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COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMME TO COMBAT SOCIAL EXCLUSION, 2002-2006

Developing Strategic Priorities for Implementing the Programme in 2002 and 2003

INTRODUCTION

The Social Exclusion Programme (SEP) is a key tool of the open method of coordination (OMC) in the field of social inclusion. If it is to make the maximum impact it needs to be developed taking account of the other main elements of the OMC. It should reinforce and add value to them. Thus, in selecting priorities and developing an implementation plan for the SEP it will be important to ensure that actions promoted:

- are consistent with the common objectives and priorities agreed at Nice and help to consolidate the new EU process;
- support the implementation and development of National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion (NAPs/incl);
- contribute to the strengthening of the network of institutions that will reinforce the social inclusion process over the longer term and the mobilisation all actors;
- build on the key messages agreed in the Joint Report on Social Inclusion and subsequent reports.

This paper sets out a list of priorities to provide the framework for developing actions under the SEP, with the aim of launching a first debate in the Programme Committee as a basis for drawing up a detailed work programme for 2002.

TIMEFRAME

The first question to address is how to plan forward the actions under the programme over a timeframe of five years. A long term perspective is indeed necessary for deciding on the allocation of commitment appropriations throughout the five years of the programme. In its original proposal¹, the Commission had considered that expenditure with the programme would be gradually increased during the first two years of

¹ Commission (2000) 368 final of 16 June 2000, Financial Statement.

implementation, until reaching a stable level after the third year. Despite the overall increase of the programme's appropriations to 75 mil. €, instead of the original 70 million, the Commission considers that its original approach continues to be justified, on the grounds that spending will tend to increase over time with the mobilisation and familiarisation of stakeholders vis-à-vis the new EU process . Therefore, the Commission envisages a gradual increase of spending during the first two years, starting at a level close to 11 mil. € in 2002, to reach 17 mil. € after 2004.

From such a long term perspective, attention should also be drawn to the need for an evaluation of the programme, which should be carried out by the Commission by the end of the third year and at the end of the programme with the assistance of independent experts. To ensure that the evaluation makes the best possible contribution to the implementation of the programme and to the mid term review arrangements for a system of monitoring should be put in place from the start of 2002 for the period 2002-2004. The evaluation of the programme should support the implementation of the programme, should ensure that lessons from previous programmes are taken into account and should help to improve methodologies for identifying and exchanging good practice.

However, if we want to ensure that the SEP does reinforce the open method of coordination as a whole, it makes sense to take the recurring cycle of preparing and implementing two year National Action Plans (NAPs/incl) into account when preparing the implementation of the SEP. Thus the issues, priorities and lessons emerging from the first round of NAPs/incl and reflected in the Joint Report on Social Inclusion should provide the essential framework for setting priorities for the SEP for the next two years. These can then be modified for 2004-2005 in the light of the second round of the NAPs/incl and the second Joint Report in December 2003.

It will also be important to recognise in setting priorities that in the first year much of the effort will involve laying the foundations for future activities which will only come to fruition in the second and subsequent years. However, it will also be important for the whole social inclusion process that the 2002 work programme aims at making an impact early on as well as contributing to the longer term success of the programme. Thus a number of fairly immediate priorities will need to be taken into account when planning the first phase of the programme's implementation if it is to have the maximum impact.

LESSONS FROM NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

It is clear from the experience of the first round of NAPs/incl that there are a number of areas that could usefully be strengthened or clarified so as to assist with the preparation and implementation of NAPs/incl. There needs to be:

improved analysis, monitoring and evaluation

- better data and thus enhanced analysis of trends in and causes of poverty and social exclusion including gender analysis across all the fields;
- more and better indicators at both EU, national and (in some MS in particular) regional levels as the basis for more specific targets and better assessment of outcomes;
- more rigorous evaluation of policies and programmes to provide a better basis for identifying good practice and greater clarity as to what makes an appropriate example

of good practice and systematic gender impact assessment of policies and programmes;

- better analysis of the links between investment in social protection and public services and levels of poverty and social exclusion.

better strategic planning

- an enhanced long-term perspective and greater awareness of the implications of major structural changes in society;
- greater integration of policies and actions and, in some cases a more comprehensive and holistic approach;
- a more strategic approach to the interface between gender and poverty and social exclusion;

strengthened institutional arrangements

- enhanced mechanisms for mainstreaming poverty and social exclusion into all policy areas, economic as well as social;
- improved linkages between national action plans and national budgetary processes;
- better linkages between the employment process, the expenditure of Structural Funds and the NAPs/incl;
- better linkages between national and regional/local planning, in accordance with established distribution of competencies in policy making and delivery;
- enhanced mechanisms for mainstreaming equality between women and men into all policy areas, economic as well as social;
- more structured and effective mechanisms of consultation, dialogue and partnership with the key stakeholders (NGOs, social partners, regional and local authorities);
- strengthened mechanisms for involving those experiencing poverty and social exclusion in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of national plans.

attention given to underdeveloped issues

- greater awareness of justice and cultural dimensions of poverty and social exclusion;
- greater attention to the interaction between taxes, social benefits and incentives to take up jobs, so as to avoid falling in poverty traps;
- increased appreciation of the connection between access to fundamental rights and development of policies;
- more focus on encouraging the social responsibility and active engagement of all citizens and the business sector in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

BUILDING ON EXISTING EXPERIENCE

A considerable body of experience on both research and analysis and exchange of learning and best practice already exists. It will be important to build on and make the maximum use of this in developing the SEP. In this connection, one should highlight the important role of the Joint Report on Social Inclusion, in identifying the key structural changes, risk factors and policy challenges, and in presenting a wealth of examples of good practice deserving further examination and dissemination. Also, for the last three years exchange projects have been supported under preparatory actions for this programme and a further round of projects were approved late in 2001 which will be operational until mid 2003. Appropriate actions will be carried out with the aim of identifying and disseminating relevant lessons to be drawn from such projects. In addition, the work of the indicator group of the SPC maps out an important agenda for further research and development on indicators and statistical data.

PRIORITIES FOR 2002 AND 2003

Taking all the above considerations into account the following are some **initial suggestions** intended to help the Programme Committee in identifying the priority issues to be developed under the different strands of the SEP for the next two year period.

Strand 1 - Analysis

1.1. development of common methodologies

- support the development of methodologies for indicators for agreed priority areas identified in the SPC report on indicators (e.g. literacy, homelessness, access to education, inter-generational factors) and for other areas including the testing and development of gender specific indicators;
- analysis of the extent to which assumptions about the sharing of income within households or the different sources of income can affect poverty rates amongst both adults and children.
- support the development of methodologies for involving those experiencing poverty and social exclusion in the testing and development of indicators.

1.2 comparable statistics

- support the development and implementation of *Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC)* in collaboration with Eurostat;
- support the development of other statistical tools to fill data gaps including gender breakdown which are considered relevant in view of the conclusions of the work of the indicators group of the SPC.

1.3 thematic studies

While it is possible to think of a wide range of possible thematic studies that would be of interest to undertake over the next few years in reality it will only be possible to manage a small number effectively over this period. Thus in selecting priorities it will be important to focus on issues that are not being adequately covered by fundamental socio-economic

research², that are unlikely to be associated with actions carried out under strand 2.1 and that have a strong policy focus. The following areas are those where further studies might be particularly useful over the next two-year period:

- analysis of the implications of changing household structures and role of women and men for poverty and social exclusion and the identification of effective policy responses;
- analysis and identification of cultural policies and programmes that contribute to increased social inclusion;
- analysis and identification of most effective policy responses to ensure the effective inclusion of immigrants and their families;
- analysis and identification of policy responses which a) prevent child poverty and b) break the intergenerational inheritance of poverty;
- analysis of the importance of "poverty traps" and of the role played by the tax and benefit schemes, and identification of recent reforms that have proved to be effective in addressing such problems in a way that both supports people to move into employment and to achieve an adequate income;
- analysis of measures and policies in the field of justice to promote social inclusion;
- analysis of the extent to which public expenditure on key areas such as social protection, health and education influences the levels of poverty and social inclusion;
- analysis on how a rights based approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion can contribute to more effective policies and programmes;
- analysis of the social situation in candidate countries and of their policy approaches to tackling poverty and social exclusion.

Strand 2 Exchange of Best Practice

2.1 Transnational exchanges

Transnational policy co-operation and exchange of best practice can take many forms under the programme. It can involve thematic workshops and seminars, policy peer reviews, joint development of strategies and common dissemination of information, field visits and exchanges of personnel and exchanges between national observatories and similar recognised organisations. This strand also holds out particular opportunities for involving the wide range of public and/or private bodies, actors and institutions who are eligible to participate in the programme³. It is thus a key tool for making progress on a

² Such as the research projects supported through the 4th Community Research Framework Programme.

³ This includes Member States, local and regional authorities, bodies responsible for combating social exclusion, social partners, bodies providing social services, non-governmental organisations, universities and research institutes, national statistical offices and the media.

significant number of key issues. Priorities for policy co-operation and exchange for the next two years could include:

- drawing lessons for best practice emerging from projects of transnational exchange that have been supported since 1998 under the "preparatory actions", and disseminating the results of most relevant projects⁴;
- promoting public debate amongst different actors on the experience gained with the preparation and implementation of the first NAPs/incl, in the light of the common objectives set in Nice;
- setting out a programme of peer reviews, based on good practice identified in the Joint Report, and involving both policy-makers and main stakeholders, in order to assess the relevance of policies for other Member States and promote their dissemination;
- developing methods of identifying and evaluating examples of good practice (which could provide a basis for guidelines on good practice examples in the next NAPs/incl).
- developing local/regional anti-poverty strategies, and promoting their consistent linkages with national plans;
- developing methods of mainstreaming poverty/social exclusion across all policy areas (e.g. poverty proofing);
- developing gender mainstreaming and gender impact assessments in the context of social inclusion policies;
- developing policy approaches to using ICT to combat poverty and social exclusion;

- putting in place stakeholder mechanisms in order to mobilise and involve more closely social partners, NGOs, providers of social services and local /regional authorities in the implementation, monitoring and preparation of NAPs/incl;
- developing ways of promoting participation of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion in the NAPs/incl process;
- identifying national and regional observatories and similar recognised bodies in different Member States and their main areas of expertise, and promoting transnational exchanges between them;
- promoting visits and traineeships in other Member States for staff working in national or regional/local administrations, as well as in NGOs or social services involved in the delivery of policy actions that are relevant in the context of the NAPs/incl.

2.2 specific studies for the development of indicators

⁴ In this connection, it will be also important to network transnational projects being supported under 2001 "preparatory actions" and ensure that they are fully linked into the social inclusion process;

Under this heading, one would support focused technical studies and expert networks aiming at the development of indicators and benchmarks in the field of social inclusion, including those aspects relevant for the knowledge-based society.

2.3 annual report

Actions under this heading should contribute to underpin the Social Inclusion Joint Report, as the key policy document analysing the state of progress of implementation of the NAPs/incl. Such actions should be carried out throughout a sufficiently extended period, in order to allow for continuous monitoring of the implementation of policy actions described under the NAPs/incl.

Given that the European Council of Nice has agreed on a process based on NAPs/incl and a Joint Report to be submitted once every two years, this timeframe will continue to be assumed, until Member States decide to modify this arrangement and report annually on the implementation of their NAPs/incl.

One action proposed under this heading would be to support a network of national experts to undertake background work to assist in the preparation of the Joint Report.

3. Participation and Networking

3.1 core funding of networks

Actions under this heading will consist of core funding of European networks involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The networks will be selected on the basis of an open call for proposals to be published in the first semester of 2002.

3.2 Round Table conference

The purpose is to prepare for a Round Table conference in 2002 including consultation with all the actors concerned and involvement of candidate countries. Ideally the Round Table should serve to publicise the SEP towards a wider public. This point is taken up in a separate paper.

MODALITIES OF IMPLEMENTATION

In accordance with the Decision the actions under each strand call for specific forms of support, which can be described by the following table:

STRANDS	Call for tenders	Eurostat procedures	Call for proposals	Request for support
1.1	X			
1.2		X		
1.3	X		X	
2.1	X		X	
2.2	X			

2.3	X			
3.1			X	
3.2.				X

Once the key priorities are established, the Commission will propose a detailed programme of work for 2002, making explicit the modalities of support to be provided for each action.

ENLARGEMENT

A key task during the first two years will be to identify how the SEP can contribute to preparing the candidate countries for their full involvement in the Open Method of Co-ordination following their accession (possibly in early 2004). This will require negotiations with the candidate countries on the modalities of their participation in the programme, including the financial aspects, which will be carried out by the Commission during the first quarter of 2002. It is expected that as a result of these negotiations, most candidate countries will be able to participate in some of the actions of this programme already in 2002.