# Peer Review on "Social Activation and Participation"

**Thematic Discussion Paper**

## Tackling exclusion in EU Member States

**Brussels (Belgium), Peer Review on "Social Activation and Participation", 25-26 February 2021**

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

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*February 2021*

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Unit C.1

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This document has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014-2020). For further information please consult: http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi

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# 1 Introduction

This paper will provide a comparative perspective across the EU on social activation measures.

Social activation is understood as 'a labour market policy instrument that does not aim directly at labour market integration, but rather at stimulating and increasing the social competences and participation of those very far removed from the labour market via work-related activities or activities which are to the benefit of the community as a first step in a process of socio-professional integration.' (Freier, Carolin, 2016) In Belgium (see: Marx, 2021) a roughly similar definition is used: 'Social activation and participation policies are distinct but not entirely separate from the broader set of activation policies that seek to promote professional integration and mobility. Social activation and participation policies are therefore specifically for people who are deemed to be far removed from the labour market because of health, housing, care, sociopsychological or other difficulties. They aim to stimulate participation in society and to break social isolation by encouraging and facilitating socially meaningful activities, either as an end in itself or as a first step in a process of socio-professional integration, and possibly paid re-employment.'

This approach, primarily aimed at social inclusion, is related to the goals of income support and inclusive labour markets. Section 1 provides an overview of relevant EU policies and outlines the existing differences in labour market and economic outcomes across the EU. Section 2 covers the policy context of activation policies and social activation. Examples in this area are highlighted in section 3 and discussion points are presented in section 4.

## 1.1. EU policy context

Social activation, targeted at those very far removed from the labour market, links with the 'active inclusion' approach outlined in the Recommendation on Active Inclusion from 2008 (European Commission, 2008). Active inclusion consists of the provision and integration or coordination of three areas:

- Income support
- Inclusive labour markets
- Access to high-quality social services

Income support systems in Member States are an important part of social security systems and consist of unemployment benefits, family and child benefits, pensions, disability benefits and minimum income schemes. They function as supplementary or replacement to income derived from employment with the aim to reduce poverty and income inequality.

With respect to income, further EU policy efforts are aimed at identifying challenges regarding minimum income schemes: their *adequacy*, their *coverage* and the *non-take-up*. For this purpose, two complementary approaches with respect to minimum income schemes can be distinguished at EU level:

- raising awareness about their importance, which is being done through the civil society initiative, the European Minimum Income Network1 and the Minimum Income Network2 for mutual learning and the exchange of good practices on minimum income;

[1] https://emin-eu.net/
[2] See also Council Conclusions (9 October 2020): Strengthening Minimum Income Protection to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion in the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/46078/11721-re02-en20.pdf which resonates with the Active Inclusion Recommendation.

- monitoring adequacy of income support as part of the European Semester and developing with Member States a common EU methodology on reference budgets.

Secondly, labour markets are inclusive when everyone of working age can participate in paid work, especially vulnerable and disadvantaged people. Promoting inclusive labour markets means that people can easily join (or re-join) the workforce and are incentivised to do so, as well as promoting quality jobs and preventing in-work poverty, focusing on pay, working conditions, health and safety, lifelong learning and career prospects helping people to stay in work and advance in their careers. In this context, the European Employment Strategy (EES, 1997) establishes a set of common objectives and targets for employment policy. Its main aim is the creation of more and better jobs throughout the EU.

Thirdly, active inclusion foresees the access to quality social services such as early childhood education and care, long-term care or social housing, which address needs-based pre-requisites for individuals to access employment.

The active inclusion approach links with the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017) and its 20 key principles aiming to address poverty and secure social inclusion. Since the nature of the Pillar is non-binding, its principles are not directly enforceable and require the adoption of legislative and administrative measures at national and local level.

Principle 4 states: 'Everyone has the right to timely and tailor-made assistance to improve employment or self-employment prospects. This includes the right to receive support for job search, training and re-qualification. Everyone has the right to transfer social protection and training entitlements during professional transitions. […] People unemployed have the right to personalised, continuous and consistent support. The long-term unemployed have the right to an in-depth individual assessment at the latest at 18 months of unemployment.'

Furthermore, Principle 14 states: 'Everyone lacking sufficient resources has the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life, and effective access to enabling goods and services. For those who can work, minimum income benefits should be combined with incentives to (re)integrate into the labour market.'

Closely related to the European Pillar of Social Rights, in 2016, the EU Council adopted the Recommendation on the Integration of the Long-Term Unemployed (LTU*)* into the Labour Market. The aim of the Recommendation was to support sustainable reintegration of the long-term unemployed back into the labour market by calling on Member States to:

- encourage long-term jobseekers to register with an employment service;
- provide every registered long-term unemployed person with individual in-depth assessment and guidance, and a job integration agreement (JIA) with a single point of contact (SPOC) after a maximum of 18 months of unemployment;
- develop closer links with employers and partnerships to increase job opportunities for the registered long-term unemployed.

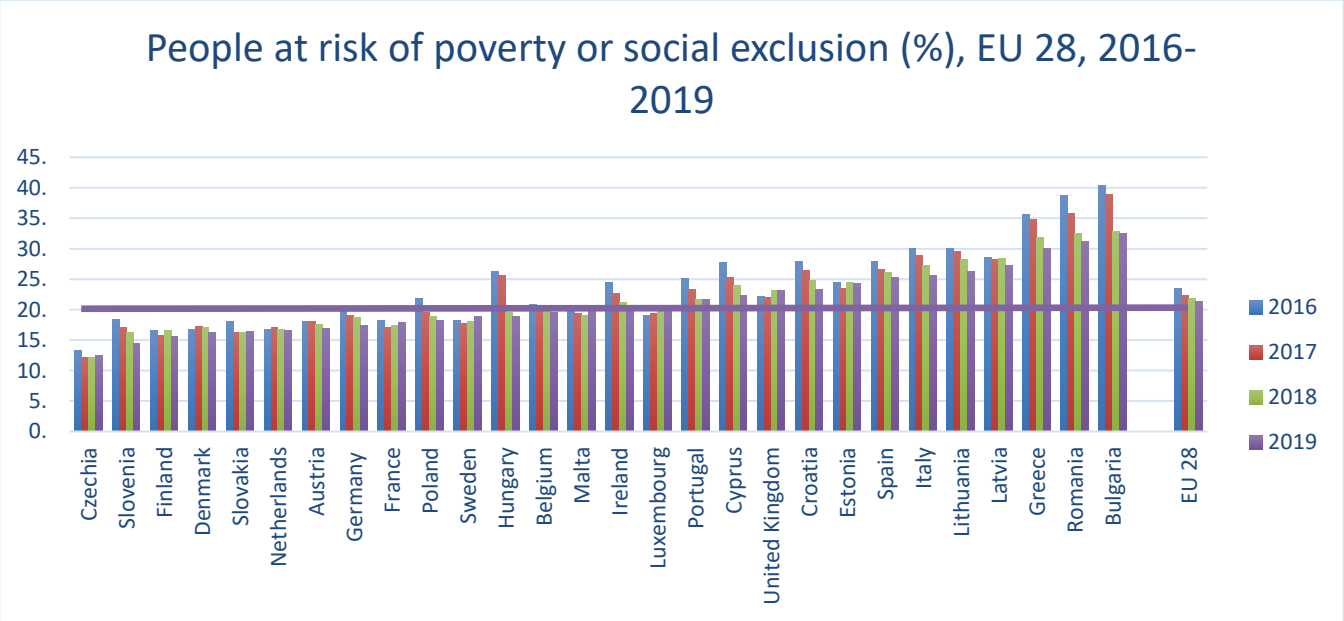
## 1.2 State of play

This section compares labour market and income outcomes for the EU28 countries in 2016-2019. Differences in these outcomes are indicative of the scope and scale of the challenges of social protection systems in Member States. Countries with low levels of social exclusion problems (such as unemployment, poverty and social exclusion) have fewer challenges in this policy area than countries with high levels of social exclusion problems.

Before the onset of the COVID-19 related social and economic crisis, several socio-economic indicators had improved. However, the target of the Europe 2020 Strategy to lift 20 million people out of poverty was not met. In addition, concerns prevail over the 'uneven income distribution, including increasing depth of poverty, the rising risk of poverty for people living in (quasi-)jobless households and the limited progress towards the Europe 2020 target to reduce poverty and social exclusion'[3].

As shown in Figure 1, in most EU Member States the population share of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion (AROPE)[4] decreased in the 2016-2019 period. In Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria the decrease is more pronounced. In 2019, the average population share at risk of poverty was 22 per cent. Poverty is higher than the EU average in the Baltic States (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia), Eastern (Romania, Bulgaria) and Southern (Greece, Spain, Italy) European Member States. Poverty was less severe in the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Finland, Slovakia, Denmark and the Netherlands. Poland and Hungary managed to change from 'above average' to 'below average' in this period.

*Figure 1.*




*Source: Eurostat (ilc_peps01)*

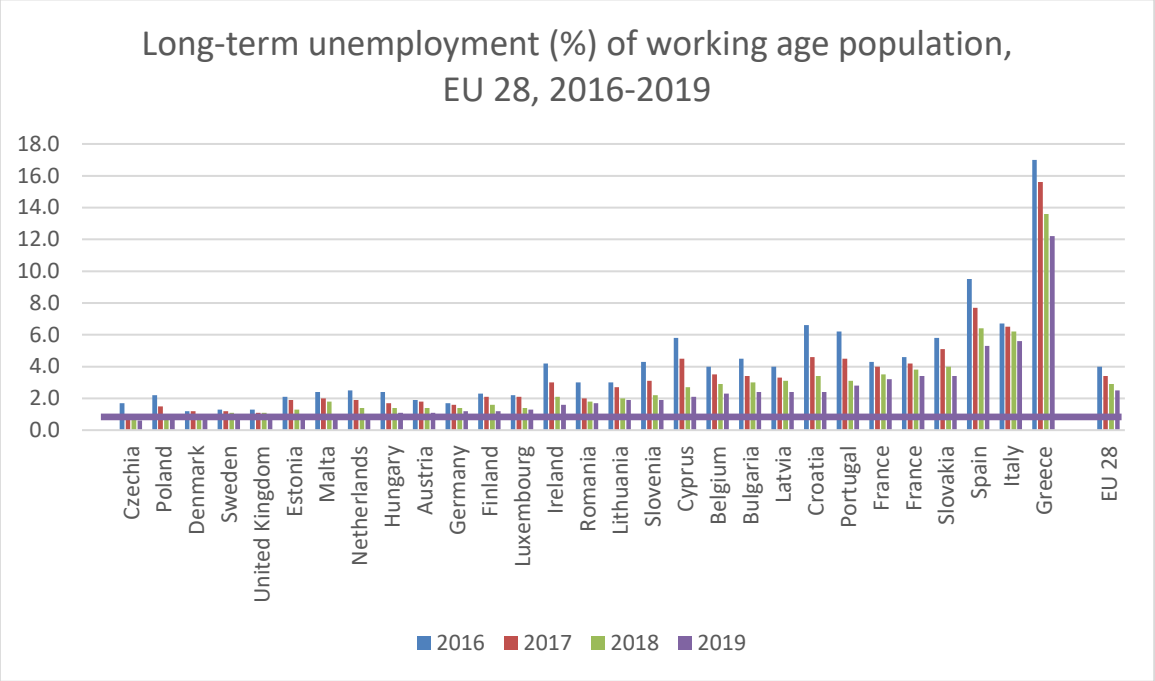
When looking at long-term unemployment, the average percentage of the working age population who was long-term unemployed was somewhat above 2 per cent on average in the EU28 in 2019. In all countries this percentage has decreased, which is indicative of the good overall economic outcomes in this period. Long-term unemployment is particularly concentrated in Southern European Member States (Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal, France) and also in Slovakia and Croatia. Cyprus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Latvia have reduced long-term unemployment attaining the EU average in recent years. Lower levels of long-term unemployment are found in Czechia, Poland, the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany and Austria.

[3] European Commission, 2020. Social Protection Committee annual review of the Social Protection Performance Monitor (SPPM) and developments in social protection policies. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9820&furtherNews=yes (17.02.2021)

[4] This corresponds to the population share of persons who are either:

- at risk of poverty, or
- severely materially deprived or
- living in a household with a very low work intensity.

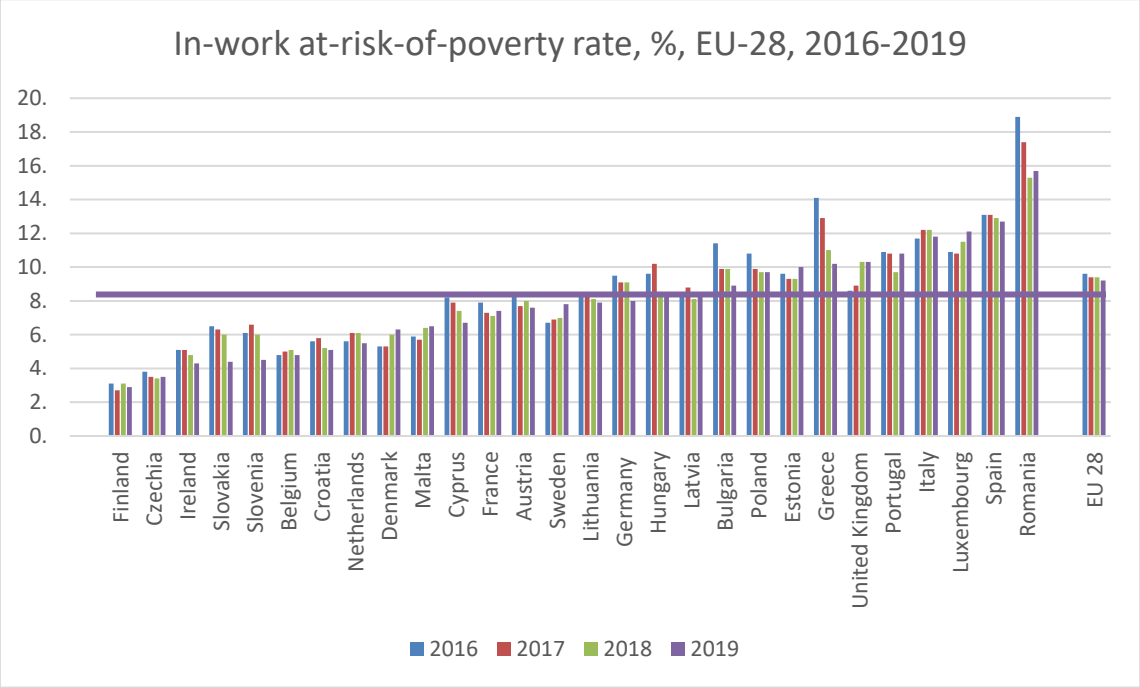
*Figure 1*




*Source: Eurostat [une_ltu_a]*

Interestingly, there has not been a uniform decrease in the incidence of in-work-poverty in the 2016-2019 periods. Countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Luxembourg experienced a sizeable increase. This can partly be explained by the larger share of flexible labour contracts in some industry sectors (e.g. hotels/restaurants and cleaning services). On average, about 9 per cent of the active workforce is at risk of poverty in the EU. In-work poverty is larger than average in Poland, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Spain, Romania and Luxembourg.

*Figure 2*




*Source: Eurostat, ILC_IW01*

# 2 Policy context

## 2.1 Active inclusion: from protection (income support) to activation

The figures presented above illustrate the relative size of the problem of social inclusion in the different Member States. These differences play an important role in how Member States deal with exclusion and how they implement active inclusion and social activation policies. Furthermore, welfare approaches and institutions, as well as labour market regulation, impact on the policy responses for those furthest removed from the labour market. For example, possibilities for labour market entry, the adequacy, coverage and non-take-up of minimum income, as well as costs for social activities, housing and/or transport play a role for social inclusion.

In order to implement active inclusion and social activation, social protection systems need to be supportive for vulnerable groups. They consist of roughly three pillars, each dealing with a form of social security in a broad sense. The first pillar is *income support*, which serves as a complement to the *income (security)* that people can derive from the labour market. Because the labour market is such an important source of income and income security, the second pillar is *labour market re-integration*. If done effectively, this is a major contribution to *employment security*, which in turn will produce income security. The third pillar of social protection systems is *access to enabling services*. This are the services that constitute active inclusion in the narrow sense, in particular for people who are not work ready and lack social participation. This access to enabling services contributes to *participation security.*

The concept of active inclusion captures the idea that minimum income systems – the last-resort systems of income support for individuals and households whose income falls below a socially agreed standard – require significant reforms (Clegg 2016). This basically means that minimum income support systems are not capable of effectively supplementing labour income. This is a serious problem since labour markets in most Member States have become more 'flexible' and provide less income security, especially for the groups that rely on income support policies.

While restating the case for the vital role of adequate safety nets in the contemporary European social model, active inclusion also represents the extension of the longer established principle of activation to people in receipt of social assistance, who are often thought to be more distant from the labour market or face particular barriers to enter employment. Because of the presumed characteristics of the groups targeted by the active inclusion approach, it is however suggested that simple activation alone may not be enough to effectively combat poverty risks. Hence, the linkage of income support with labour market services must be complemented by the provision of enabling social, health or other services that can help address complex barriers to employment and social inclusion.

Partly because of the recent EU approaches outlined in Section 1.1. above, but also as a response to the financial and fiscal crisis beginning in 2008, all Member States have shifted their policies towards activation of people furthest removed from the labour market, such as people who are long-term unemployed or the inactive working population. This shift of activation in Member States aligns with the role of the State to promote 'active citizenship'.

Although all countries shifted towards activation policies, Member States' approaches still vary. In general, there are more comprehensive activation approaches in the Nordic countries, a focus on quick labour market integration mixing compensatory and activation labour market policies mostly in the Western European states, emerging activation regimes and residual labour market policies in the Southern, Central and Eastern European countries (Heidenreich, 2012). These activation approaches focus primarily on employment to achieve the social inclusion of vulnerable people.

Activation policies were mainly driven by more liberal labour markets firstly pursued by the Anglo-Saxon countries with a focus on workfare or welfare-to-work and more

'universalistic' tendencies in Scandinavian countries. The former 'work-first' approach includes outsourcing, targeted service provision and conditionality. It has been widely debated as often these welfare-to-work policies did not bring the expected results, such as reducing long-term unemployment and in-work poverty (Raffass, T. 2017). Private and non-profit service providers are often remunerated by a payments-by-results basis with specific targets for labour market integration. Several welfare states have set up a 'quasi-market' for labour market reintegration and other social services in which private services or not-for-profit providers are either commissioned by (local) governments or directly chosen by clients. It is not entirely clear whether outsourcing of such services leads to better outcomes, but there is research that not-for-profit and commercial providers act differently. For-profit service providers seem to focus more on those 'closer to the labour market' compared to not-for-profit service providers (Greer et al, 2018). Moreover, outsourcing of services poses additional questions around the coordination of these services and the capacity of public authorities in handling often complex procurement procedures (van Berkel et al, 2011).

In addition, labour market activation is linked in some countries to the complicated issue of sanctions. Sanctions are often applied when beneficiaries to not meet requirements in terms of searching for a job in order to incentivise jobseekers to re-enter employment. In the context of Anglo-Saxon welfare states (e.g. in the UK), it has long been the case that receiving income support is conditional based on several responsibilities of the unemployed and low-paid citizens themselves (Dwyer and Wright, 2017: 33). Sanctions are often at odds with the policy goals of social justice and social rights (Withworth and Griggs, 2013) and raise questions about their effectiveness (see, for example, Escudero, 2018). An interesting case exists in the Netherlands, where volunteering is compulsory for social assistance recipients with the so-called '*Tegenprestatie'* (counterpart) and a pre-requisite for receiving benefits.

In contrast, in the Nordic approach, activation is based on the access and quality of support services and tailoring employment to individual needs. Here, the focus lies not so much on conditional elements, but rather on the individual treatment of the person and their rights. In addition, the Danish labour market policies build on the 'flexicurity model' based on more flexible rules for hiring and redundancy, social security and active labour market policies which focus on employment and training programmes, as well as obligations to take part in those measures.

Western European countries often combine the two approaches as they provide a wider set of services and benefits, such as the access to childcare or support measures for carers and a higher investment into active and passive labour market policies. Emerging activation regimes in Southern and Eastern European countries are characterised with a lower investment in social services, child or long-term care and lower expenditures for active and passive labour market policies. These countries have often also focussed more on traditional active labour market policies, such as training or subsidised employment, and less on personal and skills development.

A similarity is however that all approaches require improved horizontal coordination between various policies and sectors, cooperation between different actors, as well as the implementation to take place at different national and local governance levels (Heidenreich & Aurich-Beerheide, 2014). In the social domain, we can observe a shift to a more holistic approach where social, health, education, housing and employment services are all considered important part of activation. The combination of different policy interventions (labour market re-integration and debt relief) or using the same intervention for different target groups (unemployed, persons with disabilities) are examples which could lead to economies of scale and scope (Immervoll et al, 2013).

## 2.2 Active inclusion and social activation

Social activation policies are generally embedded in the wider set of active inclusion policies. It is therefore not always easy to single out specific social activation policies and interventions. Social activation measures are not primarily aimed at reintegration

into the labour market, but into society at large. This would, in theory, mean that the scope (and the target group) widens to include senior citizens beyond retirement age. Nevertheless, the primary focus still seems to be on the age group which is the potential workforce.

For those people excluded from (income from) gainful employment in this group the following subdivision can be made:

| Level of exclusion | Exclusion from: | Primary focus in social policy | Secondary focus in social policy |
|---|---|---|---|
| Temporary | Labour market | Income support & labour market reintegration | Labour market reintegration |
| Long-term | Labour market | Income support | Labour market reintegration, possibly preceded by social activation |
| | Society | Income support | Social activation, with possible follow-up by labour market integration |
| Structural | Labour market | Income support | Labour market reintegration or social activation |
| | Society | Income support | Social activation |

So, for the temporary excluded (unemployed) persons, the welfare state provides income support in the form of unemployment benefits and labour market reintegration services. For long-term unemployed, the same applies, albeit the income support is more likely to be social assistance and it is likely that labour market reintegration measures are preceded or combined with social activation services. When those most excluded from the labour market are also at a distance from society at large, social activation is the preferred option, next to income support. For those who are structurally excluded (e.g. through mental health problems or disabilities), labour market reintegration is still an option, but for some social activation might be the pinnacle outcome. For the structurally excluded, labour market reintegration might come in the form of sheltered employment and/or job guarantee schemes. When policy makers are not able or do not want to provide this option, social activation is even more important.

In different Member States, governments must deal with different numbers of people at every level of exclusion. One could argue that countries with high numbers of people who are structurally excluded from the labour market and society at large should put more effort in active inclusion, but it is likely that these Member States have sizeable challenges for the groups at other levels of exclusion too. So, it is certainly possible that governments focus on groups that experience less severe levels of exclusion, either because that is more 'manageable' or more financially rewarding from a government budget perspective.

# 3 Social activation approaches in Member States

As with other EU policy areas, the implementation of a policy across Europe is not a 'one size fit all'. Each country needs to take its national situation in to consideration and specifics are needed to understand the reasons behind policy implementation

gaps. As a result, different pathways for national policy implementation can be distinguished (see e.g. Dekker & Wilthagen, 2014). An earlier Peer Review (Nicaise. I, 2004) on the topic categorises social activation into six areas:

- voluntary work in clubs and associations (in some cases, beneficiaries were encouraged to continue to pursue the voluntary activities they have already done informally);
- other socially useful or cultural activities;
- probationary jobs: the duration of employment and the type of work performed must be different from the work done by beneficiaries in subsidised employment projects. The activities can take place in social enterprises and include, for example, domestic services or recycling;
- continuous training: vocationally oriented courses (e.g. ICT courses) or courses aimed at the development of personal and social competences (e.g. cycling for migrant women);
- support such as debt management, drug rehabilitation, psychological care, etc.;
- other tailor-made/needs-based measures such as competence assessment/assessment of own skills.

While there is extensive research on activation targeted at employment, there is less literature on social activation approaches which aim to support personal and skills development and the integration into society.

Social activation measures are therefore often offered alongside with active labour market policies. They include mostly recipients of basic income support and often include a range or mixture of programme types provided to the beneficiaries. Five programme types can be defined:

- counselling, monitoring and (job) placement agreements;
- qualification or training programmes;
- work incentive schemes in the public and private sector;
- wage subsidies;
- and social programmes.

Here, social activation links with labour market activation as a 'broad range of policies and measures targeted at people receiving public income support or in danger of becoming permanently excluded from the labour market' (Drøpping, B. et al, 1999). These policies and measures can cover 'various forms of education, vocational training or retraining, group process, coaching and practice programmes and even through the channelling of financial resources' (Ibid.).

In Scandinavian countries, social activation measures go along with other measures to support employment, also with an increasing focus on work first. Support offered to those furthest away from the labour market often includes help establishing social networks. For example, in Sweden, there are activation measures labelled 'Human Capital Development' that consist of skills training for a long-term integration into employment and wider societal integration. This includes foreign language training or a specified vocational skills training. These activities targeted at education are often combined with activities for labour market integration and show positive results in terms of more sustainable, long-term job placement. In addition, 'social activities' are offered in Sweden which included handicraft workshops and are mainly targeted at people who were not work ready and placed outside the activation measures aiming at employment (Nybom, 2011).

In Germany, non-work-related activation measures have not been officially titled as instruments of activation, but are increasingly offered to social assistance recipients as one of several measures by the so-called *Job Center*, the public employment offices (Freier, 2016). Although their basic orientation contradicts the focus on activating labour market policies (which aim to integrate people directly into the labour market), they are also a form of support provided by the State. In such measures - for example, theatre workshops, dance or sport activities - participants gain social and everyday skills. Similar to the active inclusion approach, social counselling is also offered to deal with wider health, financial, social or family problems in order to make employment possible in the long term.

In contrast, in countries like Belgium or the Netherlands, social activation measures are a more distinct policy instrument. They are local instruments to foster participation in society and include a range of activities, such as voluntary work, work trial placements, training and language courses, time management, sports and cultural activities (Dekker & Van der Aa, 2000). This requires the cooperation between social workers, health care institutions, training centres and other agencies. Since the adoption of the 'Work and Welfare Act' in the Netherlands in 2004, there has been a shift from a social activation orientation towards 'work-first' approaches (Konle-Seidl, 2020). This legislation, however, regulates that local authorities receive a lump-sum for social assistance and welfare work, and are given more freedom regarding the use of the funds. Social activation thus becomes a legally anchored step on the way towards work or - where this is not possible – towards social inclusion. In this way, the possibilities of cities to develop their own programmes and measures for social integration are considerably expanded.

## 3.1 Examples of social activation at national level

In this paragraph a selection of examples from three countries is presented. As mentioned above, the many social activation measures are linked with wider active labour market policies that aim for labour market integration. Some of these example projects contain interventions and activities such as: counselling, psychological support, volunteering or community activities. Only few of these examples (projects, programmes or other policy interventions) are formally evaluated with explicit mention of their outcomes and/or their actual effectiveness. More often they are evaluated less formally or evaluation is lacking completely.

### 3.1.1 A recent focus on social activation in Slovenia

In August 2017, the Ministry of Labour started with social activation programmes, which aim at both employment and social inclusion. This goes along with a legal amendment to the legislation regulating better access to social services. It covers a reorganisation of the centres for social work to focus on social work and social activation measures and to link their work better with the public employment service and employers (ILO, 2016).

Social activation programmes are mainly targeted at 12,500 of the most-hard-to-employ and vulnerable people. Social activation in Slovenia has become a recognisable concept in national documents, where two distinct views of activation are recognised. The first is primarily concerned with employment activation and focuses mainly on the behaviour of job seekers. The second view stresses the importance of strengthening the capabilities, competences, sources for empowerment and the daily functioning of marginalised individuals. Here, social activation is also understood as an integrated approach of different services (employment, social, health and education) to individual needs in order to establish the most suitable solution for vulnerable groups to enter employment.

In response to the fact that the number of long-term unemployed persons and recipients of social assistance is increasing, the Ministry launched a pilot project on social activation. It provided short, long and intermediate programmes for beneficiaries, that were not necessarily designed according to their needs. Data

collected from 16 coordinators in the project showed that these coordinators perceive an integrated approach of social activation as empowering for beneficiaries, supporting them to re-enter the labour market.

### 3.1.2 Discussions around decentralisation in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, municipalities are responsible for social assistance for long-term unemployed and people in sheltered employment. The 2015 '*Participatiewet'* (Participation Act) also delegated social assistance and labour market reintegration services for young disabled people to local authorities. The Participation Act aims at an equal participation for everyone in society, including via employment in the open labour market; thus access to sheltered employment was restricted and employers were encouraged to hire people more distant to the labour market, also by fulfilling a employment quota and (financially) incentivising them.

At the same time, the '*Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning'* (Social Support Act, WMO) regulated that municipalities assess, decide and coordinate social (long-term) care via social care practitioners. During so-called 'kitchen table conversations', social care practitioners, beneficiaries and specialised services providers discuss the needs of beneficiaries with the explicit goal of improving their self-sufficiency and social inclusion.

All of this was done with the idea in mind that a decentralised implementation of these social policies by municipalities would improve access to services for beneficiaries, by increasing the proximity of these services in line with community-based approaches.

However, the recent evaluation of the Participation Act showed no improved results in terms of labour market reintegration for social assistance recipients and people who subsequently lost sheltered employment. For young people with disabilities, their chances to work have slightly improved, but their income situation has worsened, also because they had to rely more on precarious employment. The evaluation also showed that many in the Act's target group were not yet able to work, mostly due to health problems. Moreover, employers were often not aware of the hiring incentives local authorities offer (ESPN, 2020). For social inclusion, formal evaluation is lacking.

An earlier evaluation of the WMO suggested it is time for a 'rethink' of the long-term care system, including its decentralisation. The evaluation shows that some goals are not achievable for all groups of people in need of care/support and that some of the underlying policy assumptions are not tenable. For example, there is no tangible increase in social participation among people with disabilities living independently rather than in sheltered settings. Furthermore, striving for more self-sufficiency for beneficiaries is not practically feasible for all groups.

This reorganisation and decentralisation of social support services also went along with a significantly reduced budget for these services, which may have impacted on the successful implementation of the Participation Act. Gains in effectiveness and efficiency, if any, by implementing these policies at the local level were not sufficient to compensate for the budget cuts. As a result, several improvements of the Participation Act were suggested, such as increasing funding targeted at those the furthest away from the labour market, effective job matching and an early warning system for vulnerable groups (ESPN, 2020).

### 3.1.3 Germany: varying approaches to social activation

In Germany, the *Job Center* offer people who have been long-term unemployed social activation measures. These are often people who have substance abuse issues, high debts or experience loneliness. They are moreover very likely to remain unemployed, even in times of economic prosperity. Therefore, the measures aim to support people with little chances of entering the labour market with daily routines, every-day skills, social contacts and self-esteem. They are often also seen as a first step towards employment. The approach is also influenced by the Dutch approach to social activation.

Measures include sport exercises, nutrition advice, stress management or housekeeping, cultural measures such as dance classes and theatre groups, but also debt and addiction counselling as well as socio-educational support. A study (Freier, 2016) shows five case studies of the different approaches used. They range from social work, creative workshops and excursions for young people in a deprived area, Kung-Fu training for young people with health problems, to opportunities for group exchange between unemployed women to different social activities, such as concerts or common dinners, in order to reach out to homeless people. In general, these measures are manifold, innovative and not standardised. The study also outlines that after the initial bottom-up implementation by the *Job Center* and due to increased demand, the approaches are now used as a more standard instrument for social activation due to increased demand.

# 4 Discussion and learning

When we look at the different interventions, the first conclusion is that Member States could do more to *learn* from outcomes and results of interventions that support social inclusion. Evidence of the implementation and outcomes of social activation policy is however scarce. Many projects are set up without a methodological research perspective and their goals are not evaluated, so there is no hard evidence that the outcomes (or lack thereof) of a project are due to its interventions and that there is a link between the two. Here, more established activation measures which focus on labour market integration are easier to assess, as labour market outcomes are measured. Social activation measures that are targeted at skills development, motivation and self-esteem however also come into play here as they contribute to a more sustainable labour market integration (PES Network, 2016). Skills development as well as effective job matching and working with the employers contribute to long-term job placements.

Another relevant factor is the quality of cooperation between different levels of national, regional and local government. In most Member States, the national Public Employment Services (PES) have a responsibility for implementing active inclusion policies. Therefore, PES have increasingly been involved in activating groups further away from the labour markets in order to make them more inclusive ('activation for inclusion'). In some Member States this task has been (partly) delegated to or combined with local authorities who were already responsible for different forms of social assistance. PES and local authorities can play a role in working with employers concerning specific target groups and offering and raising awareness about financial and social support for employers.

Both, active inclusion and social activation require an individualised way of service provision. As shown in the examples above, exclusion from the labour market is caused by a multitude of problems (e.g. illiteracy, indebtedness, mental health problems, disability, deprived neighbourhoods), and some of the needs linked to these challenges should be addresses first before labour market reintegration becomes feasible. Widening the scope for social inclusion, through cooperation between different types of services seems to contribute to better outcomes and possibly also to a more efficient provision of services.

Here, social activation can play a vital role. Interviews with the beneficiaries working as volunteers in work settings in the Netherlands show that the activity helped them to deal better with their problems; volunteering and interactions with the activation workers helps to recognise the importance of their contributions and increases their future employment prospects. However, it was also noted, that activation workers then fail to support towards paid work (Kampen et al 2019).

Interagency collaboration and cooperation between social assistance, employment and social services ideally goes beyond mere partnership towards more complex and

demanding service integration which often cuts across local, regional and national administrations. An approach promoted at EU level and implemented in some Member States, has been the one-stop-shop or multi-agency team at national, regional and local level, working under an integrated management structure, with shared budgets, programmes and objectives. Here, training and roles such as case managers or service coordinators are key. Especially when there is a shift of focus from labour market re-integration to social activation, the need for training and further education of social services personnel is evident. Another aspect for coordination are IT solutions that allow for better targeting of vulnerable groups, better data processing and gathering of information from recipients of social services.

In this context, new tendencies are emerging such as decentralisation and an increased involvement of private employment and social services (NGOs and some private companies). For the support of long-term unemployed, only some countries are highly centralised (such as Cyprus, Greece or Malta), while municipalities and regions are responsible for employment and social assistance in Scandinavia or this task is shared between regional and local authorities in federal countries (Bouget, et al, 2015). In many Member States, municipalities have the primary responsibility for social assistance and activation. The social activation examples above show that they are in many cases adapted to the local context and target groups. Consequently, the implementation of inclusive activation policies demands a degree of decentralisation of power from the national to the regional and local level (Borghi and van Berkel, 2007; Aurich and others, 2015; Catalano, Graziano and Bassoli, 2015; López-Santana, 2015; Marchal and van Mechelen, 2017).

Nevertheless, as shown with the Dutch Participation Act, delegating implementation to the regional or local level makes sense, but only if the resources, training and workload problems can be better dealt with at the devolved level. Without the adequate resources (funds, training) and a manageable workload, delegating responsibilities to the local level may not be helpful for the effectiveness of inclusive activation policies. Furthermore, implementation capacities in various European countries differ since national governments are not always 'able to coordinate local actors; analyse local needs, develop appropriate strategies, implement programmes, monitor, control and evaluate performance' (Mosley (2009), see also van Berkel, de Graaf and Sirovatka (2011). Decentralisation can hence lead to different local policy practices. While this can be an explicit goal, it may result in unwanted inequalities in relation to eligibility, service provision and support between municipalities.

Another trend observed is the increased cooperation and contracting of social enterprises, actors in the third sector, private not-for-profit enterprises and NGOs, which has a major positive impact on active inclusion outcomes (Bouget, et al, 2015). Organising a quasi-market for social services in which (local) governments provide the funding and/or act as buyers of these services from for-profit-organisations, is not a panacea for social exclusion.

Nevertheless, cooperation with these actors is often crucial to set up different social activation measures. For example, as described in the German example above, case managers in German *Job Center* often cooperate with local actors to offer a social activation measure to a beneficiary. Working with NGOs and social enterprises has the potential to guide some people in a more secure work environment, however, with the same tasks and working conditions as on the open labour market.

Promising is moreover the cooperation of public services providers with the beneficiaries (and their organisations) themselves. This could include employing beneficiaries as experts by experience, as done by the local welfare offices in Belgium

to inform how to best go about the implementation of certain measures[5], or setting up peer support groups for social inclusion.

# 5 Conclusion

Active inclusion and social activation are policy efforts that follow directly from the social policy goals and measures that all Member States have enshrined in their welfare state arrangements and from the relevant EU guidelines and recommendations. They want their citizens to actively contribute to the nation's economic success and general wellbeing by participation in the labour market and in society at large. Within the broad area of social policies, in recent years, attention has shifted from the generic income support and labour market reintegration measures to more 'activating' policy interventions, with social activation not exclusively aimed at labour market reintegration.

Work on social inclusion still has a long way to go in most Member States. The sheer magnitude of problems leading to social exclusion, make it virtually impossible in some Member States to implement effective social inclusion practices remedying these problems completely. These countries often also rely on support by the family, as has been traditionally the custom in many Southern and Eastern European states.

Different Member States have different pathways for activation, often with a focus on 'employment first'. The focus on social activation may also seem like an additional, 'luxury' measure. When labour market participation is low and (long-term) unemployment high, creating jobs and effective labour market reintegration should be given priority. However, social activation and active inclusion can go hand in hand and do not exclude each other. In countries with high unemployment rates, social activation could be seen as a long-term investment in human skills that can increase the quality and volume of labour supply and reduce health and other costs related to the adverse effects of social exclusion and poverty. In addition, social activation measures have the potential to implement a more personalised approach, as the participants may be more motivated to take part in other measures and to share problems they face.

Active inclusion and social activation require cooperation between different services, as well as cooperation with non-for-profit and for-profit providers. This allows them to offer a more personalised approach and to design and offer relevant services to the beneficiaries. Here, social activation has the potential to be the first step towards employment; as it addresses skills and personal development and motivation, it can also further contribute to a placement in more sustainable employment which is based on the interests of the jobseeker. This requires, however, that links between different services are made and measures are meaningful.

In any case, irrespective of the pathway Member States should follow, all of them should carefully consider the envisaged outcomes of new policy interventions and evaluate whether these goals are reached or not. By doing so Member States generate meaningful evidence that can inform their own policies and those of other Member States.

[5] See also: Peer Review on "Access to social assistance and rights for homeless people", Brussels (Belgium), 3-4 October 2019, see here: https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1024&langId=en&newsId=9436&furtherNews=yes

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