

Developing well-targeted tools for the active inclusion of vulnerable people

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1 The National Qualification Programme (QuP) as an example of good practice

“The Qualification Programme is the government’s most important initiative against poverty and is offered in municipalities with NAV offices. The programme is meant to encourage training, work training and clarification of opportunities and rights of people who receive social benefits” Norwegian Welfare and Labour Service (2008).

As context, in 2008 5,300 people applied to the QuP and 4,133 had been accepted into the programme by the end of 2008. For comparison, by the end of 2008 there were 50,076 registered unemployed (2% of the labour force at that time, currently 2.9%) of whom 7,796 were long term unemployed. There were 295,968 people on permanent disability pension and 43,273 on temporary disability benefit (Norwegian Welfare and Labour Service 2008). The QuP is focused on social assistance recipients considered capable of benefiting from the programme.

The (QuP) put forward by the Norwegian government is strongly relevant to EAPN networks and organisations in all EU Member States as an important example of supporting disadvantaged people into work and improving their quality of life. It takes an integrated active inclusion approach incorporating the principles of adequate minimum income, access to services and support for the journey to paid work.

Both for the specific Norwegian case and to aid discussion of transferability, this paper’s comments will assess strengths and areas of concern from the EAPN perspective. To do this, Parts 1 to 3 draw on the host country and discussant papers and EAPN networks’ experience in the context of our principles of human dignity, equality and non discrimination, adequate income, participation and empowerment and an integrated approach to service delivery. The final Part 4 of the paper provides a summary assessment of the QuP capacity to combat poverty and social exclusion, based additionally on the two-day Oslo Peer Review discussions and the NAV office site visit.¹ The appendix provides a brief description of EAPN.

¹¹ The Peer Review took place in Oslo on the 29-30 October 2009. It consisted of two days of exchange of information and experience focused on the Qualifications Programme for people wholly or partly dependent on

1.1 Key elements for the success of the QuP approach

The value-added of the Norwegian QuP approach is that it:

- Takes place in the context of a strong universal “Nordic” welfare model which is effective in combating poverty through social transfers
- Includes quality of life as well as labour market participation objectives for the client groups
- Integrates activities of various governance levels and competencies as well as types of service provided, to enhance achievement of the programme’s objectives
- Addresses the social situation and capacities of the clients as a priority in the steps toward work
- Aims to provide individualised pathways that reflect clients’ specific needs and capacities
- Combines individual and group activities to promote effective social participation
- Is accessible for up to two years (and there is a possibility of a third), which enables individuals to engage in real and sustained development
- Has a reasonable budget within the context of strong overall spending on active labour market measures

EAPN Norway is composed of self-organised groups of people in poverty and they confirm the overall validity of the Norwegian approach:-

- Tailored, individual pathways with varied week planning, offering a personalised mix of activities
- Group activities supporting relationship building and potentially continuation of the support group beyond the duration of the QuP, enhancing sustainability
- Skilled social work staff who may engender clients’ trust in the “system” and belief in their own potential to move towards greater participation and open market work.

social assistance and aimed at supporting their active inclusion on the path to employment and greater well being. It began with presentations from representatives of host country ministries, host country evaluator (Schafft) and discussant (Prins). Papers were provided by ministry representatives from Austria, Cyprus, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Spain and the UK as well as a UK expert (Greggs), EAPN Europe and EAPN Norway, who represented the European civil society stakeholders. A member of ÖSB (Natter) and a minute taker (Davies) were present throughout. Papers were structured as a response to the questionnaire provided by ÖSB, an expert institute organising the Peer Reviews on behalf of the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration. Intense discussions during the review were focused on evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the programme and its transferability, supported by further presentations by officials from the Norwegian ministry. The second day included a site visit to a NAV integrated employment and social welfare office with opportunities to discuss the practical reality with office staff. Final papers such as this one were submitted following the Peer Review. Further information about this and other peer reviews is available on www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu

- The payment of a standardized qualification benefit and entitlement to child allowances and supplementary social assistance
- High value placed on user participation

2 Areas for clarification and discussion

2.1 Lifting participants out of poverty

2.1.1 *Adequate minimum income*

For the 27 EU states, adequate minimum income is one of the three pillars of the Active Inclusion Recommendation of 2008. However, Frazer and Marlier (2009) show that in most EU member states social assistance schemes fall far short of the 60% benchmark for “at risk of poverty”.

Norway is one of the few European countries with no national statutory minimum income scheme (like Hungary, Italy and Greece). In effect the QuP operates like a minimum income scheme – providing a stable income base, where in other cases safety net support is discretionary. But it is not clear whether the Norwegian programme lifts participants sustainably out of poverty. EAPN notes that:

- A high percentage of QuP clients receive top up income support
- The child element is relatively low
- There are relatively high drop-out rates from the QuP

2.2 Supporting and maintaining human dignity

2.2.1 *User participation*

User participation, a feature of the QuP, supports human dignity. But effective services dealing with vulnerable people need not only to be checking satisfaction and effectiveness with the individual users, but engaging the users as a group in the management structure and process of the projects.

2.2.2 *Conditionality, autonomy and self actualization; problems with the logic of the objectives and the model underlying assumptions*

The QuP objective is to “increase labour market attachment” and *thereby* enhance the “quality of life of those who are furthest from the labour market” (Schafft 2009:6). Entry to the programme is stated to be voluntary but more than half of respondents felt they had no choice. Regulations concerning access to discretionary social assistance seem to mean that in practice, for those eligible, entry to this scheme is a condition of receiving an income and there are programme risks therefore to autonomy and dignity and long term sustainability.

But the welcome belief in positive utility (well-being) from work is contradicted by the orthodox economics assumption underlying the “conditionality” that is a feature of many welfare to work models. These assume that “work” has a negative utility and “leisure” has a positive utility, thus wages are a reward for negative utility. Consequently for those for whom work does not appear to “pay” conditionality is believed necessary to get them off “benefit dependency”. Yet when politicians and public servants repeat that work is the best route out of poverty and exclusion, they say (as in the QuP), that it is not just about being financially better off, but about self actualization and self worth arising from paid employment. Were this logic followed through, then welfare to work programmes would focus on incentivising participation through quality in work.

Also, it would be interesting to know how the QuP works for various target groups. The orthodox economics assumption that each individual maximizes his or her own utility underpins the financial incentive and sanctions model applied to lone parents in many current welfare to work models. Yet in the real world parents may aim to maximize their children’s utility (well-being). In this case, there is limited transferability of the QuP to countries where good quality affordable childcare is not freely available, and child (and elder) care arrangements frequently break down. The Scottish Working for Families project based in Glasgow developed very innovative and intensive support systems for lone parents which started from the client’s needs, but staff and participants taking part in the “*Bridging the policy gap*” project local “peer review” believed that a combination of lack of affordable childcare, rules about access to advanced education and lack of job progression inhibited sustainable employment that could lift families out of poverty (Poverty Alliance 2008).

Rather than adapt people to poor quality work (negative utility), job market wages and conditions must be better adapted to meet human need; this is a matter of employer as well as personal and state responsibility and requires enforcement.

2.2.3 *Human dignity, stigma and sanctions*

What role do they have in the QuP and how are the risks to human dignity prevented and monitored?

- EAPN Hungary highlights in their assessment of the new “path to work programme” (presented in the Hungarian National Strategic Report 2008-10) that it aims at tightening eligibility and conditionality and reflects a rise of popular sentiment against the poor – “The fundamental problem is that it tries to deal with employment issues by ‘prodding’ social assistance recipients, but provides no solution for regions with a rate of unemployment of 20%” (EAPN 2008a)
- EAPN France points out “how can you reduce benefits of people on 400 Euros a month”? (ibid.)
- Evidence from the USA also suggests that financial sanctions penalize the people with the most severe barriers to employment and lead to a deterioration of both their health and social inclusion. As early as 1996, USA experience of conditionality and sanctions showed striking impact on well-being: a study in Minnesota found that sanctioned families were four times as likely to report a family health problem, and twice as likely to report a mental health problem or domestic violence, with significant implications for social costs (Schott, Greenstein and Primus 1999)

- A report in a UK newspaper (Brooks 2009) referred to research about the potential short term effectiveness of conditionality and financial incentives, including in health care, but the long term risks to well being, human dignity and to the development of autonomy and therefore sustainable integration
- The Swedish social firm “Basta” (2005, undated 2007) is an example of a social firm in which, despite low money wages, working conditions of choice, flexibility, respect, security and quality in work and product have resulted in well functioning people with high levels of well being who had long histories of drug and alcohol dependency and many of whom had been in the criminal justice system

2.3 The goal of labour market attachment

2.3.1 *Flexible work and job matching*

Important is the quantity and quality of jobs and whether they match the profile of the people on the QuP or in need of it. Some target groups need flexible work organisation including part-time working and flexible timetables. Reviewing the Job Capacity Assessment in Australia, the OECD (2007) highlighted that support to part-time work was a key to success, but only if combined with quality support services.

To fully understand the operation of the QuP it would be useful to know more about:

- Professional job assessment to help match the job to the needs and preferences of the applicant
- Partnership approaches with private companies, trades unions and municipalities, which appear to provide value-added in Denmark
- Government subsidies to hire participants, which seem to work well (OECD 2005:173-208)

2.3.2 *Employer attitudes and employer engagement*

These are central to sustainable employment. What is the case in Norway concerning?

- Combating prejudice, discrimination and ignorance? Awareness and enforcement are problems in some EU states
- Quality marking: are there schemes to promote employer awareness? The UK “2 ticks” scheme for employers² hiring people with disabilities was welcomed by participants in the Newham local “peer review” on employment of disabled people which took place in the

²See http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/Employmentsupport/LookingForWork/DG_4000314)

context of the *Bridging the policy gap project*³. But the scheme is not universally implemented and could be better known and used by UK employers

- Workplace support: the “New Paths to Employment Strategy” in Denmark provides strong aftercare. This includes: personal assistance in the workplace; training; enterprise centres where disabled people can work and social mentors who are available to help people to cope with everyday life such as dealing with banks, doctors, caseworkers etc. (Kvist and Pedersen, 2007)
- Whether there is potential in work placements for longer term employment

2.3.3 *Informal and illegal work*

Some multiply disadvantaged people may undertake informal or illegal work because of inadequate low incomes and high marginal tax rates, constraints on working time and lack of employer flexibility or discriminatory or intermittent opportunities for formal employment. Some other disadvantaged groups, such as some asylum seekers who are legally barred from employment and provided with very low or no financial support are forced onto the grey market. These flexible alternatives to the formal labour market may inhibit some people from entering programmes such as QuP even if they are eligible. In the UK, Community Links (2009) has launched a “need not greed” campaign to address routes to formal employment.

2.3.4 *The role of intermediate labour market and social enterprises*

The paper by Schafft (2009) mentions the use of protected work spaces, municipal activity centres and open market workplaces. It would be useful to know more about how these are used to create achievable pathways to sustainable employment, including transition to the open labour market. Further, while EAPN welcomes strategies for integration of adults of working age into the open labour market, members have expressed concern about the closure of sheltered workplaces in many states across the EU, but without adequate support for alternative routes to sustainable employment.

The intermediary steps can often be taken by a social enterprise which can focus on social inclusion but in a context of viability where profit is reinvested in the company and local communities.

2.3.5 *The impact of the financial crisis on the demand for labour (and on budgets for programmes)*

³ The *Bridging the policy gap project* (2007-8) was supported by the European Commission PROGRESS programme budget for projects promoting awareness of the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion, a part of the Open Method of Co-ordination of the “social” dimension of the Lisbon strategy to promote growth and jobs and social cohesion

Unemployment data indicate that Norway has so far been relatively insulated from the employment effects of the financial crisis although the discussion paper by Prins (2009) suggests that three sectors are beginning to show decline.

“Welfare to work” programmes are designed to induce multiply disadvantaged or low employment groups into employment and may be focused on “inactivity” rather than unemployment. Therefore it is doubtful how much they can contribute to cutting overall unemployment in the many member states of the EU experiencing 8% plus unemployment and 20% plus youth unemployment. They may help prevent long term unemployment by “churning” the unemployed and supporting work readiness and job search. But they risk being cut in recession due to the financial and time costs of personalised support, to the disadvantage of the most marginalised. EAPN Ireland is one of several member networks who have welcomed the developing focus in their country on personalised support, activation and training for disadvantaged groups evident in their National Reform Programme. But they are concerned that coping with the newly unemployed in a climate of budget cuts already risks a diminished focus on long term disadvantaged groups.⁴

2.4 Access to services: the importance of health care

It is not clear how far health services are seen or see themselves as an integral part of the QuP and there may be challenges in integrating differing working cultures. However, there are a relatively high proportion of people of working age in Norway who are considered “inactive” due to health and disability needs.

- The OECD (2007:98) highlight that if increased work requirements are not matched by the provision of comprehensive, non-judgemental support services, particularly for people with mental health conditions, there is considerable risk that the number of unemployed people with mental health problems will increase
- Rather than a “work capability” test that may be little more than a tick box exercise, effective engagement in welfare to work programmes requires a health needs assessment as a key initial element and it should be made by an appropriately qualified health professional, which is not the case in some countries
- Health care support in and beyond employment may be needed

2.5 Implementation of QuP

In a Norwegian context where local municipality expertise is in a social work approach, the QuP is ambitious in aiming to bring together various levels of government, diverse stakeholders and many services so that the user encounters a “one-stop shop” in local NAV offices. Therefore it is not surprising that the evaluation notes a slow start and some difficulties in service integration and in priority for labour market activities.

2.5.1 Sufficient qualified staff

⁴Personal correspondence with Paul Ginnell, EAPN Ireland

In order to improve employment outcomes, the Schafft paper (2009) noted that there needs to be more labour market integration skills in NAV offices as well as social work experienced staff. How is this being achieved?

2.5.2 *Equal access to services*

- It seems that both the central targets brought in to increase client throughput and the lack of standardized “work ability” criteria have risked a perverse effect on the aims and objectives of the QuP and led to high levels of local discretion in eligibility criteria. There are now national standards and targets, but have all risks to fair access been addressed?
- EAPN would like to know more about how the central plus local finance is effective in meeting variation in regional need where there is local discretion.

2.5.3 *Initial assessment*

EAPN is concerned about the nature and objectives of the “work ability” test:

- If “only those who can access work” are eligible, then there is pressure to “creaming” especially with targets and a weak labour market
- Decisions based on initial assessment of “work ability” may prevent recognition of variations and permanent changes in participants’ capacity. Rather than a “work ability” test, EAPN believes there should be a “needs assessment” and pathway plan
- Any kind of assessment on “work ability” must address access to all “flanking services”

2.5.4 *One stop shop*

- It is a major advance to have all services related to welfare support, social services, housing and employment under one roof (providing the NAV is locally easily accessible). But only if the main objective is “client-focused”, otherwise it runs the risk of increasing the surveillance element which can fundamentally undermine the trust of the participant
- Trust is essential to change making and user participation is a positive feature of the QuP. However, trusted service provision may require also participation of small local organisations close to the users

2.5.5 *Relatively high “drop out”*

High dropout is not unexpected in programmes serving multiply disadvantaged people. But more information could be provided on the reasons in the QuP. EAPN Ireland assessment of the new “social and economic participation programme, based on active case management” (EAPN 2008a), highlighted that insufficient attention was paid to ensuring access to key services. These included sufficient quality childcare places and access to adequate housing and health services.

In the case of migrants, adequate language service support is also crucial. If these are readily available in the Norwegian case, it would be useful to know more about the reasons for drop out.

2.6 Monitoring and evaluation

2.6.1 *How far are “soft outcomes” evaluated and what difference do the results make to objectives and service development?*

We welcome the Norwegian good practice in distinguishing between factors to enhance employability (e.g. soft skills) and factors that are effective in getting people with enhanced employability into jobs (e.g. work placements). But both are necessary parts of the path to sustainable employment. Recognizing the value of laying the foundations for integration requires specific indicators which reflect these objectives. Within Structural Funds’ programmes in some countries, detailed work has been done to develop “soft” indicators, which evaluate these preliminary steps (EAPN 2008b).

3 Transferability

3.1 What can be transferred?

Many aspects of the programme presented are likely to be transferable and indeed are in operation in some member states:-

- One stop shop, coordinated services
- Initial intensive assessment procedure
- Initial focus on soft skills
- Personalised developed pathways
- The payment of a steady taxed “wage”, to challenge stigmatisation and ensure a dignified life is innovative
- User involvement – as a prime objective – is innovative
- The strong focus on voluntary engagement/ownership and reduced emphasis on conditionality

3.2 Obstacles to transfer

Green and Hasluck (2009:28) have argued that transferability is primarily about recognizing the ideas and principles behind good practice, rather than transferring specific initiatives to different contexts. In the case of the subject of this Peer Review, successful transfer will require acknowledgement of the importance of the Nordic services model.

3.2.1 *High public investment in maintaining a Nordic universal services model; but*

- Expenditure on active labour market measures varies greatly. For example, OECD data for 2005 showed that public expenditure on supported employment and rehabilitation measures varied in a range of European countries from 0.53% of GDP in the Netherlands

to 0.01% in Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovak Republic and the UK⁵. This expenditure is already under pressure following the financial crisis

- It would be valuable to demonstrate the costs saved and the revenues gained from a successful integration programme
- These should include also the benefits of social cohesion to the wider society and the reinforcement of universal welfare principles
- Promotion of the countercyclical added value of a comprehensive active inclusion approach would be very useful now

3.2.2 Evidence base

- The programme is relatively new and requires more monitoring and evaluation and long term follow up⁶. Evaluation including a comparator group who did not enter the QuP will strengthen the evidence base, but is acceptable to EAPN only if ethical concerns can be met in the research design
- The Peer Review is itself is a strong contribution to sharing learning and deliberate action to stimulate further learning would be useful. While retaining the emphasis on small scale intensive discussions as a means of maximizing learning, EAPN believes effective 360 degree assessment of added value and transferability requires more well developed civil society participation in the Peer Reviews

3.3 Theoretical model

The orthodox economics assumptions concerning human behavior and the operation of free markets continue to stifle innovation in labour market and social policy in many European countries, despite overwhelming evidence that they are inadequate for real world policy.

⁵ Quoted in TUC (2009) *Improving specialist disability employment services: TUC response to the DWP consultation*, available at www.tuc.org.uk/welfare/tuc-14498-f0.cfm

⁶ It appears that impact evaluation will take place from 2010-2013 (slide 2, PowerPoint presented by Angelika Schafft, *First evaluation results of the individual qualification programme*, presented during the Peer Review).

4 Conclusion: an overall assessment of the QuP from an EAPN perspective, based on information from the peer review including site visit

4.1 Attractive elements of the QuP:-

4.1.1 *The objectives*

- Employment and well being – but further clarification is needed on whether well being is an objective or a side effect of QuP participation or subsequent employment
- The aim to reduce isolation and raise confidence on the journey to employment

4.1.2 *The context*

- Norwegian welfare system:- efficient in substantially reducing poverty risks and in-work poverty

4.1.3 *The approach*

- Active inclusion: focus on *all three elements* of the triangle: adequate income; access to the labour market; access to services. In many EU member states adequate income and generalized access to a broad range of services are much less of a priority for implementation of active inclusion policies

4.1.4 *The instruments*

- A better balance between support and “conditionality” than in many EU member states
- Personalisation – but so far, this seems incomplete and there is still a categorical approach also
- Longer term: 1+1+1 year options
- Wide range of flanking services

4.1.5 *The implementation*

- Pilots, which *are* then mainstreamed
- Sizeable budget
- “One stop shop” for pension, employment and social services and contact with some other services, e.g. health (for example, the QuP participants have access to psychological services)

4.2 Assessing the QuP performance in combating poverty and exclusion

Note: the QuP is relatively new and it will be good to follow up when there is further evaluation evidence. This assessment is in principle only, as it is based on discussion and mainly qualitative information available before and during the Peer Review.

The overview below uses anti-poverty benchmarking principles for assessing service provision. They are designed as a means of asking the right questions from the beneficiary/ user perspective about services in a time of rapid change. These are Duffy's '4A's. The author has since added a fifth 'A' – Achievement, for benchmarking impact for beneficiaries/users. In the assessment below -

√ = positive impact on reducing the risks of poverty and social exclusion

X = negative impact on reducing the risks of poverty and social exclusion

? = insufficient information available/ available during the Peer Review, to come to a clear decision.

Using a “4As” approach (Duffy, 1997, 2001) to benchmark the quality of policies to combat poverty and exclusion:-

<i>Adequacy</i>	<i>of income and resources for the beneficiary/ user</i>
<i>Affordability</i>	<i>to the intended beneficiaries and also the taxpayer (policy sustainability)</i>
<i>Accessibility</i>	<i>easy, fair access and non discrimination for the target group</i>
<i>Accountability</i>	<i>to the intended beneficiaries and to other stakeholders including the taxpayer (policy sustainability)</i>
<i>A fifth ‘A’ – Achievement</i>	<i>impact for beneficiaries/ users (reduction in poverty risks)</i>

4.2.1 *Adequacy*

- √ Stable income with child element and supplements available; paid as a salary, fully taxable and giving pension points
- √ Secure, compared to social assistance which is discretionary and must be applied for repeatedly
- But*
- X Especially after 25% tax, the income achieved is well below the 60% threshold and the child element is rather low (3€ per day)
- X It appears that in the absence of a national right to a guaranteed minimum income there is no floor to the local impact of sanctions on income and as well there is no floor to social assistance benefits – the discretion introduces at least a risk of severe poverty

4.2.2 *Accessibility*

- √ Wide range of services, quickly available
- √ QuP helps to overcome isolation and exclusion because of stable “one to one” relation with advisor, relatively low case load (of fifteen or so persons) and also group activities
- √ Significant expansion in number of NAV offices to 293 in 2008 and another 153 are planned for 2009 (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service 2008)
- But*
- ? Not all areas have NAV offices or have integrated services yet. Also, in rural areas and small communities the range of services may be more limited
- ? “Work ability test” – what is the link to a health needs assessment? Is there scope for reviewing capacity at other points?
- ? Health – appears not to be a full part of the one stop shop. Most health related services moved to the Directorate of Health from the 1st January 2009

- ? Non discrimination and fair access – while eligibility rules are clear, the recruitment process to the programme is not yet transparent, although a new methodology that is intended to ensure equal evaluation and follow up was introduced in autumn 2008 (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service 2008). It appeared from the site visit that recruitment was often through NAV office personnel suggesting to existing service users they knew were eligible, that they apply to the QuP. Further, staff agreed this suggestion could be effectively an instruction
- ? User characteristics do vary significantly within and between offices and so it appears, do target groups. While local flexibility is a positive in meeting local need, it does raise questions about principles of universality in service provision
- ? Employer engagement is essential to work placement. On the site visit, staff spoke of their personal contacts, but it was not clear that there is a consistent policy on employer engagement
- X Time delay and wide regional variation in processing applications due to start up problems and rising unemployment (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service 2008)

4.2.3 *Affordability*

- √ Access to QuP and needed services free at point of need for beneficiary
- ? Resource intensive - but could be worthwhile to assess the costs saved/ avoided and the cost-benefit

4.2.4 *Accountability*

- √ The service is provided by national and local state employees, enhancing stability and accountability. Some EAPN members have found that accountability to users, and political accountability, can be compromised by privatised and outsourced provision of employment and social services in some member states, especially where transparency is diminished due to rules around commercial confidentiality. They believe more emphasis and resourcing has to put into effective local delivery partnerships.
- ? Balance between universality, equal treatment and discretion: there is a lot of discretion between municipalities and offices as well as advisors and it is not clear how the other principles are upheld. Also, do intended beneficiaries have a right to various needed services in or beyond the “activity plan”?
- ? Not clear on i) rights of access to “individual plans” (and services) which are signed and ii) why “activity plans” are not signed and whether there is or is not a concept of a “contract” between user and service
- ? Possibility of very detailed records on individual users and multi-agency data sharing; it seems some sharing has to have user’s permission (e.g. phone calls to doctors, teachers); but it is not clear if that is so for all data sharing – risk of infringement of right to privacy and family life
- ? Criteria for success – it is not clear if and how these are defined and over what time period. It is likely these would differ for different users and this should be respected. But it

seemed there were as yet no explicit expectations for output and impact as opposed to user throughput – but this may be a positive with a vulnerable user group who may be on a long path to the open labour market

- X Access is apparently voluntary – but the link to laws on social assistance may mean refusal to join affects entitlement to social assistance (and see above point in “accessibility” about recruitment to the programme). For example it appears that refusal to take part in the QuP can be interpreted as meaning the individual has not tried all other possibilities to get another income than social assistance. Thus although there is a right to social welfare assistance, this refusal may be taken into account in any application for social assistance and influence decisions regarding level of benefit or even entitlement to it. There is a right of appeal on decisions, though this may take some time. But it is not clear whether there are transparent procedures regarding a refusal to enter the QuP and that these are well known to social assistance applicants or recipients

- X Conditionality and sanctions – can be applied to the “activity plan” if the intended beneficiary does not agree it and the level of individual case officer discretion appears high. While case officer flexibility could be a positive feature, are there clear lines of accountability and are there national standards regarding the range of options and quality of the offer and its suitability to the applicant? In the consultations about the “activity plan” EAPN Norway has proposed veto rights for the QuP participants where the NAV office offers inadequate measures

- X Balance of power – staff on the site visit said they liked the fact there was no guaranteed minimum income as it gave them extra power to put pressure on clients; balance of power seems heavily weighted to the individual advisor - risk to autonomy and dignity of user and to equal treatment

4.2.5 *Achievement*

- ? A QuP intention for 2009 is “better target achievement” (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service 2008)

- ? It is not clear yet that employment outcomes have been improved over previous programmes. Evaluation of a pre-cursor programme did show significant improvements for some groups, but not for young people (Rønsen and Skaröhamer 2009)

- ? Employers wish to see transferable skills evidenced, especially in a workplace setting. But it appears that there is no “qualification” awarded to users who participate in their activity plan, although individual courses or activities may lead to a formal or informal qualification. However, something along the lines of a positive “report card” of all achievements and transferable skills may be a useful document, agreed with the user, for those exiting the QuP

- ? There was no time on the site visit to discuss the extent and quality of individual “exit plans” to ensure users have a clear agenda once they leave the programme

- ? There was a long discussion in the Peer Review about beneficiary motivation and intention and the link to impact of programmes. When the author requested the view of a person with long term experience of poverty who is a grassroots participant in EAPN England’s board, his view was: ask people whether they want a job now; whether they

want a job later or whether they do not want a job. Start with the motivated people, whatever their supposed work ability capacity. This will reap results. But it is an inverse approach to that in the QuP in which it is a condition of eligibility that the Labour and Welfare Administration is able to offer a suitable programme⁷

- ? Integration of offices and personnel in them (mix of state and local employees with employment and social service experience respectively) is still relatively new and will need time to “bed down”. But certainly, staff in the office we visited appeared to be highly motivated and enthusiastic about the new model and committed to their users, who included some multiply disadvantaged people, but considered capable of benefiting from the programme.

4.3 Conclusion

The QuP is a well resourced programme with high and focused ambition to support active inclusion and increase well being of a target group of users wholly or partially depended on social assistance for everyday living. There are very positive programme elements supporting human dignity and combating poverty and exclusion. These include stable income paid as a “wage”, user participation and a broad range of accessible services provided by staff in integrated labour and social service offices who are working with manageable case loads and considerable discretion.

However, there is still a way to go on providing incomes adequate to keep people out of poverty and ensuring fair access to the programme and a common offer between offices and regions. Greater user engagement in programme management and monitoring, a more consistent focus and consensus on outcome goals and greater transparency of decision making would enhance effectiveness and accountability of the programme.

EAPN Europe will transfer the learning from this Peer Review and promote the positive features of the QuP to its member networks and wider constituency.

⁷ *Qualification programme and qualification benefit*, Slide 6, PowerPoint presented by Odd-Helge Askevold, of the Arbeids-og-Inkluderingsdepartementet, during the Peer Review

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5 Appendix: an introduction to EAPN Europe (www.eapn.eu)

5.1 EAPN: who we are

- Launched in 1990
- Independent network of NGOs committed to the fight against poverty and social exclusion
- European network of national networks in 25 member states of the European Union plus Norway (and just launched a process in Iceland); plus 22 European Organisations (e.g. AGE Europe; FEANTSA, Eurochild, Diakonia; Caritas...).
- Budget line from the European Commission (through PROGRESS) for the European level work
- National networks differently structured in each country. Mix of big and small NGOs and self organisations of people in poverty, service delivery and advocacy organisations.

5.2 EAPN: what we do

- Advocacy– with and for people with experience of poverty and social exclusion
- Follow up the “social” Lisbon processes – the National Strategic Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion and the National Reform Programmes, but also the European Structural Funds and the Services agenda. We also undertake secretariat for the European people experiencing poverty conferences under the Presidency.
- National networks and organisations and European organisations are engaged in service delivery and advocacy on the national and European agendas concerned with poverty and social exclusion.

5.3 EAPN: why we do it

There are more than 80 million people in Europe at risk of poverty. We have a passion to change that to meet our goal of “*A social and sustainable Europe free of poverty and social exclusion*”.

5.3.1 *Our agenda*

- A rights-based approach to combating poverty and exclusion and supporting human dignity
- Active inclusion – adequate income; access to services; access to the labour market.

5.3.2 *Our key concerns*

- The principle of universality in welfare systems – it appears to be weakening, with no real public debate
- Opportunities are not rights – they are also risks
- Adequate minimum income for a dignified life – for example in the social assistance schemes – almost everywhere it is below the 60% threshold of the European Union
- The reductionism (and ignoring of those outside of the labour market) of unemployment = exclusion and a job = inclusion
- Food, fuel and housing security – there are problems in many European countries sometimes widespread, sometimes confined to particular vulnerable groups
- Neglected groups with weak rights – for example undocumented migrants; Roma; single adults without dependents
- Impact of the financial crisis on the goals and structure of welfare systems and on the ambition of the European Union as regards poverty and social exclusion.

Contact details

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