

Evaluation of the European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion – Short summary

1. The context

In recent years the European Union has organised a series of 'European Years', which are designed to draw attention to a particular theme of interest to people and organisations at large, as well as to policy makers and professionals. 2010 was designated the European Year Against Poverty and Social Exclusion ('EY2010' or 'the Year'). The goal was to raise awareness, build new partnerships, create a momentum and get a strong political commitment to fighting poverty in Europe. Four more detailed objectives guided the Year: recognition of rights; shared responsibility; cohesion; commitment and concrete action.

An evaluation was carried out by the independent contractor ECORYS, to assess how the EY2010 played out and what impacts it has had and may have in future. The research included review of background documentation and data; surveys and individual consultations as well as in-depth studies of the results of the Year in the Bulgaria, Italy, Lithuania, Sweden and the UK; and attendance at events and several activities.

A total of €17,25 million was provided by the EU to support the Year, to which significant contributions (around €9 million) were added by Member States. During the Year, the European Commission and its partners, including civil society, EU institutions, public authorities and others carried out a series of activities – the key figures below give a flavour of these:

The EY2010 in figures:

- 29 participating countries;
- 80 million people at risk of poverty in the EU;
- Around 900 co-funded activities promoted either by National Implementing Bodies as by stakeholders in participating countries;
- At least 1800 further national and local activities using the logo;
- Around 40 EU events (organised by EU bodies or in partnership);
- 160 Ambassadors;
- 400 000 unique visitors on the website www.2010againstpoverity.eu;
- Over 10 000 printed/online articles;
- 1200 entries to the Journalist Award competition and 60 winners;
- 60 videos produced at EU level;
- 49 millions of viewers and listeners reached by broadcasted reports;
- 200 photos from 18 European countries participating in the Art Partner Project.

An important feature of the Year was that activity took place in each of the 29 participating countries, as well as at EU level. In each country National Implementation Bodies co-ordinated a range of events, projects and publicity campaigns that were tailored to national circumstances. Information and communication campaigns at pan-European and national levels formed a key part of the EY2010. The four main target groups were: public authorities, the media, stakeholders, people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, with a view to reach out to the general public as well.

2. Results of the evaluation

Because the Year took place at a time of persisting economic and financial crisis it proved **highly relevant and topical** to a wide audience. This meant added impact but at the same time posed challenges in terms of communicating messages on what can sometimes be a sensitive topic. The Year complemented existing EU initiatives in the field and increased the visibility of people experiencing poverty and social inclusion. By involving NGOs, social partners and other stakeholders, the Year addressed the need to expand participation in the design and implementation of social inclusion policies. In individual countries, EY2010 funding allowed a range of small-scale activities to take place, which could not otherwise have been implemented. In most countries activities to address the needs of all the main groups at risk were organised (children, youth, women, elderly, homeless people, migrants and ethnic minorities).

In terms of the **effectiveness and impact** of the EY2010, progress was made on all four of the EY2010 objectives. At EU level in particular commitment and concrete actions featured high in the evaluator's assessment of achievements (also because of a final Declaration of the Council on the Year). Key players at national level however remain cautious about the extent to which similar commitments and concrete actions will take root, especially given current constraints on public spending. EY2010 activities in the majority of countries attracted strong participation by stakeholders, particularly NGOs and associations. At EU level too, the Year afforded valuable opportunities for stakeholders to come together, make connections and identify areas of common interest. In terms of the impact on the general public, evidence suggests that information on the Year may have reached about one tenth of Europeans through the broadcast media. One of the goals of the EY2010 was to involve actors that are not traditionally involved in social inclusion policies, and this was achieved to a certain extent at national level; perhaps less so at EU level. Notably, a number of innovative approaches were tested during the Year: using social media for communication, engaging with journalists and participatory approaches to events. Examples of policy innovation were identified in a few countries: advanced participatory approaches to policy planning, evidence-based social policy, social entrepreneurship. Links with other policy themes were made by some initiatives, notably in relation to health, justice and finance.

The Year should have **lasting effects** at national level in terms of visibility and capacity of the participating stakeholders and the development of fresh approaches to communicating and promoting social inclusion. At EU level there is cautious optimism about high-level developments in EU policy (specifically the headline targets on reducing poverty), which were helped by the momentum and interest in poverty and social exclusion created by the Year. In addition, the final Declaration of the Council represented a firm commitment of the EU and Member States to go beyond awareness-raising and give the Year 'a strong political legacy that delivers concrete results'¹.

It took some time to set up the system at EU and national level, largely because of the decision to use administrative structures that were already accredited by the EC for managing EU funding. However, on the whole, the **management of the Year by the European Commission** was judged satisfactory by National Implementation Bodies (NIBs) and stakeholders. The Consultative Committee supporting the NIBs and the EU expert stakeholders group were considered both valuable instruments. Procedures were judged clear, although there were requests for more guidance at an earlier stage. Cooperation between NIBs and the EY2010 task force worked

¹ Council Declaration on The European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion: *Working together to fight poverty in 2010 and beyond*, 3053rd Employment, Social Policy Health and Consumer Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, 6 December 2010.

satisfactorily, although for communication activities the division of tasks between EU and national levels was not always clear and smooth. Cooperation with the national correspondents of the communication contractor was satisfactory in most countries, despite some initial uncertainty on their roles. EC representations were involved and in certain countries also active in organising their own events.

Although the EY2010 is now over, it succeeded in injecting new momentum into the fight against poverty and social exclusion in Europe. As a result, those involved in the field have been energised and inspired to step up their efforts, collaborate across themes and look at new ways to tackle the challenges ahead. This mobilisation has increased the capacity of a range of key players to make a difference and a very strong policy lead from the EU has re-focused the future agenda. At an especially challenging time for the economy and society, the EY2010 opened many people's eyes to the reality of poverty and social exclusion in Europe; recognised the current and potential contributions of stakeholders and policy-makers, and reinforced the importance of listening to the voices of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion themselves. Maintaining the momentum started by the Year must now become the focus of attention.