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COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMME IN THE SPHERE OF EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY – PROGRESS

COMMITTEE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS 2007-13

ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMME FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY PROGRESS (2007-13) IN 2007

I. - INTRODUCTION

The present Annual Activity Report (AAR) is presented in accordance with Article 19(1) of the PROGRESS Decision¹. It is also in line with Section 3.7 (Reporting) of the General Guidelines for the implementation of the PROGRESS Programme (PROGRESS/003/2006), which provides for the following:

Annual activity reports will present the state of play of *PROGRESS* annual activities together with the list of end beneficiaries and service providers funded under *PROGRESS*. They will also provide a clear and accurate account of the extent to which those activities contribute to the realisation of PROGRESS outcomes.

The AAR summarises PROGRESS's financial results and performance. It underlines both the successes of, and the future challenges facing PROGRESS.

The AAR is structured as follows. It presents financial data and other data relating to the launching and completion of activities for the implementation of PROGRESS (see in particular Annex I). It also focuses on preparatory work carried out on performance management. Since PROGRESS is in its relatively early stages, performance data are not available, so the present AAR focuses on strategic planning carried out to lay the foundations for the implementation of the PROGRESS programme.

¹ Decision No 1672/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 establishing a Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity — Progress
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II. - MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF EXECUTION OF PROGRESS

As identified in the 2007 Annual Plan of Work, PROGRESS's general operational objectives for 2007 were as follows.

2.1.1. LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING PROGRESS

One of the key challenges for 2007 was to ensure timely implementation of PROGRESS so that activities could start as early as possible during the year. In operational terms, a total of 80 calls for proposals or for tenders were published issued in 2007. These calls resulted in a significant number of subsidies (119) and contracts (62). The enclosed table gives a full list of beneficiaries and service providers awarded Community funding. It is too early to give a detailed account of the number and quality of the outputs from those activities. Initial outputs are due by the second half of 2008.

Only a small number of activities originally planned (8) were not successfully completed, mainly on account of the inadequate quality of the bids submitted. In some cases, the Commission re-issued the calls for tenders or carried them over to the 2008 Annual Plan of Work. In the medium term, better marketing of our calls for proposals and tenders will be given higher priority. Potentially interested, suitable bodies and institutions at Member State level could be reached if the PROGRESS Committee members and in particular the national contact points are duly informed. Better mapping of institutions and organisations active at Member State level should also help in this respect.

In terms of execution of PROGRESS's budget, the level of commitment (nearly 92%) is high for the first year of implementation of programme. Some discrepancies are nonetheless noticeable between the policy sections. The reasons for those differences will be explored and analysed, together with the policy sections concerned. Such an analysis will be conducted as part of work to improve PROGRESS's effectiveness and efficiency.

2.1.2. COMMUNICATING PROGRESS

Communicating about PROGRESS is crucial from two main viewpoints. First, as a tool designed to generate new thinking that changes the way EU and national decision-makers perceive and respond to new challenges in the social policy field, PROGRESS's success will depend largely on its capacity to build solid, robust evidence and information base and to make sure that such information is known and used by EU and national policy/decision and opinion-makers. Second, the deliberate choice to focus only on matters where PROGRESS offers the highest EU added-value calls for its role and mission to be clearly spelled out to avoid creating unrealistic expectations.

A revamped PROGRESS website has been developed. The average number of visits to the PROGRESS website is around 3 000 per month, making it one of the 20 most visited pages of the Employment, social affairs and equal opportunities DG. Visits climbed to 5 500 with the launching of PROGRESS's new website last March. Now that PROGRESS is up and running, the remit of its website will need to be rethought if it is to be turned into a tool to complement the policy sections' websites. A number of information sessions and presentations covering PROGRESS were organised in Brussels or in some Member States, mostly for to non-governmental organisations, trades unions and, to a lesser extent, national and regional authorities.

Lastly, three PROGRESS framework contracts covering support for the development of communication activities, communication outreach and networking activities have been concluded. Scoping and stakeholders' surveys on communication and networking were organised with final results expected in June this year. Such work will contribute to developing a fully-fledged communication and networking strategy in support of PROGRESS's expected outcomes.

2.1.2. ENCOURAGING CROSS-CUTTING WORK

Thanks to its integrated nature means, PROGRESS provides an ideal platform for promoting more consistent and joined-up work in the social field, which in turn increases the effectiveness of EU action. Some noteworthy progress has been made in that respect. Work connected with the effective application of EU legislation to improve knowledge and understanding of the application of EU legislation in the Member States and to promote cooperation with the Member States and other stakeholders will be implemented shortly in cooperation with all legal units. Support has been granted under a common umbrella for the operating costs of key EU-level networks. Cross-cutting issues have been identified as issues for funding priorities over the three-year partnership with the Commission.

On a more procedural note, implementing PROGRESS has implied a significant amount of internal coordination with the Commission. To that end, coordination meetings involving all policy sections have been organised on a regular basis, in particular to plan and review the drafting and execution of the plan of work. Experience with PROGRESS implementation indicates the need to develop greater standardisation and more collaborative work among policy sections. This should be taken up in particular when drafting the annual plan of work.

2.1.4. PUTTING A RESULTS-BASED MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN PLACE

Implementation of *PROGRESS* focuses on delivering results. This means using PROGRESS in such a way that it will allow the EU to develop and implement EU policies and legislation with a positive impact on European citizens and to play its full part in support of the Member States.

A practical move has been made towards developing a results-based management system. As agreed and in line with a more participatory approach, a working group was set up with its membership extended to include national authorities and civil society. The group met three times under the guidance of a performance management expert and produced a draft strategic framework which defines the outcomes anticipated and the logical links between PROGRESS's outputs and outcomes. Performance measures will allow the Commission and the Member States to monitor, assess and report on PROGRESS's results.

A similar exercise devoted to key EU-funded networks with operating costs supported under PROGRESS was carried out. EU support is aimed at investing in the capacity of such networks to participate in and influence policy-making and policy implementation at EU and national level in support of EU objectives and priorities. The expected contributions in support of PROGRESS's outcomes and performance measures have been determined in collaboration with the networks.

The strategic framework serves both internal aims linked to management issues and external aims linked to PROGRESS's accountability. The framework will provide reliable information and recommendations on achieving greater effectiveness and efficiency in support of PROGRESS's results. It will also make the case for continuing Community intervention and support in the social field.

PROGRESS's monitoring framework which aims at translating in operational terms the strategic framework is being finalised with the assistance of an external management consulting company. Collection, compilation and analysis of performance data will commence shortly.

III. -CHALLENGES AHEAD

3.1. NEED FOR MORE JOINED-UP WORK

Opportunities to increase the consistency and efficiency afforded by PROGRESS's integrated nature have not been yet fully exploited. Silo culture is still widespread and may hinder PROGRESS's effectiveness and efficiency. Joined-up work among policy sections will be promoted when identifying policy funding priorities and delivering PROGRESS. Increasing policy coherence is increasingly important at a time when the EU is reflecting on its future policy priorities, in particular in the social field. Yet, promoting joined-up work poses several internal challenges related mainly to the need for strong coordination support and effective stewardship. Better forward planning designed to identify areas for collaborative work in support of EU social priorities will be developed in collaboration with the policy sections.

3.2. NEED TO IMPROVE PROGRESS'S EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

Two critical processes will determine PROGRESS's effectiveness and efficiency in support of the realisation of EU social priorities: the strategic process, which focuses on defining PROGRESS's goals, and the operational process, which focuses on developing processes and procedures for PROGRESS's delivery. These processes are distinct yet interrelated. Operational inefficiency may frustrate strategic accomplishment, thus threatening the commitment to PROGRESS's ultimate outcomes.

PROGRESS's cycle of planning, implementing, monitoring, reporting, and revising will add a key component: learning with a view to making decisions based on empirical information. Monitoring and evaluating the results of PROGRESS's activities will help to see what is working and what is not, and to take remedial or corrective action if need be. Ensuring that effectiveness and efficiency issues lie at the core of PROGRESS's operational delivery entails raising awareness and ownership at all appropriate levels, coupled with active, continuing leadership. To that end, preparatory work will be started in collaboration with policy sections on defining critical issues relating to PROGRESS's effectiveness and efficiency.

3.3. NEED TO CREATE A CRITICAL BASE FOR SUPPORT FOR PROGRESS'S OUTCOMES

As a catalyst for change, PROGRESS is about triggering momentum in support of EU objectives and priorities at Member State level. As a rule, no EU policy initiative can be sustained unless it enjoys a critical support base within the broad policy community. Engaging with relevant stakeholders is the path to follow to build consensus and create momentum for change and action. Participation breeds commitment.

PROGRESS provides policy/decision and opinion-makers with venues at which to build shared understanding, if not consensus, on policy options. More systematic scoping work is a pre-requisite for identifying relevant, supportive actors at both EU and national level. In addition, developing and marketing appropriate policy messages can help to secure such a critical support base. In addition, PROGRESS offers a unique opportunity to enrich broader civic culture by educating EU citizens about the nature of the world in which they live and about what the EU does to protect EU citizens and ensure that they can take up these new global challenges. Communication and networking outreach will thus be embedded in all priorities and activities of PROGRESS.

3.4. NEED TO DEVELOP COMPLEMENTARITY AND SYNERGY WITH OTHER EU PROGRAMMES OR AGENCIES

Addressing complementarity means avoiding duplication of effort and EU financing and more importantly it means creating synergy. Effectively promoting complementarities with other EU programmes, and first and foremost the European Social Fund, is conducive to work that is better joined-up, to greater effectiveness and efficiency of EU intervention and to a stronger critical support for EU social objectives. Mechanisms are in place to avoid duplication, mostly at the stage when PROGRESS's annual work plans are drafted and potential beneficiaries for EU support are being identified.

Much remains to be done, however, to promote real synergy. Work will be started on defining critical issues relating to these aspects.