



REF SEP 2/01 EN Rev.

COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMME TO COMBAT SOCIAL EXCLUSION 2002-2006

Subject: General guidelines for the implementation of the programme

Background

1. The Council of Ministers and the European Parliament reached political agreement on the Commission's proposal for a Community Action Programme programme to encourage cooperation between Member States to combat social exclusion, hereinafter referred to as the Social Exclusion Programme (SEP), on 18 September 2001. Following finalisation by the jurist-linguists of the Council, the decision was jointly signed by the Presidents of the Council and the Parliament on 22 November. The decision will be published formally in the Official Journal of the European Communities in the coming weeks.
2. The Council decision provides the legal framework for the implementation of the decision. Nevertheless, it provides no more than a framework, allowing the Community a degree of freedom in how it chooses to use the budget at its disposal. The decision provides that the Commission is responsible for the implementation of the programme, but that this implementation will be overseen and supported by a Committee made up of representatives of the Member States. In a number of defined areas, the Committee has a power of decision.
3. The Community action programme to encourage cooperation between Member States to combat social exclusion is a key element in the Open Method of Co-ordination which was agreed at the Lisbon Summit (March 2000) with the aim of making a decisive impact on poverty and social exclusion. It is thus a key means of advancing the common objectives on tackling poverty and social exclusion agreed at the Nice Summit (December 2000). This action programme is also intended to complement and support the process of preparing, implementing and monitoring National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion (NAPs/incl).
4. It has three distinct but interconnected **objectives**:

- improving the understanding of social exclusion and poverty with the help in particular of comparable indicators;
- organising exchanges on policies which are 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 level.

(taken from Article 2 of the Council Decision)

5. These are reflected in its three **strands** which are summarised below:

Strand 1 Analysis of characteristics, processes, causes and trends in social exclusion

- 1.1 studies and meetings on development of **common methodologies**
- 1.2 collection and dissemination of **comparable statistics**
 - co-operation between national statistical offices and the Commission
 - improve statistical reference sources and their analysis at Community level
- 1.3 development of innovative approaches and **thematic studies** to contribute to understanding of social exclusion

Strand 2 Policy co-operation and exchange of information and best practice

- 2.1 transnational **exchanges** aimed at transferring information and good practices and encouraging peer review
 - policy meetings/workshops/seminars on benchmarks, policies & practices
 - joint development of strategies & common dissemination of information
 - field visits and exchanges of personnel
 - transnational exchanges between national observatories or similar recognised organisations
- 2.2 expert work & **technical studies** concerning development of indicators and benchmarks, including in relation to knowledge-based society
- 2.3 **annual report** on social exclusion

Strand 3 Participation of stakeholders & support to EU level **networking**

- 3.1 core funding for key **European networks**

3.2 an annual **EU Round Table Conference** (in collaboration with the EU Presidency and involving EP, Council, Economic and Social Committee & Committee of the Regions)

6. It is clear from the above that the SEP is a complex and multi-faceted programme with a number of distinct actions which require different methods of implementation and different time scales. In general, a proactive role of the Commission is expected, in the framework of the decisions taken by the Programme Committee. It will also be important to ensure that actions under the different strands reinforce each other, that real synergies are achieved between them and that their timing is consistent with the development of the overall social inclusion process. In particular it is important that the programme incorporates a gender mainstreaming approach in all activities.

General Guidelines

7. Within the framework of co-operation described above, the Commission services put forward the following proposals for the guidelines for discussion with the Committee. These guidelines are closely based on the Council Decision and are intended to supplement and expand on the framework which it provides.
8. 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 Decision. The Programme Committee is made up of representatives of the Member States in accordance with Council Decision 1999/468/EC.
9. On the basis of the priority areas to be addressed identified by the Programme Committee, the Commission will prepare a draft annual work programme to be agreed by the Programme Committee.
10. The programme begins on 1 January 2002 and will run for 5 years. The Commission proposes that the implementation of the programme should be focused around the two year cycle of the Social Inclusion Process. Thus outputs from the programme should feed into future rounds of National Action Plans against poverty and Social Exclusion.
11. In implementing the programme, the Community will work with a wide range of partners who have a contribution to make to furthering the understanding of poverty and social exclusion and of measures to promote social inclusion. The partnerships with the Community will be based on formal agreements in accordance with the nature of the activity concerned (studies, surveys, research, projects, conferences, awareness raising events, publications etc.), following the appropriate procedures (calls for tender, calls for proposals, framework contracts, Eurostat procedures etc.). The procedures for the conclusion of such agreements will be based on the Commission's Vade Mecums on Grant Management and on Procurement and Contracts.
12. In implementing the programme, the Commission will have a regular exchange of views with representatives of non-governmental organisations and the social partners at European level on the design, implementation and follow-up of the programme. For this purpose, the Commission proposes to convene regular meetings with the European Platform of Social NGOs and with organisations

represented in the European Social Dialogue. The Commission may, in addition, invite representatives of other organisations which it believes could make a valuable contribution to the debate. To ensure as wide a possible coverage of civil society organisations, the Commission will make use of the database of civil society organisations currently being established by the Secretariat General of the Commission. The Commission will inform the Programme Committee of the opinions of the NGOs and the social partners. The Commission recommends that joint meetings should be organised between the Committee and the representatives of NGOs and the social partners to ensure that their views are directly taken into account in the decision-making process.

13. The Commission and the Member States, in accordance with the views of the Programme Committee, will disseminate the results of the actions undertaken in the framework of the programme and will provide accessible information and appropriate publicity and follow-up with regard to actions supported by the programme. The Commission will present to the Committee a plan for the dissemination of the results of the programme at a later meeting.
14. The Commission shall regularly monitor this programme in cooperation with the Programme Committee. The programme will also be evaluated with the assistance of independent experts by the end of the third year and at the end of the programme. This evaluation will assess the relevance, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of activities implemented with regard to the objectives of the Programme. It will also examine the impact of the programme as a whole and the complementarity between actions under the programme and those pursued under other relevant Community policies, instruments and actions.

Relations with the Social Protection Committee and Other Committees

15. The development of the SEP has to be consistent with other relevant Community policies, instruments and actions relating to research, employment, economic, industrial and enterprise policies, non-discrimination, immigration, equality between men and women, social protection, education, training and youth policy, health and enlargement. Appropriate consultations when setting the priorities and developing the work programme will thus be especially important. To ensure the consistency and complementarity of this programme with other activities, the Commission shall keep the Committee regularly informed about other Community action contributing to combating social exclusion. Particular attention should be given to EQUAL and to action programmes promoting exchanges of good practice in the social area.
16. Of crucial importance in order to ensure that the SEP contributes as fully as possible to the overall Open Method of Coordination will be close and regular liaison with the Social Protection Committee. To ensure a strong synergy between the work of the two committees, including the work of the Indicators Subgroup, the Commission shall establish the necessary links. Moreover, it will be important that links are established also between the Members of the two Committees at national level.