament and the Council on 7th December 2001²⁷. The programme began on 1 January 2002 and will run until 31 December 2006.

The Programme decision provides the legal framework for the implementation of the decision, but allows a degree of flexibility in how the attached budget is used.

²⁶ This section is based on findings from documentary review

²⁷ Decision n° 50/2002/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 7 December 2001 – OJ, L 10 of 12.01.2002

Although the decision designates the Commission as responsible for the implementation of the programme, it also stipulates that this is overseen and supported by the Social Exclusion Programme (SEP) Committee. In general, the Commission is expected to play a proactive role within the framework of the decisions taken by the Programme Committee²⁸.

In accordance with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, this Committee comprises government representatives from the EU Member States and other participating countries, e.g. candidate countries and EFTA/EEA countries. Its members are sometimes representatives at a lower hierarchical level than those serving on SPC. Its role is to provide oversight and political guidance to the Commission on the implementation of the Programme as well as to act as a partner to the Commission in matters of policy against social exclusion.

Specifically, the Programme Committee approves, *inter alia*, the annual work programme of the Community action programme and the overall breakdown of the budget that is allocated to the programme's three strands. This annual work programme is prepared and submitted for approval by the Commission on the basis of the priority areas already identified by the Programme Committee. The latter also advises on the criteria for selecting actions under the programme and approves the list of pre-selected beneficiaries following the publication of the calls for proposals and a selection process organised by the Commission²⁹.

In summary, the Commission implements the programme, following either approval or consultation of the Programme Committee, depending on the nature of the decisions concerned in accordance with the Articles 7 of the Council Decision³⁰.

From the start efforts were made to ensure that the programme contributes as fully as possible to the OMC in the field of social exclusion. For example, the Commission proposed that its implementation should be closely linked to the two-year cycle of the Social Inclusion Process. In this way, outputs from the programme are expected to feed into subsequent rounds of NAPs/incl. In addition, the SEP committee, with the Commission's assistance, was expected to liaise closely and regularly with the SPC. The latter was set up in 2000 and is made up of delegates from both the Member States and the Commission³¹. Among other things, the SPC is responsible for

- monitoring the social situation and the development of social protection policies in the Member States and the Community;
- promoting exchanges of information, experience and good practice between Member States and with the Commission; preparing reports,

²⁸ Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion 2002-2006: *General Guidelines for the Implementation of the Programme – SEP 2/01*

²⁹ Open Call for proposals VP-2004-05 "National Awareness raising actions on social inclusion": *Proposer Guidelines – OJ, n° CC 88, 08.04.2004*

³⁰ Decision 1999/468/EC of European Council of 28 June 1999 - OJ, L 184 of 17.7.1999

³¹ Council Decision 2000/436/EC of 29 June 2000 – OJ, L 172 of 12.07.2000 - See also Commission's Draft Decision, COM(2003) 305 final, 24.6.2003

formulating opinions or undertaking other work within its fields of competence, at the request of either the Council or the Commission or on its own initiative; and working, as appropriate, in co-operation with other relevant bodies and committees dealing with social and economic policy matters, such as the Employment Committee (EMCO) and the Economic Policy Committee (EPC). In general, the SPC aims to promote co-operation on social protection policies between the Member States and with the Commission, especially in view of the identified need for the modernisation and improvement of the various social protection systems.

As mentioned above, to ensure a strong synergy between the work of the SEP Committee and SPC, including the latter's Indicators Subgroup, the Commission was expected to establish the necessary links. Moreover, it was also deemed important to establish links between the Members of the two Committees at national level.

3.3.2. Views of the actors on governance and decision making

According to the views of our MS informants, the programme's governance and oversight arrangements were considered problematic in over half of Member States for a number of reasons.

First, boundaries of responsibility between the Programme and the Strategy were not always clear according to both SEP and SPC members. This was considered especially problematic in relation to statistical data and indicators, where neither SPC nor SEP members felt they had the necessary technical competence to provide oversight. Some SEP members could not see why EU-SILC should fall within the budget line of the Programme and why it was being developed through a contract with Eurostat, rather than through the usual work programme. The necessary liaison between Member States' representatives on the EU-SILC Taskforce and those on the Indicators Subgroup of the SPC, as well as between SPC and SEP Committee members can, in some cases, be onerous. That said, in instances where the same delegates had overlapping roles in relation to these committees/groups, this burden was reduced. On the other hand, many saw the range of roles and mechanisms for Member States' interaction was seen as effective in mobilizing a range of actors with the necessary skills and competence.

Second, confirming our own observations, SEP members reported that discussion within SEP meetings is inhibited by a number of factors:

- The involvement of 25 countries has inevitable consequences for the scope of debate, regulated by the Code of Conduct, which limits discussion of issues when they are raised in Committee by a single Member State

- Differentials in perceived seniority of provided by some EU 15 MS representatives and experience in liaising with the Commission
- Lack of translated documents ahead of meetings precluding national consultation prior to meetings
- Lack of interpretation at Committee meetings

Third, SEP members feel, in some cases, that communication with the Commission was less than adequate. The data across different sources confirmed a sense of unresponsiveness in communication by the Unit. There was neither a suggestion nor evidence of neglect on the part of the Unit. In contrast, there was a sense that management were over-stretched by the Programme's commitments and diverse range of activities, and perhaps, a feeling that ambitions for the Programme tend to over-reach its capacity. Programme management have to adapt to changing priorities of MS as communicated directly to them by the SEP representatives as well as being reflected from the European level.

Fourth, there seems to be no legitimate forum for discussion of the general strategic aims of the Programme and review of its progress. SPC members also reported a similar lack of strategic discussion within their own deliberations. Without space for general discussion, SEP members can feel frustrated in their effort to surface and resolve issues they think are important, but which they do not feel appropriate to raise in settings which focus on agreeing processual details, and can even seem designed to "rubber stamp" Commission activities.

Sometimes we have meetings with no dynamic, no exchange. Just listening to presentation by the Commission. It is necessary to get a good balanced agenda with period to listen and to exchange. Good to link it with presentation of study as it gives content to these meetings. (SEP EU 15)

One consequence of the lack of discussion and exchange during SEP meetings is that it masks differences of view between the Commission and the MS Committee members and undermines potentially fruitful engagement, with frustrations on both sides, as seen in the following examples:

- TEPs reports, though providing for the recording of important learning, are used and stored exclusively for financial monitoring purposes and appear inaccessible, certainly unaccessed, after submission. Meanwhile MS actors at all levels want to know where the results of the TEPs are. Some MS policymakers are proactive in reaching out to TEPs partners in their country, which can compensate for this
- The involvement of subnational levels remains an outstanding weakness in the Programme, potentially undermining the commitment of some MS to the Programme.

- Programme managers' decisions in relation to topics for studies and studies Terms of Reference are seen as problematic by a range of SEP Committee members who find their results lacking in relevance to their MS, despite the EC deriving themes from MS concerns and SEP Committee members approving these
- Lack of deliberative discussion in SEP Committee towards contributing to decision making diminishes the potential contribution for face to face communication which this could offer

Other specific points emerging from data analysis include:

- The circulation of Calls in advance of their publication would greatly enhance the efforts of MS to mobilise partnership within smaller and EU 10 countries.
- The timely circulation of agendas will be much more important in PROGRESS when MS will want full consultation or adequate notice for the attendance of a range of policy specialists

3.3.3 Information systems and communications

A review of the information and communications system was undertaken during 2003 and 2004 (for details see Appendix 4 Programme Information Systems). Findings included:

- The information system while adequate for Programme accountability purposes could be strengthened in relation to TEPs and events and better use made of the human aspects of information processing. The onerousness of reporting requirements for TEPs is noted alongside misleading messages this sends about the Commission's intentions to publicise and disseminate outputs
- The Unit's capacity to process information is severely limited by staff numbers in relation to the Programme's scope and objectives, exacerbated by cumbersome and time-consuming monitoring processes for administrators
- Information is geared to vertical communication for accountability purposes rather than knowledge generation and capture driving out the information processing capability which would deliver more learning.
- Increasing face to face communication would enhance reliability and validity of data through creating frames of reference in which it is better understood but would require a diversion of Unit capacity from other activities. Better use of SEP Committee meetings and events could be used for these purposes more effectively.

A final finding about the information system internally and externally is now revised. Changes to the intranet available to many Programme actors have improved provision of information to them.

Information available to wider audiences through the publicly-available website have also improved but continue to provide a poor service to a range of different informants. For example, well-regarded and informed research institutions participating in the TEPs were entirely unaware of the overall Programme; once they understood their role in a number of cases they made much more effective links with MS policymakers and European NGOs.

It should be noted that Programme management intended to improve information systems from the start of the Programme and changes to the intranet were in hand to improve information provision from early in the Programme's life.

A majority of actors see the need for disseminating information from the Programme both across and beyond Programme boundaries. However, there is little consensus developed on the division of responsibilities for the task of knowledge management including dissemination, between different actors.

While some actors see this as the task of the Commission, others as the role of the European Networks, while for the first half of the Programme at least the Commission seemed to see this as a task for national authorities. Disseminating knowledge and learning from the programme often seems to depend on the goodwill and energy of individual participants rather than being driven by a shared vision. The lack of space for strategic discussion creates the conditions for loss of impact.

Further developments in this area were anticipated by the call for tender (VT/2005/019 closing 23rd August 2005), which aimed at providing the Commission with the services of technical assistance on how to improve communication and information in the development and implementation of the new streamlined process of policy co-ordination in the field of social protection and social inclusion.

3.3.4 Accessibility of the Programme to EU-10 Member States

The issue of accessibility for enlargement countries was also explored in this evaluation. In general the Programme was welcomed and seen as useful to EU 10 MS. However, some policy makers in EU 10 MS expressed a need for actions more ‘tailored’ to their needs, for example, because the necessary structures are not yet put in place.); others expressed their need for specific support for the EU-10 to catch up with the knowledge base of the EU-15, for example in the area of setting up networks of NGOs and knowledge institutions. Since some of these infrastructures, necessary to implement Programme activities are not yet in place in EU-10 countries, instead of receiving more support to catch up, EU-10 Member States receive less support, according to some informants. Furthermore, in order to optimise the potential learning, Programme Committee members from EU-10 countries state that they need to learn the procedures and mechanism that are put into place to make such Programmes function, such as information on roles and procedures. By 2006 EU 10 actors report much greater ease and understanding in these roles.

In EU-10 countries the mobilization of actors is still in progress but has been considerably enhanced by the activities of Key Networks. However, participation in the Programme by researchers, NGOs and subnational authorities, is more limited than in EU 15 countries where such actors participate through Studies and TEPs. However, this may reflect the priorities of these countries rather than the accessibility of the Programme. Smaller EU 10 countries, like smaller EU 15, often seem to report a more pragmatic and practical approach towards programme use; for example, targeting aspects which are national priorities. For some EU 10 countries the NAP/incl. process was more important in terms of

learning (process and content) and therefore, they have put their resources in this area rather than in the Action Programme.

Comparative Programme impact in MS, including EU 10, is discussed in Chapter Four.

3.3.5. Programme Management Summary Conclusions

Programme governance and decision making

Conclusions and recommendations based on those put forward by MS and endorsed by the evaluators include:

- More inter-linkages between SPC and Programme Committee members could better support the activities of this Programme, with greater effectiveness for the mobilization of actors and improving the understanding of social exclusion and poverty
- Some regular space for strategic appraisal of the priorities for Programme management's scarce resources and the choices between them. This would enable MS to prepare in general for discussion of particular issues which come before them.
- Collaborative review of specific issues which could benefit from clarity of the respective roles of Programme managers and MS could surface areas of dissatisfaction and create conditions for sharing tasks which take into account the constraints of both parties, for example in relation to defining Studies and dissemination of TEPs and Studies' findings
- Provision of agendas and accompanying papers to enable timely consultation within MS will increase in importance in PROGRESS

Information and communication

Information provision has improved over the life of the Programme but communication to external audiences remains problematic in some areas. Responsibilities for the task of knowledge management are contested and therefore not currently well distributed. Knowledge management of the outputs of this programme is essential to its efficiency and effectiveness and are too restricted.

Accessibility of Programme to EU 10 MS

In general the Programme is found to provide equal accessibility to EU 10 MS. However, there remain some support needs for these countries in articulating roles and procedures more clearly which would support acceding as well as EU25 MS in participating more effectively.

3.4. Complementarity with other EU Programmes and Directorate Generals

One aspect of learning within this Action Programme is seen by the Commission and MS to occur in the context of its complementarity with other associated Programmes, including some within DG Employment and Social Affairs and some located in other DGs, such as DG Research and DG Justice, Security and Freedom. Our overall findings on Complementarity are presented in full in Appendix 5. Below is a summary of the main conclusions on Complementarity.

Summary Conclusions on Complementarity

- Complementarity with other Programmes within DG Employment and Social Affairs, such as EQUAL, Gender, Anti-discrimination and EIM is mainly at the level of content. It is, therefore, difficult to pinpoint synergies between these Programmes, though this may occur through discussion at a strategic level within DG Employment and Social Affairs.
- Involvement in both the Action Programme and the Anti-Discrimination project, for example the General Gitano TEP partnership, provides scope for developing different areas of shared knowledge and competence.
- Holding on to the different budget lines within the “streamlined” the PROGRESS Programme will enable different types of learning and development to be pursued.
- Despite the explicit concern about the relationship between the Action Programme and the other Programmes within DG Employment and Social Affairs, there is very little ongoing dialogue and co-ordination between the Programmes. More contact points release greater synergy leading to increased efficiency and effectiveness.
- There is a well established history and practice of consultation with DG Employment and Social Affairs by DG Research, which supports the European contribution to combating social exclusion and poverty.
- The Daphne Programme, within DG Freedom, Security and Justice offers a different model of working, based on a different theory of change. Potential synergies between the Action Programme and Daphne were explored by TEP actors.
- Some complementarity is noted in some countries with structural funding for development of capacity on the ground.

3.5. Assessment of Programme Implementation

Programme implementation is assessed according to the extent to which it has supported Programme objectives.

Effectiveness

- Implementation has been effective in providing a range of actions with the potential to meet Programme objectives
- Effectiveness could be increased by more engaged processes of decision making with clarity of roles which would improve capitalisation
- The Programme has been adaptive and reflexive in responding to changes in the strategic environment, emerging issues at the EU level and changing priorities
- Programme management is challenged by the breadth of demands and ambitions for the Programme, suggesting the need for greater strategic focus

Efficiency

- The Programme is making efficient use of the funding available though efficiency could be considerably improved by a greater capitalisation of results
- There is a fairly even spread between the different strands, providing effective underpinning to the different Programme objectives
- More efficiency could be achieved through greater capitalisation of results and more synergies of between actors, especially between the SEP Committee members and Programme management, but also with other Programmes and DGs
- Clearer articulation of roles between MS, the Commission and other actors would increase efficiency in disseminating Programme outputs

Relevance and utility

- Implementation shows Programme adaptiveness to varying needs for relevant and useful activities
- The actions have relevance for mobilizing a broad set of actions which can support national authorities in meeting the Programme's objectives in support of the OMC
- Relevance could be improved in Peer Review and Studies, through greater engagement between those involved in defining and selecting topics
- The Programme is largely relevant to the EU 10 MS, although greater clarity in articulation of roles and procedures would support acceding countries and current EU 25

EU Added Value

Programme implementation has provided EU added value for MS through:

- the provision of activities which can enhance their capacity to address social exclusion and poverty,
- considerable efforts on the part of Programme managers to provide information and

- increasing understanding of roles and constraints of different parties

4. ACHIEVEMENT OF PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

This chapter synthesises the evaluation findings presented in Chapter 3 in relation to the Programme Objectives of:

- Improving the understanding of poverty and social exclusion
- Promoting mutual learning
- Developing the capacity of all actors to fight poverty and social exclusion.

The chapter offers assessment and discussion of:

- the comparative effectiveness of programme actions in relation to programme objectives, including the mobilization of actors
- the programme's contribution to knowledge and learning in five key thematic areas
- comparative impact of the programme in different MS
- an assessment of EU value added of the Programme to the OMC/inclusion

4.1. Comparative assessment of the actions according to Programme Objectives

This subsection provides a comparative assessment of the actions as a whole against the specific programme objectives (Table 4.3). Evaluation data on Actions (Appendix 3) highlights the varying contribution of the actions to the Programme objectives.

Table 4.1(below), provides an overview of the Indicators used to assess contribution of the actions to the Programme Objectives

Table 4.1: Relation between indicators and Programme objectives

Objectives ➡ Indicators ↓	Improving the understanding of poverty and social exclusion	Mutual learning	Capacity building of actors
Indicator 1: Data	x		
Indicator 2: Mobilisation	x	x	
Indicator 3. Actors - Breadth of Penetration		x	x
Indicator 4. Actors - Depth of Penetration		x	x
Indicator 5: Learning	x	x	
Indicator 6: Capacity building			x
Indicator 7: Transferability			x

The table (4.2) provides descriptions of the Indicators used to assess contribution of the Actions to the Programme Objectives.

Table 4.2: Indicators used to assess the contribution of Actions to Programme Objectives

	Strong	Weak
Indicator 1. Data	The outcome of the action is the production of new or comparable data.	The outcome of the action is the dissemination of existing data.
Indicator 2. Mobilisation	The outcome of the action is the creation of opportunities for interaction.	The outcome of the action is the provision of information.
	The outcome of the action is the creation of opportunities to engage with a wider environment.	The outcome of the action is increased interaction within the internal systems.
Indicator 3. Actors - Breadth of Penetration	The outcome of the action is the bringing together of actors from different settings.	The outcome of the action is the bringing together of actors from a selected setting.
Indicator 4. Actors - Depth of Penetration	The outcome of the action is the engagement of principle administrative actors.	The outcome of the action is the engagement of primarily a self-selected sub-set of actors.
Indicator 5. Learning	The outcome of the action is the development of shared understanding.	The outcome of the action is individual learning.
Indicator 6. Capacity Building	The outcome of the action is capacity building of beneficiary organisations.	The outcome of the action is the development of professionals in beneficiary organisations.
Indicator 7. Transferability	The outcome of the action is the provision of principles.	The outcome of the action is the provision of specifics.
	The action addresses various types of welfare states.	The action addresses specific welfare state types.

Table 4.3 below shows an assessment of where the actions contributed strongly against these indicators. Full text providing an assessment of each of the Actions in relation to the Programme Objectives by Indicators can be found in Annexe 1 of Appendix 3.

Table 4.3: Actions' strong contribution assessed by indicators

Actions:	Stats.	Studies	TEP	PR	NGE	ARP	KN	Events
Indicators:								
Data	S	S			S			
Mobilisation	S			S			S	S
Breath of penetration			S	S		S		S
Depth of penetration	S	S	S		S		S	
Learning	S		S				S	
Capacity building	S				S		S	
Transfer								

Learning within different actions in the Programme occurs at different levels and mobilizes the involvement of different actors. We can distinguish a number of differences. For example, Peer Review is generally agreed as a strong form of mobilization, involving participants in learning about a new practice and reflecting on their own practices. On the other hand, Peer Review involves relatively few, though sometimes key, actors. Transnational Exchange Projects often use a peer review learning model but generally involve actors at the subnational level. By contrast with the Peer Review Programme, Key Networks mobilize a much greater number through providing information: a weaker form of mobilization but with much greater penetration of networks.

The issues around assessing each of these different forms are different: Peer reviews may be a powerful form but they may not always focus on the best practice and the participants may not be the best people to take away the learning on these subjects. In our evaluation data it is possible to give undue weight to the positive feedback on Peer Review because SEP Committee members are the main participants and our predominant informants. We might

argue that SEP Committee members enjoy Peer Reviews because it gives them access to the front-line delivery of services and practice which fleshes out their experience at the policy level. More exposure to front-line delivery of services in their own country might result in different, possibly more useful, learning.

One argument is that since national policy makers write the NAPs/inclusion they are relatively powerful, indeed key actors. Against that, in some countries the NAP is not a strongly felt driver of national policy, though it reflects that policy, and Peer Review participants may have relatively weak influence on the delivery of services to poor and socially excluded people in some countries. We might therefore argue that while Peer Review is a powerful mechanism for learning we can only judge it to be worthwhile when participants have key roles within policy and practice on the theme or topic.

A similar criterion can be applied in relation to thematic studies. In a few cases, some studies make an important contribution to the policy development in a country, for example the Child Poverty Study in Latvia. However, the attendance at the study seminar is seen as an essential element in learning within this action. Having the study report on its own without having the key lessons distilled from it is unlikely on its own, to have much impact. The presence of appropriate specialists from member states at study seminars is a strong indicator that learning can occur, although other factors are also involved, especially when it comes to implementation.

In a number of actions, such as Peer Review and Transnational Exchange Projects, the learning mechanism is the meeting of different levels of actor: for example, some TEPs bring together the perspectives of national government and local government; others bring local or regional actors together with NGOs. The presence of researchers from different institutions can support participants in leveraging more learning than would otherwise be possible. In relation to statistical data, the usefulness is partly in bringing together analysts from MS statistical offices but also in creating knowledge and understanding which can be used by much broader sets of actors.

The examples above are all ones of collaborative learning in which actors at different levels share learning and knowledge. In Non-Governmental Experts a different model of learning involves a more critical stance of challenging and reviewing. This may be seen as politically necessary and useful but can be experienced as unhelpfully adversarial on occasion; for example, in one country the relationship with the NGE had changed to one of supportive, sometimes critical but basically encouraging champion, to one characterized more by criticism than support.

The model of change from the statistical data also underpins an approach based on performance comparisons, even “naming and shaming” MS, as well as encouraging MS to learn about social exclusion over time. On the other hand EU SILC mobilizes MS statistical offices in learning through collaboration through the EU SILC Taskforce. The broader European community of analysts are also likely to be involved in assessing the instrument and data as it becomes available. The statistical data is also likely to mobilize a broad range of other actors, including those from political systems and civil society in the MS who can use the data to help lever change at the MS and possibly also at the European level.

4.2. Presence of types of actor in the Programme

Programme actors and national authorities do not have the power to command mobilization of all those involved in combating poverty and social exclusion at the regional and local levels. The political will and commitment to combat poverty and social exclusion at the local, national and European levels will remain under scrutiny and debate and will be subject to change over time. The capacity of the Programme to mobilize all actors and enable them to learn is limited by its role. Nonetheless the role of the Programme is to provide learning through the interaction of different levels.

A wide set of actors at different levels is mobilized through different actions in this programme, though some are more strongly present than others, as shown in the following table (Table 4.4)

Table 4.4: Mobilisation – Engagement of Types of Stakeholders Across the Different Actions

Stakeholders	ACTIONS								
		Statistics	Studies	TEP	PR	NGE	AR	KN	Events
EU LEVEL	Politicians								X
	Administrators	X				X			X
	Civil Society			X	X	X		X	X
	Social Partners								X
	Others								X
NATIONAL LEVEL	Politicians								X
	Administrators	X		X	X		X		X
	Civil Society			X	X		X	X	X
	Social Partners								
	Others		X	X	X	X	X		X
REGIONAL LEVEL	Politicians							X	X
	Administrators			X			X	X	X
	Civil Society			X			X	X	X
	Social Partners								
	Others						X		

X Denotes the significant presence of a given type of stakeholder in the given Action.

Others = Consultants / Researchers

From Tables 4.3 and 4.4 it can be seen that actions each have a particular contribution to make to Programme Objectives and that appropriate mobilization of actors within Programme objectives varies between and within actions, but several actions have a comparatively weak learning model and require reinforcing activities to reinforce their impact. For example, studies would benefit from closer engagement with MS or subsets of MS in defining their scope, developing ownership which could result in the presence of appropriate policy specialists attending study seminars and identifying dissemination targets. TEPs benefit from greater understanding of their role in the Programme to target their findings appropriately and from MS representatives reaching out to include them in other activities such as developing the NAPs/inclusion. From the explanatory section to the Table, it can be seen that European Networks, Peer Review and TEPs share stronger learning models than, for examples studies and, especially, the Independent Experts Network, through providing opportunities for participation and engagement. The Programme seems to work most effectively

where participants have been able to explore the same theme across different actions.

Though the foregoing assessment is useful, readers should, however, be aware that other factors are involved in comparing different kinds of action, including:

- Costs vary considerably, between for example individual studies and EU SILC;
- Peer Review is capable of generating high levels of mutual learning but constrain learning through their focus on good practice and “good-mannered” appraisal;
- TEPs provide potential for learning from failure as well as from success.

Learning, Mobilisation and Capitalisation of learning in this Programme

Learning and capitalisation of learning in this Programme requires that the ‘key’ or appropriate actors are mobilized within a learning environment which supports their needs. Politicians were identified as absent stakeholders in the Programme, according to MS national authority informants. While the statistical data is considered likely to support their mobilization at the highest national levels, impact of, for example peer reviews, could usefully be brought to the attention of political players who could use the information. However, it is possibly one constraint on the Programme that the collaboration with national policy makers renders it unlikely that learning from the Programme is readily available to critical political audiences.

The debate about who is really a key actor in this programme, that is the normative issue of who should be involved, can be clearly seen in our evaluation data. Some informants question the involvement of key actors in the Programme and relate this to the lack of visibility of the Programme in many Member States.

“If key actors involved in the NAP/incl. process are not part of or related to the Programme, the impact of the Programme is limited.” (SEP Committee members)

“The absence of the largest national social NGO umbrella organisation in the Programme is worrying.”

Many informants commented on the rather modest involvement of regional and local actors in the Action Programme. This is considered to be a missed opportunity, since the implementation of social policy, and in federal structures the policy making itself, is happening at the subnational level. Aid more directed towards the support of regional capacities would be welcomed by most informants. While the European Network RETIS represents regional and local actors which can provide learning from and to these levels, on its own this has to

be regarded as a weak mechanism in terms of the Programme's institutional engagement with local and regional levels.

The issue of participation of excluded people is specifically addressed via the People Experiencing Poverty (PEP) events that are organized in cooperation with EAPN. TEPS, such as Leeds City Council project also have this theme as part of their focus. The third PEP event took place 28th/29th May 2004 in Brussels, under the Irish Presidency, with the aim to develop further ways of promoting the participation at all levels of people experiencing poverty and the structural networks to facilitate this. A particular objective was to promote their involvement in the development of the NAP/incl. Participation was also a sub-theme in the Finnish-hosted Peer Review event.

4.3 Thematic learning from the Actions

In this subsection we look at the learning generated within the Actions with regard to content or substantive issues related to social exclusion and poverty. The 'themes' selected for consideration are:- Child Poverty; Homelessness; Ageing and Health. Both child poverty and ageing were raised as important issues in the Report of the High Level Group on the Future of Social Policy in an enlarged European Union (European Communities 2004)³². The High Level Group was established by the Commission to identify the main challenges, opportunities and pathways for action for the European Union over the period 2006-2010 in the field of employment and social policy. The Group adopted a strategic approach, trying to identify key ideas for social policy in an enlarged Europe and to define some major policy orientations. With regard to Ageing and Child Poverty, the High Level Group Report (2004) conveyed the following messages intended to inspire the next social agenda.

"To extend working life by increasing the employment rate not only of the senior workers and of women but also of the young. We can both extend and improve working life by offering men and women a more flexible pattern of life, combining working periods training periods and periods dedicated to children and to the elderly. This implies the promotion of mobility over the life cycle both through working arrangements and social protection" (2004, pg.7).

"To foster social inclusion and invest in children and young people. Even if social policy currently focuses on the elderly and the sustainability of pensions, we must not forget that many young people are today at risk of poverty in Europe and that they will play a key role in the future of our societies" (2004, pg.7).

³² European Commission, DG Employment and Social Affairs (2004) Report of the High Level Group on the Future of Social Policy in an Enlarged European Union

In addition all four themes reviewed here were identified through dialogue with DG Employment and Social Affairs as having a high priority.

This review of the way in which content on this subset of themes has been developed through the different actions, aims to examine:-

- The extent to which the Programme offers varied opportunities for exploring these themes and
- The extent to which progress has been made in Programme participants' understanding of poverty and social exclusion.

Consideration of thematic learning and impacts achieved by the Programme, directly addresses Hypothesis 5 of this evaluation, which states "Through the implementation of the Action Programme, a learning environment will be created via the establishment of cross strand, cross level and cross action links". That is, if thematic learning that cross-cuts the Programme actions has occurred then it can be seen that the Programme has achieved progress with one of its primary objectives - *Improving the understanding of poverty and social exclusion* - through the thematic inter-linkages made.

4.3.1 *Child poverty*

In Central and Eastern Europe child poverty has been particularly exacerbated by the economic recession set off by the "transition" to market economies³³. This trend is not confined to the poorer countries of Europe although spending on social transfers clearly has an effect³⁴. Of the EU-25, Denmark and Finland have poverty rates of less than 3% and in Europe more generally only in Norway are child poverty rates "low and continuing to fall." Increasing child poverty seems to be at least partly the result of government social allocations directed to pensions and health care.

Child poverty is therefore part of the seven key policy priorities standing out across the EU. This is seen as a key step in combating the intergenerational inheritance of poverty. Particular focus is given to early intervention and early education in support of disadvantaged children; and enhancing income support and assistance to families and single parents. Several countries also put increasing emphasis on promoting the rights of the child as a basis for policy development³⁵. Furthermore, the 2004-2006 NAPs/incl. show that the 6 priority challenges which emerged from the JIM as common to most new Member States

³³ Carter, R. (2000) *The Silent Crisis: the impact of Poverty on Children in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*. London, The European Children's Trust

³⁴ United Nations International Childrens Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Series: Innocenti Report Card *Child Poverty in rich countries* (2005), No. 6 at <http://www.un-ngls.org> May 2005

³⁵ Commission of the European Communities, (2005), *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion*, Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM(2005)14 final

remain pertinent. One of these 6 challenges is “strengthen policies to tackle child and family poverty and to protect the rights of children”³⁶.

Different actions in the Programme clearly address the issue of child poverty. One of the Key Networks has this domain as a central area of action (Eurochild); and some TEPs have focused on child and family poverty (e.g. ATD Fourth World, AWO and Home Start International).

There were also new TEPs on child poverty: the Cyprus college project on integrating children’s perspectives in policy making to combat poverty and social exclusion experienced by single parent families, the project of Quartiers en Crise on tackling early school leaving, the Italian Associazione Amici dei Bambini on social inclusion for out-of-family children and young people in public childcare and the project of the Italian Istituto degli Innocenti on conditions for children’s placed in out-of-home care and the construction of child oriented welfare policies.

A thematic study specifically on the issue of child poverty³⁷ has been undertaken, and two further studies can be said to strongly relate to child poverty, although of a narrower perspective than the former:- the study on disadvantaged youth³⁸ which focuses on youth unemployment and early school leaving; and the study on Poverty and Social Exclusion Among Lone-Parent Households, which explores the increased risk of poverty and social exclusion identified by many member states, for those in lone parent families.

The Peer review has also dedicated two seminars to this issue in Italy (Preventing risk of exclusion of families with difficulties – January 05) and United-Kingdom (Sure Start – May 06). Furthermore, the social exclusion of children was also chosen as the country specific study by Hungary.

A further Programme development is that under the Network of Independent Experts action, the newly introduced synthesis reports of the experts individual national reporting shall focus on child poverty as one of their four key issues for the 2006-2007 work period.

On the basis of the fieldwork, cross linkages between these different ‘actions’ on child poverty are identified. These linkages have been largely encouraged by the Commission for example through workshop sessions at Round Tables (Aarhus, Rotterdam) and in the March 06 Conference “Learning Together”.

One of the workshops during the “Learning Together” conference in Brussels was on ‘eliminating child poverty and breaking the intergenerational inheritance of

³⁶ European Commission. DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Unit E2, (2005), *Report on Social Inclusion 2005. An analysis of the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (2004-2006) submitted by the 10 new Member States*, Brussels

³⁷ Hoelscher, P., (2004), *A thematic study using transnational comparisons to analyse and identify what combination of policy responses are most successful in preventing and reducing high levels of child poverty*, report submitted to the European Commission, DG Employment and Social Affairs, University of Dortmund

³⁸ Institute for Regional Innovation and Social Research *Thematic Study on Policy Measures Concerning Disadvantaged Youth Final Report*, October 2005

poverty'. In this workshop, results of the study on child poverty and of TEPs in the domain of child poverty were brought together. A TEP actor of the Home Start International project participated in the event organized by Eurochild in Brussels (March 2005) during which 12 young people aged between 13 and 15 years challenged Members of the European Parliament and representatives of the European Commission on how social exclusion is affecting their lives and made proposals for change.

Another example is the participation of independent experts, members of the Programme Committee, members of European Networks, and TEP actors in the seminar on child poverty in Brussels during which the results of the thematic study were presented. A UK project actor also participated in this study seminar and felt that the study enhanced their understanding of how they were working. For policy makers it was good to see that the results of the country specific study on social exclusion of children were consistent with the research results of the study on child poverty. So far Eurochild may not have linked up with all potential relevant TEPs in the area of child poverty; due to what is effectively a recent start up of their activities.

One potential strength of the Programme is the way it is able to explore the issue of child poverty from different perspectives. Eurochild, the Key NGO Network for example, focuses on the rights of the child; the Home Start TEP by contrast focuses on the situation of the family; while the German Peer Review considered Reconciliation between Work and Family Life. Whilst, the study on Child Poverty went some way towards a broader consideration of these different approaches and was found helpful by many informants because it provided consolidation of what can seem a fragmented and diverse set of explorations, and in some cases actually impacted on MS policy, for example:-

“The study on Roma has been influential in Sweden, as well as the study on Child Poverty. Roma is recognised now as being an item on the Swedish policy agenda and the study on Roma has been the starting point for this. The same happened with child poverty issues”. (SEP)

Similarly, Estonia acknowledges the direct impact of the child poverty study on their national policy making³⁹

Eurochild has expressed the view that the OMC inclusion process has overall brought about an increased awareness of child poverty⁴⁰.

³⁹ European Commission, 2006 *Commission Staff Working Document: Evaluation of the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion*.

⁴⁰ European Commission, 2006 *Commission Staff Working Document: Evaluation of the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion*.

The Programme through its various actions (including for example Key Networks, Transnational Exchange Projects, Roundtables) has raised the profile of Child Poverty. Notably the Study on Child Poverty served as the major impetus in propelling this theme forward as a significant area of social exclusion for focus.

4.3.2 Homelessness

Homelessness is a problem shared across the EU 25 countries; though perhaps experienced most intensely within the Central and East European countries⁴¹ in richer countries it has resulted from increase in inequalities.⁴² Tackling homelessness by ensuring decent housing is of the seven key policy priorities mentioned in the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2005)⁴³. Furthermore, in the 2004-2006 NAPs/incl. of the new Member States more emphasis is given to the issues of poor housing and homelessness than before. The six challenges have been amended to reflect this^{44/45}.

Homelessness is an area where information is gathered and new knowledge is created through the FEANTSA network. Some of the TEPs also address the issue of homelessness, for example the Catch project of the City District of Kirseberg and the SRZ Stadt project on new cooperation forms in housing policies and the results of these projects will be considered further when they become available. The Peer Review Programme has also largely contributed to exchanges on this issue through the organisation of three peer reviews on the subject of Rough Sleepers in the UK, Freek Houses in DK and strategies to combat homelessness in Norway plan for September 06. Both the UK and Danish reviews have led to some transfer of ideas in some participating countries. In addition some member states have identified the review on homelessness in London as having had a concrete impact for them⁴⁶. This theme has also been identified as a “Key issues” in the web site of the Peer Review Programme which should gather information and useful links on this issue. A study on Measurements of Homelessness at EU Level has also been commissioned to build upon the 2003 INSEE/Eurostat report in terms of taking concrete steps towards statistical capacity building for the purpose of measuring the extent and nature of housing deprivation and homelessness in member states, through developing appropriate methodologies. As noted in the terms of

⁴¹ Pichler-Milanovich, N. (2001)'Urban Housing Market in Central and Eastern Europe: Convergence, Divergence or Policy 'Collapse'. *European Journal of Housing Policy* 1 (2)

⁴² O'Flaherty (1996) *Making Room: The Economics of Homelessness*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press

⁴³ Commission of the European Communities, (2005), *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion*, Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM(2005)14 final

⁴⁴ One of the six challenges is to 'improve access to decent housing and tackle homelessness'.

⁴⁵ European Commission. DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Unit E2, (2005), *Report on Social Inclusion 2005. An analysis of the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (2004-2006) submitted by the 10 new Member States*, Brussels

⁴⁶ European Commission, 2006 *Commission Staff Working Document: Evaluation of the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion*.

reference for this study “homelessness and housing deprivation are perhaps the most extreme examples of poverty and social exclusion in society today. However so far there are few official statistics on homelessness and housing deprivation, and these are rarely comparable between countries”.

Again, the Commission has played an active role in disseminating the learning on this issue and exchanges between actions through the organisation of workshops at the Round Table in Aarhus and Rotterdam and in the March 06 conference “Learning together”. A workshop has been dedicated to “eradicating homelessness and give access to adequate housing”. During this workshop the results of peer review sessions, Key Network activities and TEPs on this issue have been brought together.

In terms of impact and shared learning on this theme, informants provided a number of illustrations whereby the work of the Programme Actions on homelessness have been of direct use, for example:- the ETHOS typology of learning developed by FEANSTA is identified as having been adopted by NGOs in some MS, supporting further research in MS, and providing the first EU-wide comparable dataset on homelessness (KN informants); and the DK homelessness peer review is credited with having led to changes in MS policy (KN informant). Estonia reports that the study on homelessness has directly impacted on their national policy making.⁴⁷

FEANSTA made a positive assessment of how the OMC inclusion process has overall raised the profile of homelessness⁴⁸

The multi-dimensionality of Homelessness has been recognised as such in the Action Programme. Via the different actions (PR, KN, TEP and indicators) understanding and insights on homelessness are now more widely spread. Good practices can be identified (typology, freak houses) that can be used as an input for Progress. Furthermore, also because of the strong role of the Key Networks in this domain, intra-Programme knowledge creation, exchange and linking took place.

4.3.3 Ageing

Important shifts in the age structure of the European population are occurring which will have significant implications for the full range of social policies. The 70 million over 60s recorded in 1997 is forecast to increase by 37% by 2020

⁴⁷ European Commission, 2006 *Commission Staff Working Document: Evaluation of the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion*.

⁴⁸ European Commission, 2006 *Commission Staff Working Document: Evaluation of the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion*.

(European Parliament). Ageing is a central element of the A+G+E TEP (Nederlands Platform Ouderen en Europa). In the project 'Inclusion of seniors at the labour market' (FIC) age is also a central theme, in particular maintaining older people in employment.

There were 3 projects on the issue of aging in TEP II: a project of the Hessische Staatskanzlei on promoting innovation in re-integrating older citizens in community life, a project of the European Older People's Platform on developing the role of older people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in the implementation and further development of NAP/incl. and a project of European Profiles on transnational exchange for active aging.

A thematic study on the poverty of older people is in progress (due to completed in 2006); and a study on how Private Pension Schemes can Contribute to Safe and Adequate Pensions, is currently planned. A Peer review on minimum pension and older women's poverty has been conducted in June 06. In the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2005)⁴⁹ one of the chapters is on 'pensions and active ageing'. Many informants felt that this was a poor reflection of the significance of ageing as a policy issue. For example, in the country summaries in the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2005) many of the Member States refer to the issue of 'age' and 'age and work force'. The European Older People's Platform (AGE) expressed concern that poverty amongst the elderly had been relatively neglected in the overall OMC⁵⁰. However, some informants saw the specific issue of pensions as lying beyond the sensible boundaries of this Programme, appropriately addressed by the Social Protection Committee through other activities.

Aging has not been a major issue in the Programme and is not necessarily identified as a social exclusion issue in all countries (rather in some it is viewed as an issue of social protection). Some good results have been achieved by the A+G+E project in the coordinating country. However, here as well, there was not really a 'champion' to bring information knowledge, and results together.

4.3.4 Health

Healthcare is considered a key issue for all EU MS, but particularly in the EU 10 MS, which can exacerbate existing inequalities or support social inclusion. Health is considered an issue within the EU's social policy agenda and access to healthcare is part of the common objectives. Health indicators were a task of the

⁴⁹ Commission of the European Communities, (2005), *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion*, Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM(2005)14 final

⁵⁰ European Commission, 2006 *f Working Document: Evaluation of the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion*.

Indicators Subgroup of the SPC during the first half of the Programme's life. Poor health and health inequalities are reported in all MS but especially in the EU 10, where groups such as the Rom are badly affected. NAPs/incl in Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Poland and Slovakia all highlighted health issues, while the issue was also raised by the NGE for Slovenia.

However, there is relatively little activity on the subject of health and social inclusion within this Programme, perhaps reflecting the common separation of healthcare delivery from delivery of other services and possibly efforts within the Community's Public Health Action Programme (2003 – 2008).⁵¹

The little activity on the issue of Health can in part also be explained by the rather later introduction and development of the theme in the Action Programme.

Activities have included:

- A Phase I TEP led by EurohealthNet
- A Phase II follow-on project led by NHS Scotland
- In TEP II there are some projects on health (like the Mental Health Europe projects on good practices for combating social exclusion of people with mental health problems and the project of the Platform for International Cooperation and Undocumented Migrants (access to health care for undocumented migrants).
- EAPN website postings of reports from these projects
- TEP Homestart has also addressed issues in access to healthcare
- A TEP on health services for the mentally ill led by PRISMA in Greece
- A Peer Review in October 2005 on 'Pathways to social integration for people with mental health problems: the establishment of social cooperatives in Greece'
- A workshop session at the Round Table in Aarhus on access to health care and the need to tackling health inequalities
- Health indicators were discussed at the Round Table in Turin and in events for people experiencing poverty

The Programme has not brought together knowledge, information and results on the subject of Health. Rather, the initiatives found in the Action Programme are scattered and not linked to each other. Health was not an issue as such during the Learning Together conference.

⁵¹ COM (2000) 258 final.)

4.3.5 *Synthesis of thematic content*

A wide range of different thematic content has been developed in this Programme. Some of it, like the development of statistical data, is directed at the multi-dimensionality of poverty and social exclusion. Beyond that, the Programme goes some way to creating a learning space for a diverse set of specific themes to be explored.

From the themes looked at, child poverty and homelessness have been relatively well covered over the course of the Programme lifespan. However, health and to a lesser extent ageing have not featured significantly. The themes of child poverty and homelessness can both be seen to have been addressed from different perspectives and using different frameworks, as well as being addressed through different actions. This demonstrates a clear strength of the Action Programme, that for two particular themes it has enabled consideration of the themes through inter-linkages across the Programme which illustrates the creation of a learning environment. However, two concerns are identified as inhibiting Programme effectiveness in addressing thematic issues – clarity and focus in the selection of themes; and knowledge management and dissemination of thematic issues.

A common issue raised by informants from both MS national authorities and other actors is the lack of coherence in thematic content in the Programme. One informant questioned about themes across different actions responded angrily.

*“There are no themes; (the Programme) is a catch-all”
(National level, generic Civil Society, small EU 15 MS)*

A commonly expressed view was that the Programme should be more strongly targeted on a smaller number of themes and, a less common view, on a narrower set of actors.

The role of the SEP Committee member as a focus for dissemination activities within MS was in some cases reported as providing a useful node in networking within MS to ensure appropriate dissemination of thematic materials to specific policy audiences. At the European level some knowledge management can be seen in the Programme in incipient form, with reports being published on the website. However, overall it was observed by informants that a stronger strategic process must be brought to bear on ensuring that thematic dissemination occurs adequately for specific audiences.

In order therefore for successful examples of thematic consideration, including child poverty and homelessness, to be built upon, in the future (PROGRESS) there needs to be explicit focus on a sub-set of themes, which are explored over a sustained period, with a clear strategy for consolidation and knowledge management with respect to the themes.

4.4. Comparative impact of the programme in different MS

4.4.1. Role of different actions in MS impact

Impacts recorded through evaluation data in MS were mostly associated with three actions: Peer Review, TEPs and European Networks, corresponding to their strengths in mobilising actors and building their capacity to address social exclusion and poverty.

Informants had different views of the relative effectiveness of different actions. European Networks were seen as making a positive contribution in many EU 15 as well as EU 10. However, some doubts were expressed in larger and smaller EU 15 countries where large national ngos were not participating in the Programme. While the reasons for this have not been tested, the evaluators observe that large national ngos often have their own links to policy makers at the national level and may not feel the need to participate at the European level.

While in MS where national and regional authorities reached out to TEPs there were good impacts reported, in those MS who had no contact, the lack of results from TEPs in a few cases created suspicion of what was being achieved at this level. The evaluators' view is that the requirement for lengthy reporting on their learning to the Commission breeds the expectation that the Commission will publicise their results or at least make them available. The lack of availability of these reports creates the conditions in which TEPs could be considered of less value.

Views expressed in relation to Peer Review were among the most polarised. While many considered them very effective, a substantial minority of national authorities, NGEs and other informants was sceptical of their value. This seemed to be associated three different factors:

- a perspective which saw the Peer Review process between countries as lacking in "bite", as MS anticipated their own hosting prospects
- a view of PR as lacking appropriate challenge and transferability to their context
- dissatisfaction with their allocation to topic and selection of topics more generally.

Studies were also seen as having most relevance to those countries where case studies were undertaken by EU 10 MS, but also as having few lessons by EU 15. Topic selection of studies was also seen as reducing the relevance and therefore utility and impact of this action.

NIEs were criticised in a number of countries for not having sufficient knowledge of the NAP/incl. The evaluators view is that the pool of eligible actors able to fulfil this role is likely to make quality variable but the contribution of the IE can be important.

Events are generally limited in country impact to the MS where they are held. Here they may make a considerable impact, through developing cross-action links between Programme participants, who can share their learning, and through developing ownership at the political level. UK TEPs participants in the Glasgow Round Table commented favourably on their increased understanding of the strategic role of the Programme and on the particular contribution they could make to that, which modified their dissemination outputs. The links between these actors have been continued through the UK Awareness Raising Project.

4.4.2. MS views of Programme impact

This subsection describes the comparative impact of the programme in different MS. All participants were asked about Programme impact in their countries. SEP Committee members most often had an overview of this issue, although some other responses, such as those of SPC members and European Networks, were also useful. The results from the 2006 survey tended to reinforce evaluation findings from 2004 and 2005 but generally with little elaboration. In some cases SEP representatives still had little information about programme impact beyond the individuals in national authorities. There was little evidence offered of institutionalised impact. This was most marked in regionalised countries, especially where SEP roles were dispersed between different Ministries. In small centralised countries, SEP Committee members often had a more overarching view, especially where the Programme had strategic value for them, although NGEs were well-informed in some cases. NGOs views sometimes contrasted strongly with those of SEP members. Analysis of the data was undertaken to examine differences between small and large MS, different welfare models in use, EU 15 and EU 10, North and South. A range of scenarios of use of the Programme and resulting impact emerged.

Hungary

The major contextual factors in this small CEE country are the transition to a market economy and radical reform of pensions and of healthcare funding. Poverty often occurs in dispersed rural communities where jobs and services are poor, resulting in a plan for micro-regionalisation.

“In 2002 when (MS) first joined the Programme there was a national conference with the EU when the SI process was presented to an audience including civil partners and poverty/social inclusion was discussed in those terms, a new concept. Prior to 1989 there was no research about social inclusion – or research studies but no overall picture. So the National Conference was the start of co-operation with civil partners and debates about definitions and terms which has been ongoing. From this began both new ways of thinking about the problems and also a process of collaboration” (SEP Committee member verified by interviews with NGO informants)

This country's use of the Programme has included:

- Bringing together Programme participants in a national conference (which they are planning to repeat) which led to broader understandings of poverty and social exclusion and multidimensionality of the issues shared between different types and level of partners
- Participation by the Roma Unit of the Ministry of Youth, Family and Equal Opportunities in the TEP led by the Spanish General Gitano project (extending mutual learning and cooperation developed within the Anti-Discrimination Programme), which provided learning, for example, on how service provision can be developed through consultation and collaboration with service users
- Developing new NGO collaboration between partners ideologically opposed, through participation in the Key Networks action, which has offered experience of participation in European-wide activities and new models of engagement
- Participation in Peer Review, notably participation of local and national authorities together in the Irish Peer Review on indebtedness, extended and supported through participation of the same key actors in a Phase 3 TEP on this subject, which has fed directly into planning for legislation in this area
- Participation in EU SILC, though local research showing the presence of absolute, though post-modern, poverty, may not be reflected.

Other EU 10 MS took a similar view of the Programme as an opportunity:

For (this MS) it has had a positive impact – it has promoted cooperation between social partners and government. It has helped us clarify our common objectives and helped them think about policy and bring new issues into the social policy agenda, for example, drug users, pensions. It has also helped to organise actors involved. The Programme came in a critical time of transition because the role of the family as responsible for the vulnerable is loosening.” (NGE small EU 10 MS)

However, another CEE EU 10 MS national authority commented that they were prioritising their effort to the NAPs/incl rather than the Programme. However, the views expressed were very positive of the Programme, especially Key Networks of NGOs and local/regional authorities, peer reviews, studies and statistical information:

We can observe tangible effects of the Action Programme on the general intellectual perspective on the inclusion process: the concept presented in government documents are based on a broad multi-dimensional approach. Specifically the documents are focusing strongly on the problems related to child poverty and the situation of immigrants” (NGE EU 10)

For South European EU 15 countries the Programme is also seen as making an important contribution. National authorities in one MS commented that by defining social exclusion, identifying the key target groups and their needs and by starting to measure/assess the size and extent of social exclusion in (MS) the programme has helped lay the foundations for policy making, or at least to make manifest the reasons why social exclusion-related policies are urgently required. In another small EU 15 MS the Programme was an essential part of the strategy and in this country:

“The NAP is the Bible for the Social Action Services and the basis for all the work being done at national level” (National authorities EU 15)

This view of the Programme contrasts with some countries in North-West Europe, including both large and small countries. Here the programme and the OMC was most often seen as a parallel and subordinate process to a broader range of national strategies and programmes

“they (EC) have that idea that their Action Programme plays a much bigger role than it does in reality” (NGE EU 15 MS)

And another small EU 15 MS seemed similar:

“Our expectations were too high because our system is different from the continental system. Responsibility for issues of poverty and social exclusion is already in the domain of the public sector so the impact is not so high. There is little EU value added value for us” (National authority, Nordic country)

Other informants in this country, as in other EU 15 MS, see the Programme as reinforcing the strategies in their MS but “

“The programme was and is behind domestic policy” (National authority, Nordic country)

While in Nordic countries generally “the Action Programme is only a very small programme compared to what is already taking place”, some report significant Programme impact:

“The role of the key networks has been very important in (MS) in strengthening NGOs and to encourage them in their work. NGOs are in this way acknowledged that they are an important partner in the SI process. They became more aware of their position and of their potential

Furthermore, through the exchange activities in the Action Programme, practitioners, but also policy makers are ‘exposed to learning’ In (MS) still often the attitude exists that ‘we cannot learn any more from others’; however this is not the case in reality. The Action Programme has helped to focus social exclusion and poverty issues. There is definitely something going on which is an effect or side-effect of the Action Programme, but is not very tangible. The awareness-raising on issues of social exclusion and poverty has been very successful in (MS)” (National authority, Nordic MS)

Other informants working in the field in this country were much more positive about the contribution of the Programme, especially those involved in networks.

In large EU 15 countries, impact is generally constrained by the presence of much larger national programmes, pre-existing strategies and in some cases by dispersed information sources. This seems the case especially in federal structures where responsibility for the Programme and NAP/incl are separated diminishing the transferability of learning from other MS and using the Programme strategically. However, generally the Programme is seen at least as reinforcing and consistent with other initiatives. Where national authorities reach out to TEPs or participate they report good results emerging, which may be in terms of developing collaboration but sometimes goes beyond that:

“Participation in this project gave us greater awareness of how other countries are tackling poverty at national, regional and crucially local level. Since the project coincided with the period where we were drafting the new anti-poverty policy, we were able to factor in lessons learnt from observing policy and practice in other partner countries. In addition, this project helped strengthen the relationship between the regional and national administration” (Regional authority participating in TEP, large EU 15 MS) .

In one large EU 15 MS SEP Committee member’s responses to TEPs changed markedly over the course of the Programme as they adjusted to understanding of their role in the Programme and the national policy system made efforts to engage with the TEPs. Here, as in all types of MS the importance of TEPs were seen as a key to involving the subnational level effectively, ensuring “real, active involvement” at this level.

“The fact that the partners were both governmental and non-governmental organisations meant that the latter could have direct impact in policy making by working closely with senior government officials from the respective departments. In the same vein, the latter were able to access the expertise and knowledge of people who work at grass-roots level and have direct contact with people at risk of exclusion. In this sense there was transfer of learning in both ways. The involvement of EAPN has also been invaluable in facilitating transfer of learning.”

(Regional authority, TEPs participant, EU 15)

UK

As in many other EU 15 MS, the Programme can be seen as a parallel process alongside other major policy drivers for addressing social exclusion, though consistent with those. Use has been made of the Programme through, for example:

- Engagement with UK TEPs actors in developing the NAPs/inclusion 2003
- Participation of policy makers in the Mainstreaming TEPs
- Attendance of SEP Committee member in TEPs final meetings
- Attendance of SEP Committee member at Peer Review meetings
- Linking the national organisation representing local authorities, through participation in the Turin Round Table
- Use of the Round Table located in the UK as a vehicle for engaging with UK politicians
- Round Table participation of TEPs actors, who used the opportunity to make better sense of their role in the Programme
- Building on the links made through the Round Table with politicians and TEPs participants to engage them and others in the Awareness-Raising Project

4.4.3. Assessment of Programme impact on different MS

Programme impact on different MS and subsets of MS can be identified.

For one subset of MS EU 15, there are large pre-existing programmes addressing social exclusion and poverty. This can be interpreted by some informants as weakening the impact of the Programme; others see the Programme as providing reinforcement for other drivers. In some of these countries, this may reflect a weak commitment to the Programme and the potential for learning from it. Among MS EU 15, those countries with strong subnational structures tend to benefit less from the Programme, with its strong emphasis on linking with national level actors.

In another subset of MS EU 15, the Programme is considered more central to their strategies for addressing social exclusion and they consider themselves to be beneficiaries of the Programme.

In MS 10, considerable use may be made of the Programme or it may be seen of marginal significance due to different strategic priorities over the life of the Programme.

4.5 EU value added: overall findings on Programme contribution to the OMC

In this section EU value added is considered in terms of the Programme's contribution to the Common Objectives for improving the understanding of social exclusion and poverty, mobilizing all actors in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and building the capacity of actors to address poverty and social exclusion effectively. The section addresses first EU value added from the Programme in improving the understanding of social exclusion and poverty or learning and second in relation to mobilization of actors and capacity-building.

4.5.1. EU value added in improving the understanding of social exclusion and poverty

EU value added in improving the understanding of social exclusion and poverty may be seen as an increase in transnational learning and cooperation between the actors, mutual learning and cooperation at a national and subnational level, as a consequence of participation in the Programme, and that would otherwise not have happened and which develops the capacity of actors to address social exclusion and poverty. EU value added is therefore linked to the typology of learning adopted in this evaluation, showing different levels of EU value added:

- Awareness raising – the issue comes to the fore in the policy/practice arena and subjects are legitimised for discussion/action
- Changing understanding - learning on a subject has been acquired and internalised so that new understandings are developed or new ways of conceptualising policy issues are developed
- Actionable knowledge - learning acquired is useful and can be acted upon
- Implementation - acted upon knowledge, knowledge has been transferred to new settings

The absence of impact at the MS level is not an indication that the Programme is not producing European value added. But the presence of impact does indicate that learning is being fostered and change is supported. All the impacts noted in the preceding section in relation to comparative impact in different countries can therefore be seen as EU value added.

The Programme is seen as contributing to strategies and practical ways of addressing poverty and social exclusion. This was true in all EU 25 and at all levels, with a few exceptions. This was linked to support for the Lisbon strategy and perception of the EU as putting social exclusion and poverty on the national agenda. It was also accompanied by widespread concern at all levels about the changing EU political context which is seen as subordinating social aspects of poverty and social exclusion to economic competitiveness.

Generally high levels of learning between MS were consistently reported. Nordic/Social democratic and other large EU 15 MS national authorities considered their countries to be contributors rather than learners but also noted

areas where important learning had occurred. Most EU 10 MS see the Programme as timely in relation to the socio-economic impacts of the transition period in EC Europe and also demographic changes in Cyprus. The Programme provides learning opportunities which give practical application complementary to national policy agendas or has given a new impetus to policy development in these countries. However, EU 10 and Mediterranean countries reported some constraints in learning from the Programme due to lack of capacity and resources.

Co-operation between MS was seen as a further level not yet reached, except in the case of EU SILC where national statistical offices were required to co-operate and in one or two TEPs. On the other hand, cooperation between actors other than national authorities was clearly visible in the activities of (Key) European Networks.

Examples of reported learning from the Programme include:

- Reflection through the Peer Review process in Sweden around local development, leading to renewed political commitment to change, and in the TEP LASI, where conditions for self-criticism were created
- Specific practice and policy learning from UK and Danish Peer Reviews on homelessness, reported by other EU 15 countries such as France and Netherlands
- Timely policy advice, for example in relation to legislation around indebtedness reported by the Hungarian from the Irish Peer Review and a follow-on TEP; in relation to mainstreaming reported by UK participant in TEP Mainstreaming; and in Lithuania from the Child Poverty Study
- Models of user involvement in service delivery reported by Hungarian national authorities participating in General Gitano TEP.
- Conceptual understanding of multidimensionality of poverty, reported by EU 10 MS, such as Hungary and Cyprus national authorities, through participating in the Programme as a whole
- A new understanding of “absolute if post-modern poverty”⁵² alongside social exclusion highlighted in the EU 10 countries.

4.5.2. EU Value added as Mobilization of actors and Capacity building

The Programme was generally seen as supporting the mobilization of actors. For example, increased participation of NGOs in developing the NAP/inclusion was reported in the UK, through developing relationships with TEP partners. Key Networks were providing new architecture for participation of NGOs in some EU 10 countries, overcoming previously ideologically divided groups. European networks were also contributing in Nordic/social democratic countries to developing participation of smaller NGOs. In some EU 15 MS the Programme was seen as privileging some NGOs over others.

⁵² Z.Ferges (2005), Evaluation interview

Mobilization at the sub national level was generally reported as weak, especially with regional/local authorities, particularly for example in Germany. In general, while TEPs provide some possibilities for participation at this level, their results are not systematically capitalized through for example thematic links in the Programme.

Differences around mobilization between MS and the Commission was a consistent theme, as in:

- An overemphasis on centralised national authorities by Commission resulting in eg lack of capitalisation of bottom-up learning through the TEPs and poor interaction with regional/local levels and people experiencing se and poverty
- Over-weighting of Commission in decision making, for example in relation to Programme themes which were seen as unstrategic and often of marginal relevance.

However, Programme management appears to be balanced in relation to EU 15/EU 10 support.

Differences in perspective between Commission and MS affected their view of the need for visibility of the Programme, consistently though not unanimously reported. The Awareness Raising action was widely welcomed, especially in recognising differences between EU 15 and EU 10 countries.

The need to develop more synergies between actions, possibly through follow-up activities, especially in relation to learning from Peer Reviews was a theme across types of MS, although there were MS who felt this was not part of the programme's brief. Positive responses from national authority involvement in TEPs, especially as follow-up to Peer Review engagement, highlights the need for interlinkage between actions as a successful way for national and sub national authorities to improve their understanding and build their capacity to address poverty and social exclusion.

Large and small EU 15 countries generally demonstrated in-depth knowledge of the Programme and of the need to match appropriate actors to different actions and processes in order to maximise learning, mobilization and capacity building. These MS often had specific criticisms of the Programme, including: lack of visibility and engagement with regional actors in the Programme (especially in Germany), TEPs lacking in strategic connection, constraints for the programme in moving beyond centralised administrative circles and large, 'professionalized' NGOs, Peer Review participation, and lack of strategic deliberation. A few MS reported that the role of NGO European networks were irrelevant and duplicated national provision. However, shifts in opinion were noted over the term of the evaluation. Sometimes these were associated in greater learning from, even participation in, TEPs by national authorities.

EU added value can therefore be applied to the different levels, as noted in relation to Studies: European, National and Regional/Local; and to different systems: political, administrative and civil society, and by different actors. EU added value may be seen at all points along these dimensions, which also implies learning potential for different levels of stakeholders at European,

national, regional/local levels and different types of stakeholders in the political or administrative systems or in civil society: study reports can fulfil a number of functions, for different audiences.

EU value added from different actions

EU-SILC

EU SILC provides high European added value. It can be seen in the broad comparability between MS which is being generated and in increasing transparency about levels of social exclusion and poverty between MS. Its outputs will contribute to the mobilisation of a broad range of actors across the EU. There is also EU value added in the capacity building effects resulting from the Framework Regulation requirement for national offices for statistics and from the development of the EU SILC Task Force at the European level.

Studies

Thematic studies help to inform and therefore by extension contribute indirectly to mutual learning, especially about the range of actions possible within subsets of MS whose contexts share characteristics. Studies constitute a co-operation between institutions across member states. EU added value arises from learning from studies which would not have otherwise have taken place in MS. However, learning and use is contingent on a number of factors including: whether the subject is new or emergent; of immediate policy interest and importance; whether the right person has the information and ability to act; the capacity of the MS to act. Country-specific studies for acceding countries supports the inclusion of the MS into the social inclusion process. Co-operation on developing methodologies supports the European social inclusion process by providing indicators which can be used across the EU.

TEP

Added value is in this paragraph used in the sense of 'additionality' of the TEP: what has happened via the TEP, which would not have happened without the TEP. The added value of the TEPs is related to different dimensions, i.e. mobilisation of actors (especially local actors is by various informants considered to be important (policy makers and grass roots actors), the transnational character of the TEPs, the fact that through the project structure and project activities policy and practice are linked, the exchange and learning taking place at project level leading to knowledge creation and new activities for organisations involved. Project visits are a strong instrument for developing a deeper understanding of the context, which was vital for some projects. The transnational character of the TEPs related to the EU added value. If the TEP would only take place in a regional/national context results might appear, but not results that are based on European experiences and expertise, which might enhance the take-up of results.

Events

Promoting dialogue between the various (transnational) actors involved is key in relation to the events, while in some cases, the objectives of the events tend to go beyond this. E.g. one of the anticipated practical outcomes of the Round Table in Rotterdam was amongst others "mutual learning connected to the key priority areas of the social inclusion process". Some participants of Round Tables do agree that they have learnt as a result of participation and that they have used that learning within their national context. Other participants keep the main focus on exchanging experiences. Concluding we might say that learning happens, but that it is depending on contingencies, such as interest in particular issues, the need to have information on certain policy aspects, the 'policy willingness' to be able to implement the learning, the 'position' and responsibility areas of the participants, etc. An inhibiting factor is that the dissemination of the results of the events is very weak.

European networks

Information and knowledge exchanged between the members of the Networks enhances understandings of different contexts. A number of different sources confirm that members who are active in the networks at national and European level become more aware of social inclusion issues, approaches, systems, etc. in different Member States. At the same time, it is also said that the people in the European Networks offices have a lot of knowledge about different systems that they feed into the networks (during events or personalised answers to requests of members). Networks also provide or disseminate very interesting and useful material to feed into debates, which can be used to improve understanding of social exclusion issues (see the numerous background papers, position papers, research work findings, etc. of the networks published on their websites). Together this constitutes a high European added value.

As a result of the information exchange, a mutual process of learning and co-operation may occur between Programme participants. Evidence from fieldwork

provides different examples of learning occurring at the level of the Networks. Through their involvement in the Networks, organisations also started to cooperate with each other, for example in joint projects. Furthermore, through the Networks, organisations are brought together that otherwise would not meet, for example because of ideological reasons.

One of the major issues arising is that this cooperation and learning should be better capitalised on by the networks, for example by developing an inventory of instances of learning, success, results, and outcomes. Furthermore, the networks themselves are involved in an internal learning process to make their internal operations optimal. This is done on the basis of internal evaluation, external evaluation and discussions with various stakeholders (e.g. work programme of EAPN is firmly based on internal evaluation results; strengthening cooperation with local actors by FEANTSA is based on discussions with stakeholders)

Peer review

The European-added value of the Peer Review action is strong, through its links to the NAP and OMC process. In addition, its European added-value is addressed through its contribution to the European comparative assessment of policies. This is achieved primarily by the thematic expert and the inclusion of a comparative assessment in the meeting agenda.

Network of Independent Experts

The work of the NGEs is making a relevant, useful and effective contribution to one of the key elements of the OMC and the social inclusion strategy, which is the production of the Joint Inclusion Reports.

The reporting is also supporting the European comparative assessment of policies. It contributes – through its support to the JIR/JRSPSI process - to a key European process involving the assessment of social inclusion policies across Member States and policy domains. The CIRCA net has also given country desks the possibility to look at the reports of other experts – for comparative purposes – and to make use of the outputs in other work areas like the Employment Reports or the Structural Funds Programming.⁵³ Moreover, its contribution to the comparative assessment of policies may strengthen in the future, through the planned synthesis reports, the introduction of more consistent (and thus more comparable) approaches for reporting, the extension of the Network to cover all Member States, the accession countries and Turkey, and the focus on certain thematic issues. A further strengthening of EU-added value and comparative assessment of policies may result from the use of the experts' outputs in the Peer Reviews.

National Awareness Raising Actions

The Awareness Raising Action is the only action in the Programme that supports purely national – as opposed to transnational - activities. The European added-value of this action is therefore in its contribution to reinforcing linkages between

⁵³ The assessment of the NAPs/inclusion and the NAPs/employment and the monitoring of the ESF operations are carried out by the same Commission services in DG EMPL B, C and H. Interviews with EMPL country desk officers. May 2005.

policies and actors operating at different levels (European, national, sub-national) and filling in key gaps in the awareness and mobilisation of stakeholders.

However, the design and implementation of the action has not involved a real dialogue and partnership between the Member States and the European Commission, or with other actors (e.g. the Key European Networks). Such a joint dialogue and partnership (on the objectives and design of the action) would have enabled the targeting of countries, regions and stakeholders where awareness and mobilisation are most needed to improve social inclusion and NAP/JIM processes, and the complementing of other information and mobilisation initiatives of Member States and key EU and national stakeholders.

4.6. Synthesis of Programme Achievements

Comparison of the actions

Actions each have a particular contribution to make to Programme Objectives and appropriate mobilization of actors within Programme objectives varies between and within actions. Several actions have a weak learning model and require reinforcing activities to reinforce their impact.

The Programme was generally seen as supporting the mobilisation of actors. Appropriate mobilization of actors within Programme objectives varies between and within actions (e.g. NGEs versus TEPs, national versus local level in Round Tables and Events). Overall, a wide set of actors has been mobilized but to varying degrees with actors at sub-national level particularly weakly mobilized, though there is debate between the Commission and the Member States as to whether this latter is part of the intent of the programme.

Thematic learning from Actions

A wide range of different thematic content has been developed in this Programme. Some of it, like the development of statistical data, is directed at the multi-dimensionality of poverty and social exclusion. Beyond that, the Programme creates a learning space for a diverse set of specific themes to be explored.

While some themes in the Programme are relatively well covered, some are much less well-covered. Among those well-covered, some are addressed from different perspectives and using different frameworks as well as being addressed through different actions. This is a potential strength of the Action Programme that it enables a theme and its relatedness to other themes to be explored. In order for this strength to be capitalised on, however, the Programme needs some strategy for consolidation and knowledge management.

However, informants from both MS national authorities and other actors are concerned about the lack of coherence in thematic content in the Programme. A commonly held view is that the Programme should be more strongly targeted on a smaller number of themes and, a less common view, on a narrower set of actors. One way forward could be to reduce the number of themes or at least to articulate more clearly a rationale for choosing some over others.

Comparative impact of the programme in different MS

NAPs/inclusion may not be a major vehicle for developing policy strategy in some MS and therefore policy influence has required mobilization of actors at the sub-national level.

Full impact of the Programme within a single MS is difficult to assess because actors are rarely brought together and only rarely do informants carry an overall picture of what is being achieved. Nonetheless impacts from the Programme have been recorded in all the MS at some level. Actions most associated with impact include Peer Review, TEPs and European Networks, though other actions were highly rated for their potential contribution, most notably EU SILC.

Impact at the country level varies according to a number of factors, such as openness to learning, timeliness within policy cycles, presence or absence of major national initiatives in this area. Impact of the Programme is constrained by its size in relation to national programmes and indeed to other EU initiatives such as EU Structural Funds. European OMC instruments are not always the major vehicle for developing strategy. Small centralised countries are more likely to record impact from the Programme at the level of national authorities

General points made in relation to constraints on Programme impact across all types of MS by many informants on the Programme concerned:

- Lack of synergy between different actions
- Lack of information about results, particularly from TEPs
- Timeliness and relevance of topic based activities

EU value added

EU value added in improving the understanding of social exclusion and poverty may be seen as an increase in trans-national learning and cooperation between the actors, mutual learning and cooperation at a national and sub-national level, as a consequence of participation in the Programme, and that would otherwise not have happened and which develops the capacity of actors to address social exclusion and poverty. EU value added is therefore linked to the typology of learning adopted in this evaluation, thus shows different levels of EU value added:

- Awareness raising particularly around the needs of particular groups and specific needs
- Changed understanding, particularly in EU 10, for example in relation to social exclusion aspects of poverty and multidimensionality of poverty
- Actionable knowledge – requires transferability assessment and this is the most difficult task in the learning process requiring appropriate actors involved in assessment. Many informants consider they have acquired knowledge which can be acted on.
- Implementation of learning: despite the difficulties experienced by actors in the implementation of learning, a surprising number of examples were provided of how learning from the Programme has been implemented.

The absence of impact at the MS level is not an indication that the Programme is not producing European value added. But the presence of impact does indicate

that learning is being fostered and change is supported. All the impacts noted in the preceding section in relation to comparative impact in different countries can therefore be seen as EU value added.

The Programme is seen as contributing to strategies and practical ways of addressing poverty and social exclusion. This was true in all EU 25 and at all levels, with a few exceptions. This was linked to support for the original Lisbon strategy and perception of the EU as putting social exclusion and poverty on the national agenda.

Generally high levels of learning between MS were consistently reported. Co-operation between MS was seen as a further level not yet reached, except in the case of EU SILC where national statistical offices were required to co-operate. Learning (let alone co-operation) was seen as costly and therefore required resources additional to those available through the Programme.

Efficiency

The financial framework for the Programme is Euros 75 million (see Appendix 5 on Costs). To the end of 2005 the budget utilised was Euros 59 729 743. An expenditure of a further Euros 24 300 000 was forecast for 2006, showing an overall increase in the total budget.⁵⁴ While the commitment to the Programme is a political one, the impact achieved through advancing the understanding of poverty and social exclusion, the thematic knowledge generated and the range of actors mobilized across the EU suggests the Programme is good value. Against the Third Poverty Programme which ran from 1989 to 1993 at a cost of ECU 55 million, the Programme is more highly targeted on actors in a position to make more difference. Utilisation of the Programme budget of 89% in 2002, 91% in 2003, 95% in 2004 and 94% in 2005 suggests considerable efficiency.

⁵⁴ EC Employment and Social Affairs DG *Community Action Programme to combat Social Exclusion (2002-2006) Draft Annual Workplan 2005* Doc SEP 13/04rev

5. Conclusions and Related Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions according to the main evaluation criteria

Programme efficiency

The Programme is making efficient use of the funding available though efficiency could be considerably improved by greater capitalisation of results. There is a fairly even spread between different strands, providing effective underpinning to the different Programme objectives. More efficiency could be achieved through greater capitalisation of results and more synergies between actors, especially between SEP Committee members and Programme management, but also with other Programmes and DGs. Clearer articulation of roles between MS, the Commission and other actors would increase efficiency in disseminating Programme outputs

Relevance and Utility

The programme has relevance to all EU-25 MS – and beyond - though some actions are more relevant to some sub-sets. The thematic content of actions varies in its relevance, and therefore its utility, to meet MS policy needs in timely fashion. The contribution of the Programme to the social inclusion process has been constrained by MS contexts; the relevance of its outputs; and the effectiveness and timeliness of its dissemination and its relative lack of engagement with key actors at the sub national level.

Effectiveness

The Programme has been effective in providing many learning opportunities for participants, raising awareness, changing understanding, creating actionable, and in some cases, implemented learning; mobilising a broad set of actors and their networks; thereby developing the capacity of actors to address social exclusion and poverty more effectively. Some actors see it as providing a space for a continuing dialogue on social exclusion and poverty in Europe, though it is limited in scope, particularly with respect to engagement with the sub national level. The Programme management has been adaptive and reflexive in responding to changes in the strategic environment, emerging issues at EU level and shifting priorities. Programme management is challenged by the breadth of demands and ambitions for the Programme, suggesting the need for greater strategic focus. The Programme would be more effective with increased funding to enable greater capitalisation of learning, especially of TEPs results.

EU value added

The Programme has provided considerable EU-added value. It has clearly contributed to the start-up of the OMC and is seen as contributing to strategies and practical ways of addressing poverty and social exclusion. This is linked to support for the social inclusion process and perception of the EU as putting social exclusion and poverty onto national agendas through this Programme. The Programme offers a space for a learning through continuing dialogue on social exclusion between policy actors and perspectives from a cross-section of those involved in combating social exclusion. This learning supports greater shared learning at the strategic level. It is also seen in co-operation between partners

across national boundaries, especially in the Key European Networks, and enhances the capacity of actors to combat social exclusion and poverty.

5.2. Conclusions according to Overarching Evaluation Questions and Hypotheses

In broad terms, the evaluators have identified the following synthesised answers to the evaluation questions or indicators of achievement of Programme objectives identified in the Introduction. The conclusions also draw on the hypotheses raised during the evaluation. More detailed answers to these questions can be found in the chapters above and in the Appendices to this report.

Is there a better understanding of the key issues based on common indicators and shared learning?

Sharing learning to improve understanding of key issues is one of the key objectives of the Programme. The evaluation was informed by a hypothesis that: *Through the implementation of the Action Programme, a learning environment will be created via the establishment of cross strand and cross level links.* Over time cross-action, rather than cross-strand, links have emerged as important in the development of cross-level links and where these have been made, impact has increased. In terms of a learning environment, perhaps the most important impact of the Programme has been the creation of a space for dialogue on social exclusion issues at the European level, not the only such space but the only one to significantly interact with the European strategy level. However, there are severe constraints on the extent to which the Action Programme provides a learning environment including: lack of strategic discussion, lack of feedback loops, e.g. with regard to the TEPs, and no agreed model for knowledge management agreed between MS and the EC. This results in poor capitalisation of learning in this environment.

Results from the evaluation indicate that across almost all the actions there is some degree of shared learning of key issues and even developments of new concepts. The typology of learning developed for the evaluation ranges along a dimension of awareness raised, changes in understanding, actionable learning and implemented learning. There are examples of all these types of learning occurring through this Programme. In terms of the Programme as a whole, it is difficult to make a judgement as the Programme lacks any strategic overview. The Programme does keep open the possibility of some European dialogue on social exclusion issues which increases understanding of social exclusion and poverty, though this is fragmented between different actions and constrained by institutional factors.

The development of common indicators has been progressed in a range of different actions and with respect to a range of specific issues which have relevance for subsets of actors. The development of indicators is challenged by the accession of the EU 10 countries, also contributing to their development.

Do key actors – individuals, groups and communities – co-operate and engage in a mutual learning process?

Over the course of the Programme the evaluation has examined assumptions about what a key actor is. Is it for example, the author of the NAPs/inclusion and representative of the lead Ministry for social exclusion in the country, capable of interacting both with the strategic environment and with all those involved in developing responsiveness to social exclusion at MS national level, as seem to be the position of the Commission. Capacity for interaction with the strategic environment at MS and European levels still seems an important indicator of whether an actor is key or not, but the sub national level may also be seen as key at the MS level and have not been well-represented. Programme Committee members may not be in a position to influence sub national drivers. They may be constrained by their political environment or institutional situation within a particular Ministry from exercising the kind of impact envisaged by the Commission Actors in the political environment have been singularly neglected in the learning strategies adopted.

Key actors do cooperate and engage in a mutual learning process in the Actions where this was intended and also in EU SILC and in European Networks, where this was not fully envisaged. Most examples were at the level of raising awareness and changing understanding, though there are also some examples of learning implemented into policies.

Do key actors across different levels (strategy, programme and actions) know how to act more effectively against poverty and exclusion?

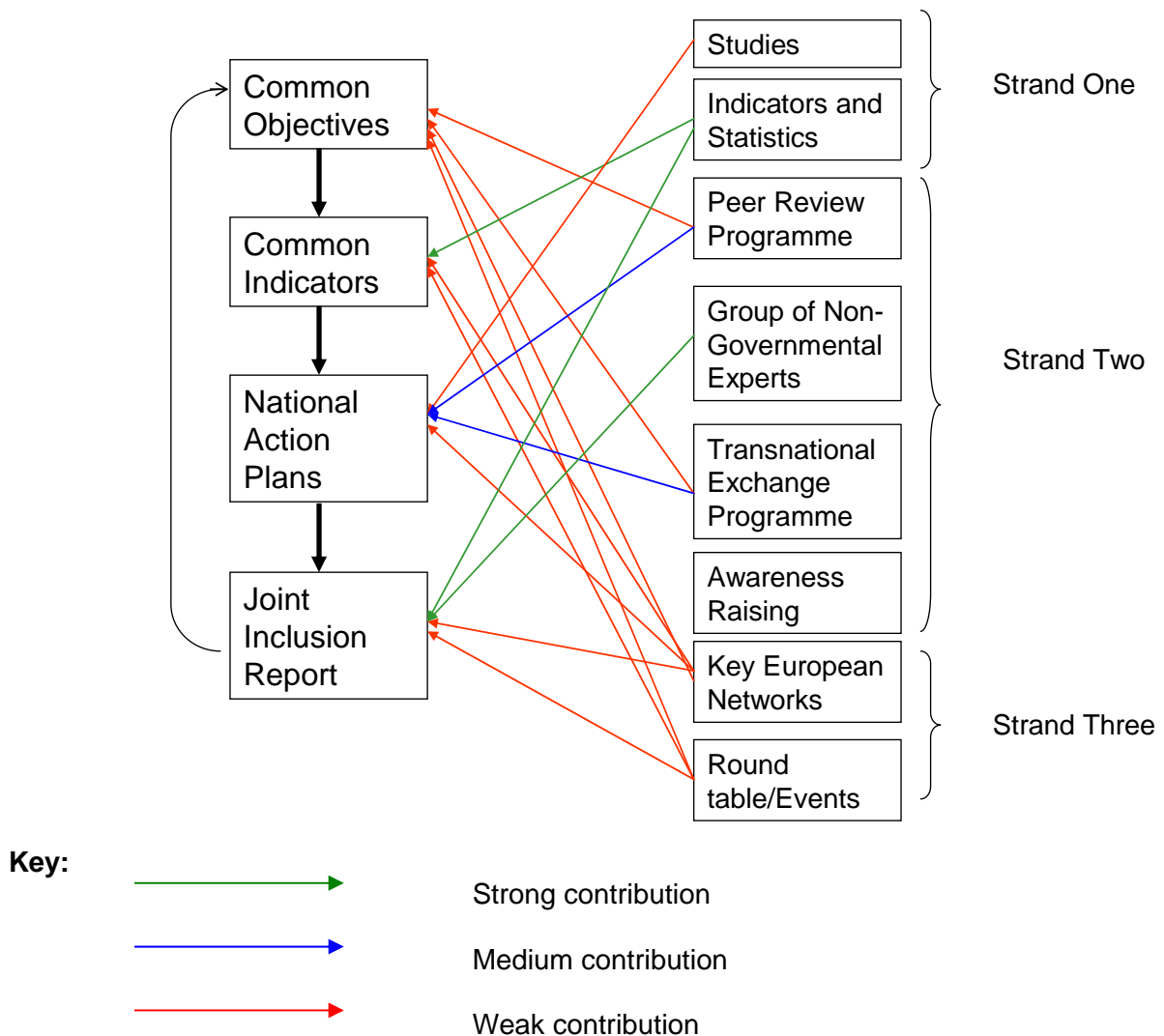
At the strategic level, the role of the Action Programme was to underpin the implementation of the OMC in the field of social inclusion which would support the European social inclusion strategy. In operationalising different actions and intentions for the process, the Programme has been drawn in different directions and spread its effort across a range of different actors who are pursuing their activities across a range of specific themes. This is reflected in an early evaluation hypothesis that *The effectiveness of the Action Programme in terms of its contribution to the strategy is directly related to the degree to which all key issues and problems are adequately addressed.* The evaluation of this Programme shows that the multi-dimensionality of poverty and social exclusion can be advanced through specific thematic activities. However, reflection by a range of participants highlights that poverty and social exclusion cannot be adequately addressed in a piece-meal fashion. Activities in this Programme have ranged across a broad set of themes and issues but has consequently often been criticised by informants as “scattergun”. Although there has been much progress in specific areas, there has so far not been the kind of strategic “round-up” which would appraise these differences and different kinds of contributions together, although EU SILC, many TEPs and Round Tables have each in their way attempted to work with multidimensionality. This leads to considerable frustration at the more strategic levels about how to act more effectively at the European level, with MS policy actors asking about the direction of the European “project” on social exclusion and poverty strategies, beyond the life of the Programme.

At the level of the Actions, the starting hypothesis was that:

The actions will contribute to the Action Programme if they are embedded in the OMC. There are linkages between the actions in this Programme and the elements of the European social inclusion process: EU SILC with the common indicators; NGEs with the Joint Report. However, in the case of other actions, for example Studies, the contributions are not clear and other actors, such as European networks may address their strategic contribution through other activities.

The following figure represents the contribution to the Action Programme of the other OMC elements.

Fig. 5.1 Contribution of the Action Programme to the other OMC elements



Answers to this question also link to the answers given to the previous evaluation questions above: what is a key actor, and how far does shared learning occur in this Programme. An evaluation hypothesis was: *The Action Programme will only contribute to the strategy if key actors are involved, have learned ie have acquired new and relevant knowledge and know-how and if the key actors involved have the capacity to act upon their learning within their strategy and policy environment.* Those key actors who have been involved will almost certainly have acquired some relevant knowledge, though the practicalities of its application, ie transferability, are often unclear. There is room for more actors to become involved at different levels especially at the sub-national level, where the drivers for policy development may be more active than at the national level.

In general, the Programme has lacked the “proximity” to systems within MS – whether regional policy systems or delivery systems – which would allow it to develop more “know-how”. This kind of learning is mostly buried in the TEPs, which take most seriously the articulation between policy and practice, between national policy making and local delivery systems, without which practical implementation cannot occur.

Have innovative approaches emerged, particularly through co-operation?

There has been little which can be termed real co-operation between MS in this Programme. The only real MS co-operation project has been EU-SILC. Innovation, in terms of generation of wholly new ideas and practice has not been the main intention of the Programme and only a small number of isolated examples were identified. On the other hand many actors have learnt about policies and practices which are new to their MS context and these have been reported to us as useful to MS policy actors, in particular to EU-10 MS. It is also possible that some innovative approaches have been developed which are invisible to the evaluators.

Are the different key players at the various levels engaging actively in a process of dialogue?

Key players are engaging actively in a process of dialogue in all actions. Dialogue between actors at different levels can be seen increasingly in TEPs where national authorities are involved and where national and European actors are invited to final meetings. However, again, there remains potential for more dialogue between levels which would give greater Programme impact, and for a greater number of actors to become involved, particularly at sub-national levels.

Has real change been achieved in policies addressing social inclusion?

Real change so far has probably only been achieved in a small number of cases, where all the conditions were right for learning and implementation. However, there are many examples where awareness has been raised, understanding has changed and common understandings of an issue have been developed within MS. The evaluators would not have expected high levels of change across MS at the end of this 5 year Programme.

5.3 Summary Conclusions

The expectations of the Programme are set out in the Decision⁵⁵ establishing it as follows:

1. Through its three Strands, the Programme should:
 - Improve the understanding of social exclusion and poverty with the help in particular of common indicators (Strand 1)
 - Organise exchanges on policies which are implemented and promote mutual learning in the context of, inter alia, NAPs/incl (Strand 2) and
 - Develop the capacity of actors to address social exclusion and poverty effectively and promote innovative approaches through EU networking and dialogue with all involved at national and regional level (Strand 3)
2. As its main objective, the Programme should support co-operation, enabling the Community and MS to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of policies to combat social inclusion
3. Together with the NAPs/incl, the Programme should contribute to a better understanding of social exclusion, mainstreaming of combating of exclusion in MS and Community policies and measures and the development of priority actions by MS
4. Overall, as part of the OMC, the Programme should contribute to giving decisive impetus to the elimination of poverty.

The overall conclusion emerging from analyses of all parts of this Programme and supported by the majority of informants from different perspectives is that the programme has clearly supported the implementation of the OMC process in terms of shared learning, mobilization of actors, capacity building and policy development, making a good contribution at the strategy level.

However, there is equally compelling evidence to support the view that it could have achieved more through greater focus and coherence, involving more active, ongoing management of thematic integration between the actions at both EU and national levels. One example of this is that while information provision has improved over the life of the Programme, communication to external audiences remains problematic in some areas. Responsibilities for the task of knowledge management are contested and therefore not currently well distributed.

Greater proximity to practice in combating social exclusion, especially through engagement with the sub national level, would increase the effectiveness of this Programme. Programme effectiveness within MS depends considerably on local factors and the extent to which the OMC instruments reflect national strategy. Some MS use the NAP as their policy instrument, some not; some use Peer Reviews, Events and TEPs as an auxiliary to national policy processes, some

⁵⁵ Decision No 50/2002/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 December 2001

just engage in a piecemeal, fragmented fashion. In general the Programme is found to provide equal accessibility to EU 10 MS. However, there remain some support needs for these countries in articulating roles and procedures more clearly which would support acceding as well as EU25 MS in participating more effectively.

All actions have resulted in some learning, though capacity building is more constrained. However, participation in Peer Review, Transnational Exchange Projects and Key European Networks is associated with the greatest learning. EU SILC is regarded highly for its potential EU and MS added value in understanding poverty and social exclusion and supporting mobilization of different actors. Peer Reviews are highly regarded, but there is a desire for more follow up and capitalisation, for example in the form of a TEP, a task for a Key Network or as an input to an Event. NGEs could be strengthened through better dissemination of their reports. Round Tables are welcome but experience difficulties. They would benefit from more linkage to national context of their location, incorporating site visits, PEP participation and more focus on strategic issues. Awareness raising projects could usefully focus on dissemination and coordination around the NAPs and other policy processes, providing more impact on strategic policymaking. Informants had little to say about Studies, even though there are some examples of implemented learning from them

Perceptions of actions have changed over time, for example:

- Those who were involved in the Statistics pilots can now see results and find them useful, e.g. in making connections between different policy areas. SEP members are now in the last year of the programme beginning to appreciate the contribution of the TEPs.
- KN have latterly effectively penetrated and helped mobilisation in EU-10 countries.
- There has been a lot of dissemination accomplished in the last year of the programme, especially on the Commission's initiative.

The programme is managed efficiently. Effectiveness would be increased with greater linkages between actions, thematic coherence and a knowledge management strategy shared between MS and the Commission. The contribution of the programme committee to programme management is limited, while the Commission's effectiveness is constrained by limited human resources.

5.4 Recommendations

Our recommendations relate mainly to our overall conclusion about the effectiveness of the Programme and its weakness and address the needs of subsequent Programmes for increasing coherence and knowledge management and greater engagement of national with sub national actors. It can be summarised as advocating that PROGRESS tries to do more of some things and less of other things by comparison with the Social Exclusion programme.

We recommend: more knowledge management of programme outputs; more focus in programme content; more active management of the programme, with data gathering geared to learning rather than monitoring; more linkages between the different elements of the programme; more active involvement of the Member State representatives in the ongoing management of the programme; more involvement of subnational actors; and, more national involvement in dissemination of programme outputs. And, conversely, we recommend: less of a 'scatter gun' approach to programme content/projects; less (fewer) isolated activities; less (fewer) actions; less (fewer) themes; and less administrative procedures for projects.

Specific recommendations are:

- a. That those instruments or actions which are generating most learning - the TEPs, KNs and Peer Reviews - are continued in an integrated, actively managed process led by the Member States backed up with appropriate technical support from the Commission or elsewhere.
- b. That the EU SILC work and funding is continued in order to provide a strong evidence base for policy making, supporting the mobilization of actors and their capacity to address social exclusion and poverty.
- c. That the Programme focuses on 2 or 3 themes at a time – across all or most actions - on a rolling basis, in order to capitalise learning across the Programme more effectively.
- d. That the Round Tables are rolled up together with the PEP conferences in the form of regular thematic conferences linked to national events and include site visits as well as discussions and presentations, to increase learning and develop more shared learning to influence the strategic level.
- e. That the NGE contribution to the NAP/JIM/JR process is continued and dissemination of outputs is facilitated to increase learning and shared understanding.
- f. To increase efficiency, relevance, utility and effectiveness, that further Studies should be commissioned in closer engagement with MS and a shared dissemination strategy. Commissioning, where appropriate, should be linked to other DGs or organisations (e.g. DG EAC, DG RESEARCH)
- g. That the current Awareness Raising actions are replaced with funded national plans for awareness raising, coordination and dissemination linked to the NAP and other key policy processes, developing more shared learning and greater impact on the strategic policy levels.
- h. That an appropriate intranet and internet based knowledge management platform for the programme is developed