

**An EAPN progress report on the implementation of the
Strategic Reports on Social Protection
and Social Inclusion (2006-2008)**

LIGHT YEAR: HARD WORK!
Assessing the impact on Poverty

Produced in October 2007



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

General summary and conclusions

In this report, EAPN have set out to **evaluate progress** made under the 'light year' of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), and in particular on the National Action Plans (NAPs) Inclusion in 2007, and to ask what has been the benefit for the fight against poverty and social exclusion? The Commission has emphasized the benefits of the 'light year' process as enabling greater in-depth analysis and mutual learning between member states in the priority theme: child poverty. However, unless this exchange leads to **better engagement and better policies** which effectively impact on poverty, it could be seen by many as "hard work" (particularly for EAPN networks trying to engage in the process...) rather than "effective delivery". EAPN has asked its members to assess the **benefits** and **risks** of this approach and whether it has undermined the **effectiveness** of the process at national level, as well as assess **progress on the delivery of the broader objectives and priorities** of the Open Method of Coordination – to make significant steps towards the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010.

For EAPN, the **success of the 'Light Year'** therefore depends on 3 main criteria:

- 1) Has the light year promoted effective mutual learning on the priority focus and led to stronger policy objectives, targets and implementation in the focus areas (ie child poverty and to a lesser extent active inclusion)
- 2) How far has the light year strengthened governance, participation and mutual learning with broader stakeholders?
- 3) How far has progress been made on the other priorities identified in the NAP Inclusion and the Strategic Reports in terms of the other objectives and priorities of the OMC and the overall impact on poverty?

2007 is a crucial year, prior to the call for new Strategic Reports on social protection and social inclusion for the new 3 year cycle: 2008-11. It is therefore vital to carry out a **stock-take of the process and results of the OMC** on social protection and social inclusion and to **make proposals** for improvement, if the EU is to move forward significantly in its goal to make significant steps towards eradicating poverty and social exclusion before 2010.

EAPN Networks, in general, have **valued the chance** to focus on the theme of child poverty, which has enabled many to deepen their knowledge, and strengthen their policy messages. The many activities related to child poverty at EU level have been useful and well coordinated by the Commission and have the potential to lead to important policy recommendations. However EAPN is concerned that there might not be sufficient emphasis given to the need to address child poverty from a multi dimensional perspective, based on universal, preventative, rights-based approaches, but rather from a too narrow labour

market focus. Moreover, the lack of governance process, linked to the 'light year' has not allowed EAPN networks, people experiencing poverty and other stakeholders to contribute their insights and findings effectively to their government's position through the NAP Inclusion nor to be integrated into the EU level exchange through the OMC. There is also concern that the activities carried out at EU level, will remain as government peer review and exchange, rather than resulting in specific policy recommendations which will lead to improved policy impact at national level.

In terms of the **impact on other key priorities** in the OMC, the Networks message is clear. Given the discouragement by the Commission to provide updates on the Strategic Reports, there has been no process this year, in terms of evaluating progress on stated priorities or flagging up new concerns. This has raised strong concerns about the direction and future of the OMC. The networks have highlighted particular concerns about the lack of action on key priorities related to: migrants and black and ethnic minority groups, access to vital services particularly housing and health, and the erosion of financial support to poor households. To many networks, there is a vital need to **take stock of what is happening to European welfare states in the process of 'modernization'**, when the main impact often appears to be cuts in services, resources and rights leading to a worsening of the position of the poor and socially excluded.

Despite these difficulties, EAPN networks still believe that the **OMC is a vital instrument in the fight against poverty**. However, it must not lose its focus on the broader priorities and objectives to have a decisive impact on poverty and social exclusion and retain its commitment to multidimensional, integrated, preventative approaches. Above all it must get the **political support to re-dynamise its processes and impact**, based on innovative participatory democratic methods and better linking to national planning processes. Mutual learning must move beyond peer review, mainly at inter government and expert exchange levels, to a broader, more dynamic process. In this, the participation of people experiencing poverty has a vital role to play, but needs to develop beyond one-off events to structured dialogue as part of a new governance process, and ensure that all faces of poverty are listened to and their messages acted on

Whilst Networks believe that the OMC, and specifically the NAP inclusion should be retained as a separate process, it should not be left on the sidelines, but must engage actively in the broader Lisbon framework, through improved feeding in, but more importantly - feeding out. Above all, the Council, the Commission and the Parliament must insist on a **re-think of the integrated guidelines** and the **connection/hierarchy of the different strands** as equal and complementary elements of this overarching integrated social, economic and environmental vision based on sustainable development.

Some strong **new tools and instruments** are also vital to demonstrate a renewed vigour and commitment to fighting poverty.

Summary of Specific Key Messages and Recommendations

Child Poverty: Key reflections and recommendations

‘Strong focus – light participation’: EAPN has benefited from the ‘light year’ focus on child poverty in-depth analysis and exchange on child poverty but regrets the **lack of structured governance process** involving stakeholders, **particularly at national level**, which has limited the value of mutual learning, and appears to have threatened the governance process of the OMC. The fears of a specific thematic focus reducing commitment to broader approaches to poverty and social exclusion has also partly been realised, as well as limited visibility and lack of new actions related to key risk groups and concerns e.g. migrants, ethnic minorities, single older people, access to services and erosion of welfare benefits.

Child Poverty approaches need to be built on common assumptions and principles: Some core concerns from EAPN networks...

1) *Everybody only gets one life:* Everybody has a right to a life free of poverty. Child poverty needs to be embedded in universal, preventative rights-based approaches to combating poverty for all, backed by tailored measures for children and specific groups.

2) *There are no rich children in poor families:* Child poverty cannot be considered separately from family policy.. Effective policies should prioritise integrated, multidimensional approaches which support the family to provide a better environment for the child.

3) *Listen to children and to parents:* Policies must be based on human rights, human dignity and participation of all. This means promoting the rights and participation of children and young people, but also of their parents, recognising the gender concerns and broader models of family and household care.

Child Poverty Strategies need to focus on: tackling the **causes of poverty** rather than “blaming parents” and **supporting parents to provide a better life for their children**. The starting point must be **guaranteeing an adequate income** for a dignified life, regardless of employment status and **access to quality** services for all, particularly housing, health and education.

This implies a more **radical approach to challenging inequality of income and to public financing of services** through stronger redistribution mechanisms. Some of the most effective methods are seen to be: **universal family benefits**, backed by targeted measures, and tools to make work pay which ensure a decent living wage to raise a family. Activation measures should only **support parents to take up appropriate, decent work**, which will enable work/life balance rather than forcing them into low-paid jobs that will increase poverty and threaten child and family welfare.

Universal provision of quality pre-school and after school care, is vital, but as a social right linked to life-long learning for all. Families should be **supported to provide a positive environment for their children and** in their work-life choices. Urgent action needs to be taken to tackle the numbers of children being taken into **institutional care**, particularly in some new member states, which is too often seen as a punishment for being poor, and can exacerbate the social exclusion of the children and their families. The link between **school drop-out and the draw of the informal labour market** in many member states must be recognised and **specific measures developed** for unaccompanied minors, street children, child labour and trafficking. Active measures must be taken to tackle **inequality and discrimination** in access to services for specific groups e.g migrants and asylum seekers,

The ‘light year’ focus must result in action: The mutual exchange of experience must lead to policy impact. The Commission should publish a road map to illustrate how the outcomes of the focus on child poverty could be translated into policy at national level through the follow up of the National Action Plans on Inclusion. New policy goals, targets, indicators and good monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be set at Member State level to ensure follow up of these policies. This should include explicit policy objectives in the NAP Inclusion and other areas of the Strategic Report as well as support for the participation of children and youth (as well as other people experiencing poverty) in the process. The Commission should monitor progress in the follow up of the policies to address child poverty.

Active Inclusion: EAPN key messages and recommendations

Active Inclusion as an **integrated strategy** for supporting inclusion, linking minimum income, positive activation and access to services is a **welcome step away from narrow activation approaches**. However, it should not **replace** a focus on **social inclusion** and the **broader priorities and objectives** of the OMC if a long-term impact on poverty is to be made. In practice, Active Inclusion is little known or practiced at **national** level, and the dominant approach in most member states continues to be **‘activation’ and ‘make work pay’ involving increased conditionality**, without measures to ensure an adequate income, access to quality services and to decent jobs. EAPN networks demonstrate that this is often resulting in **increased deprivation and the hardening the exclusion of specific groups:** particularly long term unemployed, lone parents, large families, people with chronic ill-health, black and minority ethnic groups, migrant and asylum seekers.

EAPN members highlight **key shortcomings** of the current strategies for supporting excluded groups out of poverty and exclusion: the **overriding focus on the labour market** which neglects and even **undermines the social inclusion** of those who cannot access work. The minimal focus on the **type and quality** of jobs available or being accessed by the most disadvantaged

individuals and groups. The lack of attention being paid to the **impact of privatisation and liberalisation on access to services**, particularly in relation to affordability and access to quality services and the emergence of multi tiered systems, with poorer quality services for poor people and better services for the wealthy. The inadequate **level and coverage of social benefits**, with increasing evidence of cuts and reduced access for specific groups particularly migrants and asylum seekers. A lack of pressure brought to bear with employers and service providers on countering **discrimination** in access to jobs and services.

“Active inclusion” needs to be re-focussed on **creating positive incentives for inclusion** – providing people with a **secure and adequate** income as a right with **guaranteed access to affordable, quality, responsive services** which encourages stability, confidence and mainstream job search. This is likely to be cheaper in the long run and less risky for social cohesion. **Positive employment activation means providing support along pathways to social integration** rather than a focus on work first. Strong investment in social enterprises and intermediate models must play an important part in supporting people who are distant from the labour market through path ways approaches. The EU needs to move forward on the commitment to safeguard access to services and **guarantee social standards** for all services of general interest, energy and transport as well as social services, while taking active measures to tackle discrimination.

The promotion of broader approaches to Active Inclusion must be implemented through the Open Method of Coordination. The next stage of the launch of Active Inclusion must have real political ambition. This should include a strong process to monitor effectively real developments and ensure that the broader approach is taken up in future rounds of the OMC as well as in the National Reform Programmes. A revitalised and more dynamic OMC involving all stakeholders including those most affected, is vital to drive the ownership and implantation of this vital agenda.

Monitoring progress on other commitments in the National Action Plans on Inclusion and the health and long term care and pensions strands of the National Strategy Reports (2006-2008)

During the light year, the **lack of obligatory and publicly available implementation reports on the NAP Inclusion and the Strategic Reports**, has made it impossible for EAPN members to make a coherent assessment of progress or the need for new measures. Networks have clear concerns about the **lack of progress on some stated priorities** as well as the **lack of action on important new priorities**: 1) Migrants, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, black and ethnic minorities 2) Reducing access and level of benefits leading to the worsening situation for many groups; 3) Increasing urgency of action on access to services – particularly housing and health. Unless **monitoring and evaluation of the NAP inclusion** is carried out systematically

and transparently, at national and EU level, the whole NAP process risks being weakened and undermined. Although **the light year** offered good opportunities for in-depth focus, the lack of transparent, active stakeholder involvement has only added to the decreasing ownership and stakeholder involvement, particularly at national level.

For EAPN the new “**streamlined**” **process** involving social inclusion, pensions, health and long-term care has not so far delivered on its promises. Networks have found it **difficult or impossible at national level to access** the pensions, health and long term care processes. Even if the processes were more open, most Networks would find it difficult to engage given their limited resources. Members however, highlight **the vital importance of the streamlined areas**, particularly levels and coverage of pensions and inequality of access to health care. New steps need to be taken urgently to ensure **effective coordination** between the three strands, both in terms of horizontal government department involvement and to promoting active cross-cutting stakeholder involvement. **The allocation of resources** to NGOs working with people experiencing poverty will be essential, if they are to be able to input their concerns effectively. EAPN, however, strongly underlines the **importance of the NAP Inclusion as a separate entity and process**, and stress the need for strong backing for its continued development and to provide the full details of the plan in the supplementary report.

Governance and Participation

The majority of EAPN networks have **increased their activity and engagement** in the NAPs, but this has not been met by equivalent engagement of governments in extending the scope or quality of governance. Most networks complain of **limited transparency and minimal policy impact**, which is undermining the sustainability of their involvement. There are however important exceptions where networks have played a key role in important new policy initiatives. Several member states have now established more on-going structured dialogue around the NAPs, but the networks are still waiting to see real impact. Despite the lack of structured stakeholder involvement in the ‘**light year**’ process several networks have been instrumental in organising seminars on child poverty with government and other stakeholders. However, most have not been able to **access the final Social Protection Committee** questionnaire on child poverty, which raises serious questions about transparency and accountability.

In terms **of the participation of people experiencing poverty**, networks reported an **increasing range of ‘one off’ activities** such as conferences or seminars at national and regional level; but in many instances these events relied on support from the Social Exclusion Programmes, NAP Inclusion Awareness budgets. Few networks reported innovative structures for national or local

dialogue with people experiencing poverty that had a formal and recognised place in developing the NAP Inclusion.

The **new cycle of Strategic Reports 2008-11** offers an important opportunity to **deepen and strengthen governance and participation** in the NAP Inclusion and the whole OMC. The Commission should build on the conclusions from the Round Table in the Azores and good practice examples to make strong new recommendations in revised guidelines for the preparation of the Strategic Reports, highlighting the need to improve and benchmark governance and participation, with better indicators and active and transparent monitoring and evaluation in this area.

Benefits and Weaknesses of the NAP Inclusion and Recommendations for strengthening the OMC and other processes

The networks highlight that the OMC has brought **key benefits** to the fight against poverty - putting combating poverty explicitly on governments' agenda, promoting European reflection and exchange and encouraging convergence of thinking on key policy areas. It has also been a **beacon of good practice on participation and governance** (in comparison to other European processes, for example, the National Reform Programme) However the **main weakness** lies in the NAP Inclusion **remaining a report** rather than a **process**, disconnected to national policy making. The lack of **coordination** and co-relation between government departments and the still limited **structured stakeholder** involvement has led to limited ownership and impact on policy at a national level.

Although **EAPN networks have experienced important benefits** of engagement in the NAP Inclusion including a higher profile with the responsible government departments, providing a platform to engage with governments on poverty policy, the lack of support for civil society engagement and funding to support participation continues to be a major barrier.

EAPN networks highlight that at civil service level there is often huge personal commitment to the NAPs Inclusion process but that the real barrier to the development of an active NAP planning process is in relation to the lack of **political priority accorded to combating poverty as a goal** in itself, especially where such an approach might conflict with an economic agenda driven by growth.

Proposals for strengthening the impact on poverty through the OMC and other processes

EAPN networks **defend the NAP Inclusion and the streamlined OMC** on social protection and social inclusion **as a vital instrument** for combating poverty and social exclusion. However the process is not sufficiently dynamic, does not deliver sufficient policy impact, has insufficient stakeholder involvement and is

currently at risk of being overwhelmed by the limited vision in the revised Lisbon Strategy. EAPN networks therefore underline the need to make changes on the following three levels and to **muster the political will to drive through a high profile demand and process for change for a real social progress agenda.**

1. Overarching Framework: Strengthening the social and poverty dimension of Lisbon

The social dimension of Lisbon needs to be reinforced by revising the integrated guidelines to create a coherent, social, economic and environmental approach embedded in the EU sustainable development strategy. This means insisting on **feeding in**, but even more on **feeding out** – putting the National Reform Programme at the service of social cohesion through strengthened joint processes and mechanisms. New guidance must be given to ensure more effective **participation and governance** and new efforts must be made to reinforce the role of the EU in the **fight against poverty in a global context**, linking the policy proposals for a social Europe to a social world. (See EAPN Report: Strengthening the social dimension of the Lisbon Strategy: proposals from the European Anti Poverty Network – July 2007: www.eapn.org)

Structural Funds must be made a driving force for social cohesion and be monitored for their impact on delivering on the priorities of the National Action Plans on Inclusion as well as Employment and in the National Reform Programme.

2. Revitalise the OMC as a dynamic, participative and strategic tool

The OMC on social protection and social inclusion needs to become a more **strategic instrument**: ensuring real impact on national policy and on poverty. Examples of tools needed include: systematic poverty assessment, linking national and local processes better with EU ones, investing in the regional and local dimension, implanting better coordination and through the establishment of clearer targets and transparent and effective monitoring to demonstrate policy impact to all, as well as ensuring better coordination between the different strands.

The OMC needs to become **more participatory** by investing in promoting **better governance and participation** as the prime means to increase national ownership as well as extending effective mutual learning and supporting policy impact. This means both piloting and mainstreaming innovative ways of promoting participative democracy, developing regional and local NAPs to feed into national NAPs, providing detailed guidelines on benchmarking quality of participation and above all investing in participation, through ensuring adequate resources for NGO's and other under-resourced stakeholders, particularly at national level in line with the good practice of the Commission at European level. The **European meetings of people experiencing poverty** need continued

support and the progress that has been made in developing this model of participation at national level needs to be further strengthened so as to give a more on going and strategic support to the involvement of people experiencing poverty and exclusion in the OMC process.

The OMC needs to become **more dynamic**, through ensuring high-profile visibility at national and EU level and by deepening the yearly reporting process. A 'light-year focus' on key themes, should promote exchange at EU level, but not undermine the yearly evaluation process, or the follow up of all areas identified in the National Action Plans and Strategic Reports at member state level, or the chance to flag up new concerns. The OMC also needs **new roles**. Key to this will be a dynamic new process around driving and monitoring the promotion of **Active Inclusion**, to ensure that it is delivering on its poverty and social inclusion objectives.

3. Specific new tools and instruments

To demonstrate its new vitality, the OMC needs to have **new tools and instruments. These should include**

- A new EU Poverty Programme within the framework of the OMC,
- Enlarging the focus of the OMC to report on wealth as well as poverty
- The development of a common horizontal EU framework promoting a "package" of common minimum standards (benefits and services) in order to make social rights effective.
- Increasing the profile, budget, ambition and ownership of the European Year for the Eradication of Poverty 2010 to actively move forward at EU and national level on delivering the goals of eradicating poverty and consolidating the role of the OMC.

Conclusion

In general, EAPN's assessment gives a **positive** answer to the **first** of the criteria set out above, whilst regretting that more advantage was not taken of the broader stakeholder interest generated and their findings. (*Has the light year promoted effective mutual learning on the priority focus and led to stronger policy objectives, targets and implementation in the focus areas -ie child poverty and to a lesser extent active inclusion-*). This positive assessment, however, is conditional on there being a **full follow up** of the in depth reflection that has been generated on child poverty and active inclusion in the future work on the National Action Plans on Inclusion and the Strategic Reports.

In regards to the **second** criteria (*How far has the light year strengthened governance, participation and mutual learning with broader stakeholders?*) EAPN's assessment is **more negative** and it is our view that the 'light year' has **led to a loss of momentum** in relation to participation in the governance of the strategy, both in the 'light year' focus and in the overall implementation of the

NAP Inclusion and the broader OMC. However lessons can be drawn from the experience of this first 'light year' and corrective actions can be taken to ensure that the problems encountered in relation to stake holder involvement are overcome in future years.

In relation to the **third** criteria (How far has progress been made on the other priorities identified in the NAP Inclusion and the Strategic Reports in terms of the other objectives and priorities of the OMC and the overall impact on poverty?) EAPN's assessment is that there is still **room for much improvement**. The 'light year' approach and the lack of annual implementation reports has meant little structured and focused activity and follow up of commitments made in the National Action Plans on Inclusion and the Strategic Reports in most member states. In relation to the broad concept of mutual learning based on common reflection and policy actions about how to reach the over all goal of *"making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty"* again this focus seems to have diminished in the 'light year'.

To overcome this reality the OMC framework needs to **innovate and become the home of dynamic new processes**, based on participatory democracies which really deliver on the ambition to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty. This means investing in the process at national as well as EU level, and taking the courage to move beyond "exchange" to broader mutual learning involving all stakeholders, and commitment to progress on policy goals, which lead to improved social standards. If this happens then there is a chance that the OMC can stand shoulder to shoulder with the dominant economic processes in a renewed Lisbon vision, based on an integrated sustainable development vision – which is capable of finally having an impact on poverty and promoting a decent society for all.

FULL REPORT

Introduction

The European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) has been a key actor in defending and promoting the EU social inclusion strategy at national and EU level, since its launch in 2000.

Since 2005, the EU social Inclusion strategy has been “streamlined” in an integrated strategy based on agreed common objectives with two other key fields: pensions, and health and long-term care. This ‘streamlined’ strategy is called the **Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on Social Protection and Social Inclusion**. Under this “streamlined” approach, Member States were required to submit **National Strategic Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NSRSPSI)** for the period 2006-2008. **National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAP Inclusion)** were submitted as the Social Inclusion part of these reports.

Under this new approach, during the intervening years (i.e. 2007), called “light years”, Member States are not expected to produce implementation reports but participate in an **in-depth analysis and comparison of specific themes** drawn from the National Strategic Reports as identified by the Commission. During this “light year” in the area of social inclusion, the Commission has chosen **poverty and social exclusion of children** as the key priority theme. A second theme identified for follow up was the theme of **Active Inclusion**. However, the establishment of this focussed approach at EU level should not have prevented Member States from implementing, monitoring and evaluating the commitments they made in the National Strategic Reports or the NAP Inclusion or in developing new policy initiatives or measures. There should also have been a clear strategy for stakeholder involvement in both the implementation of the NAP Inclusion and in the activities on the light year priority theme.

This report gives an assessment by EAPN members (National Networks and European Organisations) on the process, activities and impact on poverty of the 2007 “light year”. Members were asked to comment specifically on the light year theme of child poverty, but also on active inclusion as well as providing an assessment of the implementation of the NAP Inclusion during the year. Members were also invited to comment on the broader National Strategic Report areas (health and long-time care and pensions) although in reality, most Networks have had insufficient resources to tackle these areas. The report also looks at the question of governance in the NAPs Inclusion process. The final sections attempt to assess the benefits/weaknesses of the NAP Inclusion and the “streamlined approach” and to make recommendations for future development of the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the EU.

The report is based on **responses to a questionnaire** circulated by EAPN in June 2007 and follow up discussions in EAPN's working group on Social Inclusion (the Review Group on Social Inclusion). There was a tight timescale for responding and replies were received from the Networks in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK. Reports from European Organisations in membership of EAPN were also received from, AGE (European Platform for older people), FEANTSA (the European Federation of national organisations working with homeless people) and ATD Fourth World (which works with peoples and families in extreme situations of poverty).

Linked developments in relation to social policy in the EU during this period include: the follow up of the **social reality stock take**, the **mid-term review of the social agenda**, the **revision of the Lisbon Integrated Guidelines** and ways of **improving the link between the OMC on social protection and social inclusion and Lisbon** (the so called "feeding in and out"). These developments are the subject of separate reports by EAPN. (See www.eapn.org)

Child Poverty: An EAPN Assessment

EU Background and Activities on the Child Poverty priority

EU background to child poverty as a priority

Child poverty as a policy priority has been gaining in political importance since the European Council of 2005. This is partly in recognition of the severity of the problem, and partly a response to the pressures of demographic change that is forcing Governments to reconsider their approach to family policy. It is also recognition of the growing demand to take firmer action on children's rights in line with the United Nations Charter. However, a central factor has been the greater political acceptability of a child poverty focus in the current EU climate, instead of the more general objective of "eradication of poverty". The Commission and Council has played a key role in the decision to prioritise the issue in the 2007 "Light Year".

In 2006, the European Commission's Guidelines for preparing the National Strategic Report specifically mentioned child poverty as an example of how to strengthen economic, employment and social policies to meet the agreed Common objectives. Member states were encouraged to "*particularly concentrate on four key areas repeatedly identified by various Councils* (one of these being child poverty). This was further underlined in the European Council in March 2006 when Member States were asked to "*take the necessary steps to rapidly and significantly reduce child poverty, give all children equal opportunities, regardless of their social background*"

In the [Joint Report 2007](#), the Commission highlighted that "*the vast majority of Member States prioritized the need to develop an integrated and long-term approach to preventing and addressing poverty and exclusion among children*". The report highlighted the need to make "*breaking the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next*" a key strategic priority. This commitment was further underlined by the [Spring Council Conclusions \(8/9 March 2007\)](#) stressing "*the need to fight poverty, social exclusion, especially child poverty, and to give all children equal opportunities*".

At the same time major developments have been taking place in the area of children and fundamental rights. DG Justice and Home affairs published in July 2006 a Communication titled "[Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#)" which promotes the idea of a comprehensive EU strategy to ensure mainstreaming of children's rights across internal and external policies. Its objectives include: evaluating progress and identifying priorities for future EU action, mainstreaming children's rights across all EU policies, establishing efficient coordination and setting up instruments and tools to enhance the capacity on children's rights, raising awareness with a communication strategy and appointing a Commission coordinator of the Rights of the Child. One of the

key actions is to ensure that EU budget lines (e.g. Structural Funds) use money in favour of children.

The main EU actions on child poverty carried out within the “light year” remit have been the development of **new indicators on child poverty and well-being** by the Indicators Sub-group of the Social Protection Committee. The publishing of an **Independent Experts report** on policy measures aimed at “tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children in the EU”. The completion by member states of a **questionnaire on policies and measures to combat child poverty** and promote child-well being which will form the basis of a peer review exercise in the Social Protection Committee. Other actions include a **report and seminar on lone-parent families** (23 May 2007) and a **study on the prevention of child poverty** and the means to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty, due by the end of 2007.

The Commission underlined specific areas where action needed to take place on child poverty with a strong emphasis on **education and training, labour market participation** and **childcare**. However, as a result of some stakeholder consultation, the Social Protection Committee questionnaire which formed the basis of Member states response prioritised 4 key elements: 1) Adequate income, 2) Access to employment for parents/particularly for women/lone parents, 3) Pre-school education and childcare and 4) Education and Training, particularly related to school ‘drop out’.

In the area of **family policy**, a new communication: **Promoting solidarity between generations** was published on the 15th May 2007. It outlines how best to support families to reach the “Lisbon goals”. This is primarily focused on helping women into work by tackling work/life balance and quality care services. A third key element in the Communication is the importance of adequate *“financial support, to cope with the costs of raising a family”*. This included the establishment of a new platform on family policy called the **European Alliance for Families**, which aims to promote “family-friendly policies” through a “systematic exchange of best practices and research”.

How visible was the ‘light year’ focus on child poverty?

Most networks agreed that there was **no national visibility** for the light year focus on child poverty and very limited consultation. The Portuguese network noted that the 2007 *“light year” strategy on child poverty is completely invisible at the national level. The overall stakeholders don’t have the smallest idea about the child poverty focus and there were no visible actions (consultation process, visibility actions...) about this. Even NGOs directly concerned with this subject were not aware of this focus. Therefore the objective of putting a highlight in this subject at the national level was in Portugal completely forgotten and unsuccessful and should make us think if this is a good strategy”*.

In fact, little guidance was given by the Commission on the need for active stakeholder involvement in the preparation of the questionnaire or report on child

poverty. The questionnaire approach and the long time that elapsed before national governments were sure that they would not be required to prepare a NAP Inclusion report meant that there was very limited opportunity for consultation with other government departments or with stakeholders. Further, for those for whom child poverty was not a priority objective in the 2006-2008 NAP Inclusion, there was little tie in between the 'light year' focus and national government key priorities.

How far have specific child poverty strategies been developed in the follow up of the 2006-2008 NAPs Inclusion?

Few networks reported that their member states have specific child poverty strategies. Indeed the French network said that they were pleased that a global approach had been taken as a focus on one group – even children - might lead to neglect of others. The Irish and Portuguese networks referred to a lifecycle approach in their countries – in which children appear as one stage in the lifecycle approach, rather than there being an overarching child poverty strategy.

Few networks reported specific child poverty targets or specific child poverty strategies actually in the 2006-2008 NAP Inclusion plans submitted by Member States. Those networks that reported that there was not a specific strategy in the NAP Inclusion included those in France, Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic. However, as indicated by the German network, this does not mean that in the NAP Inclusion there were no policies at all that were aimed at children. Also, there may be strategies or policies not reported on in the NAPs Inclusion. Several networks referred to the constraints on reporting imposed by the European Commission's restriction to four objectives and twenty pages.

The Spanish network said that there was a good analysis on child poverty in the NAP Inclusion but limited command over budgets. In Spain, the national government does not have direct competence for child poverty. There is a national plan for childhood and adolescence, which is an important step, as it is the joint work of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Social NGOs. However, the margin for action is small and specific policies are carried out at regional level by the autonomous regions.

The Austrian network reported a specific child poverty target, but felt it was rather vague and not ambitious. The Belgian network stated that a specific focus on child poverty is a very recent concern; like the Austrian network, there are targets for percentage reductions in child poverty by certain years. The Norwegian network said that there was a child poverty strategy for 30 municipalities.

The Portuguese network noted a decline in ambition at the same time as a rise in political priority for an explicit strategy on combating child poverty: *“On previous versions of the NAP inclusion there were some measures and targets (to eradicate child poverty by 2010 – 1st NAP inclusion - and to reduce 50% of the*

child poverty rate – 2nd NAP inclusion but it wasn't a priority and one of the main axes of the NAP inclusion as it is now".

The UK network is one of the few to report a clear, overarching and specific target - to halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020.

In Bulgaria, child poverty and children at risk are outlined as a basic issue in all the different official documents: the Joint Inclusion Memorandum; the National Reform Programme, the National Development Plan 2007-2013, the National Healthcare Strategy 2007-2012; the Operational programme "Human Resource Development", etc. However, the collapse in living standards has resulted in severe problems and evidence confirms that poverty has reached extreme dimensions – such as undernourished children: (this is illustrated in the fact that the first of the Millennium Goals for Bulgaria is to halve extreme poverty and malnutrition).

What are EAPN Networks main policy priorities for combating child poverty?

The starting point for most of the EAPN networks is a commitment to fighting poverty as part of a universal, integrated and multidimensional approach based on fundamental rights. Most expressed concern about the implications of a focus on child poverty rather than poverty as it affects all groups. Key concerns were raised about the implications of a focus on child poverty for other key groups (e.g. older people, ethnic minorities, asylum seekers..)

However, following discussions in the EAPN Social Inclusion Review Group most EAPN members felt that benefits could come from focussing on the specific concerns of child poverty, as long as the broader approaches and other groups were not forgotten.

Networks believe that the overarching approach to addressing child poverty that has been adopted in their member states is focused on parental employment – especially maternal employment (see next section of this report). In this section we highlight other key policy areas which networks felt were of vital concern.

Early years' education and childcare

The Portuguese network referred to their government's emphasis on education as a means of 'breaking the cycle of poverty' – this is a concept popular with national governments but it raises concerns for EAPN networks about the narrowing of government focus to family behaviour with insufficient attention paid to the economic context for families at risk.

Increasingly, it appears from networks' responses that the purpose of education policy is to be the main 'flanking' policy for employment. The UK network reported that its government is becoming a high spender on early years' education; but the network is concerned at the increasing focus of education for

even very young children as future workers. Recent work in which the network has engaged has raised the importance they attach to child play as a holistic source of healthy development.

The French network reported that nursery care can be a powerful tool for cutting child poverty. 95% of children aged three plus have places and there is often additional local support. However, they too note that the primary focus is on enabling mothers to take paid jobs – nursery care for very young children is expanding. The Austrian network too, reported the widespread focus on early years' education and increases in the number of childcare and kindergarten places. The network is concerned about work-life balance, especially for lone parents. The Irish network reported a positive development that since 2006 there is an early childcare supplement regardless of the employment status of the parent.

The Dutch network reported that from 2007, young people will have to stay in school until their 18th birthday, or 16th if they finish the school with a qualification certificate. Schools will also be obliged to provide after-school childcare for children up till 12 years old. "It doesn't work well yet, but it is improving" commented the network.

The German network reported a federal initiative to provide Länder finance for 230,000 extra childcare places by 2010.

The Luxembourg network also linked an increase in early childhood education and care places to maternal employment. However, in contrast to some of the concerns of other networks, the network noted that because of their lower average pay, twice as many of the minority Portuguese community are dependant on care by relatives, for children under age 12. The network believed that this may affect educational opportunities as structured childcare opportunities are a basis for preparation for school.

The Irish network reported that although there was improvement in childcare provision, it is piecemeal and there is no ambition for universal provision. There are other member states for which this is the case also. On the other hand, the Norwegian network put forward as a good example the goal of full kindergarten coverage, which is well on the way to being fully achieved.

Equal opportunities in access to education

For many networks, severe obstacles remain to promoting equal access to school for all children. The Bulgarian, Belgian, Estonian and German networks referred to new urgency being given to promoting equal opportunities for schooling.

The Belgian network reported a Federal government initiative to get children who 'beg' into school, but the network remains concerned about access for migrant

children. In Bulgaria as well, a specific group at high risk are the children 'begging' and working in the streets. The majority of such children are boys, of Roma origin, of school age, who in most cases do not attend school, but are in the street throughout the day.

The Estonian network reported a range of financial and service measures to reduce the financial barriers to education. Financial support includes extending opportunities to qualify for child allowance, free school lunches, support for buying school supplies and free supplies for low income families. Service developments included early identification of children with special needs, local counselling services, bilingual training for teachers as the transition to Estonian takes place in Russian language schools and actions to integrate migrants and refugees. However, budgets are not stated in the NAP Inclusion itself and actual budgets are insufficient for services for children with a disability and children with behavioural problems.

In Germany, education costs have been rising for poor families because the Länder have reduced payments for schoolbooks. The network is concerned also about opportunities for migrants' children and for children with a disability. In the Netherlands from the beginning of this school year all schoolbooks will be provided free of charge, which will help a lot towards promoting equal opportunities.

Several networks mentioned a greater emphasis on language teaching for migrant children (and adults). However, referring to the Roma, the Polish network stressed also the need for equal opportunities in access to education, for example help in accessing books and school equipment, plus training for teachers in combating discrimination and implementing equal opportunities.

School participation and children at risk

The Spanish network reported that NGOs have made a significant improvement in the integration between families and schools.

The UK and Belgian networks both reported more resources for schools (Francophone community only in Belgium) and targeted support for school participation for children at risk (Brussels capital region). However, in the UK exclusion from school and truancy by children (sometimes with parental knowledge or encouragement) are resistant to a raft of current policies. The UK network said that recent research indicates that the UK education system's focus on testing and "teaching to tests" risks affecting children's health and well being and could discourage some children from attending school. The Portuguese network was one that reported a focus on targeting school drop out and a minimum income scheme tied to encouraging parents to put young people back into school. The network highlighted the important link between school drop-out and the easy access for young people to jobs in the informal or very low paid job labour market.

In Bulgaria, different policies and measures aim to address the problem of lack of school participation. These include: the National programme for the development of school education and pre-school preparation (2006 – 2015); the Strategy for educational integration of pupils and children from ethnic minorities; the National plan for children with special educational needs; linking of family allowances with school attendance of children, etc. The specific activities include: overcoming the high percentage of children dropping out from the educational system; including children who have never attended school; providing opportunities for children from the Roma residential areas to get quality education; providing opportunities for their integration into society and reducing the risk for their drop out of the labour market in future; developing of adequate measures for pupils' motivation; etc. Nevertheless, the problem with the premature drop-out from the educational system is substantial. It exists already at the first level of the education system, though not as strongly expressed as in the following stages. Many Roma children leave school before they have achieved functional literacy.

Play for children and young people

The Danish network referred to a 2007 initiative for eleven local municipalities to develop leisure activities for socially excluded children. In addition to the child poverty strategy in thirty municipalities, the Norwegian network reported a focus on increased youth centre provision for youth in urban areas. This is now promised also by the new government in the UK, but is not in the NAP Inclusion. However the UK network said that there is no play strategy at national or regional level and it is not a statutory requirement at local level, despite its central role in child development and the lack of play spaces and play opportunities especially in disadvantaged areas. The network emphasised the importance of play to child development and the current relative lack of opportunities for free, child led play. They summarised the appropriate role of adults as '*child led, stand back, be there*' to enable creative play and 'safe' risk taking by children. The network is hopeful that child play will become a higher government priority.

Overall, networks' comments on policies for early years' education and childcare and access to schooling showed that they acknowledge them as key contributing policies to combating poverty and exclusion. But networks are frustrated at the **lack of consistent attention to child-centred as opposed to parent work-focused priorities**, equality of access and sufficient recognition of special needs of poor children and vulnerable groups, as well as informal as well as formal approaches to education and learning.

Family financial support

The Dutch network stated that *you cannot end child poverty without ending poverty in the family, awareness of this fact is slowly rising*'. This view is echoed by most networks. However, many raised concerns about what this family policy should contain. Many voiced the view that a progressive family policy needs to be based on providing active support to the family to maintain and develop the well-

being and potential of all its members whilst respecting each individual member's human rights and voice.

An important area of debate for networks was the effectiveness of current family financial support mechanisms. For example, in Bulgaria, the universal family allowances for children have been cut off and only families with very low incomes receive such allowances.

A majority of networks emphasized the importance of universal child benefits, as opposed to means-tested benefits. This approach is confirmed by recent studies by the OECD, which highlighted child benefits as the single most effective means of challenging child poverty. In addition, networks emphasised that the overall effectiveness of child poverty strategies ultimately depended on general redistributive mechanisms in society.

Many networks noted the absence of strong government support for higher and universal non 'means-tested' specific child benefits, which are not stigmatising, have higher take-up from those eligible and are relatively cheap to administer. The German network noted the introduction of parental benefits and improved child bonus for low income families but felt that overall there was a need for welfare benefit reform and uplift. The network pointed out that the German Poverty and Wealth Report demonstrated the efficacy of child benefits in cutting child poverty.

Take up of targeted and 'means-tested' support is low in many countries. The UK network is (somewhat) hopeful that rising problems with the efficacy and cost of means tested benefits will result in a shift in policy that will increase child benefit to help achieve the child poverty target. However, this was not foreseen in the NAP Inclusion and several networks are in the same position of having a different leadership than the one in place when the NAP Inclusion was prepared.

Some networks, however stressed the importance of targeted benefits supporting lone-parent and two parent families e.g. the Irish network highlighted the payment of family income supplement for families with at least one child and at least one parent who is working more than 19 hours a week but where the income is below a certain threshold.

Specific concerns were raised about tax credits, which are linked to the number of hours of paid work. Whilst recognized as a useful tool in lifting incomes from work, networks recognised that they are not well targeted on combating household poverty as households without paid work are not eligible. As well, some networks were concerned about the impact of the credit 'tapers' on effective marginal tax rates and therefore 'poverty traps' and the credits' administrative complexity and therefore cost.

The effectiveness of family benefits depends also on how they are distributed within the household by those members with the power to decide. One of the strongest cases for child benefit is the affirmation that it goes to the main carer, usually the woman. A further step is to ensure that the benefit is reached by the children.

Finally, the Irish and Danish networks were two of many that reported restrictions on benefits, including restrictions for migrants. All networks reported that migrant and minority ethnic groups' poverty is higher than the average for their state; but despite this, the Irish network reported that asylum seekers, children of certain categories of non-EU migrant workers, and the children of undocumented migrants have been excluded from universal child benefit. The network highlighted that these restrictions on access to benefits came into effect following the enlargement of the EU in May 2004.

Family support and children's rights

'Family' is a high profile concept in Poland - there is a Polish political party with 'Family' in its title. However the Polish network felt family policy was not so much focused on combating family poverty as on raising fertility.

The Estonian network said that parental employment and a family focused approach are the two instruments to tackle child poverty in their NAP Inclusion. Changes to family benefits include a rise in the level of child allowances for large families and extension of the duration of parental benefit. However, despite the high risk of poverty for lone parents, the lone parent benefit remains very low. There are services in development also to identify signs of abuse early, to support families to stay together and to promote better parenting. As the Estonian network put it '*Emphasis has been placed on developing the network surrounding the child and the family*'.

The French and Belgian networks are two that identified employment and family policy in their states as twin engines of a global approach to combating poverty. In these member states, family policy seems to have a stronger and different emphasis than in Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon member states. The Belgian network agreed with the basic principles of their government's approach and praised the government for embedding its child poverty approach in the family context of the child. Many other networks support a family oriented approach, including the French and Dutch networks. However, the Dutch network reported that recent policy developments increase the risk that children will be removed from families who are poor.

The Danish network was one that reported their government's increasing focus on the concept of 'social inheritance' of poverty, but this is developing in a context where existing child poverty is relatively low and policy is targeted on a small group of multiply disadvantaged households needing intensive and long term support. In Member States adopting the same conceptual apparatus, but

with much higher rates of child poverty, a failure to prioritise broader economic and welfare factors is much more serious for risk of poverty.

Overall, networks were concerned about the **increasingly 'behaviourist' approach to family poverty**, resulting in punitive approaches. The approach risks **blaming the parents** in a way that undermines the capacity to support multiply deprived households including their children. Further, many networks reported services for children were patchy, especially in new Member States. The main increased resource everywhere is childcare – linked to maternal employment goals, but often piecemeal and with insufficient concern about quality.

It is particularly concerning that an increased risk of poverty is being used to control household behaviour. For example, the Belgian network referred to income and other sanctions on individuals or their households, which *'punish the child and add to child poverty'*.

The principles on which family policy is based are critical both to combating child poverty and ensuring the human and civil rights of family members: some concepts of family policy can be inimical to children rights and to their independent consideration as service users. The Polish network's comments urged caution about the efficacy of their current family policy and emphasised the need for an explicit focus on child poverty based in human rights: *"Poland also encounters the phenomenon of "juvenilization of poverty", which means, that the rate of poverty among children is higher than in other age groups. In Poland children are more threatened with poverty than adults. The rate of people threatened with poverty is 8% higher among age group 0-17 than among the whole population of Poland (compared to 3% in the European Union)".* ...*"The National Programme "Social Protection and Social Integration 2006-2008" diagnoses the social situation in Poland. It mentions that the increase of child poverty is greater than in other age groups. However, this fact is not reflected enough in the priorities and actions set. It indicates that there is still lack of true understanding, that counteracting child poverty is a way to stop the transmission of poverty.'... 'Concentration on the family and ignoring the child as an individual end-user of the state policy is continued in the National Programme. The programme is based on the assumption that in a family, resources are divided fairly depending on the needs of its members".*

ATD Fourth World argued also that the rights of the child include supporting families to fully assume their responsibilities.

Children in institutions

ATD Fourth World pointed out that badly paid insecure work or inadequate benefits condemns families to poverty and puts their children increasingly at-risk of being taken into care. Yet very often the root cause of families 'dysfunction' or social difficulty is their poverty. Services are insufficiently resourced to take a

preventative approach and instead a protectionist approach is taken, without evidence that the life chances for children removed from their family are better than would be the case with more support to the birth family. In new member states like Bulgaria and Romania, these concerns reach very high levels.

On the other hand the closing of children's homes as proposed in Latvia, without adequate support for the proper care of the children who will leave these institutions, is a cause of great concern. In Bulgaria deinstitutionalization is among the main policies. But, according to the network, tracing back the data since 2001, the official reports as a rule include a conclusion that "there is a sustainable positive trend towards reduction in the number of institutionalised children". However, there are not any evaluations of how positive these developments really are in a context of widespread family poverty, including absolute poverty.

Access to housing for children

The *Joint report on social protection and social inclusion 2007*, refers to the housing dimensions of **child poverty** in the following terms: "*Member States approach the issue [child poverty] in different ways, but often with a mix of policies addressing the manifold dimensions of the problem – increasing the family's income, improving access to services, including decent housing, or protecting the rights of children and their families*". Indeed, child poverty often concerns children living in poor housing conditions or temporary housing which can lead to a cycle of homelessness, if adequate support is not provided. Access to adequate living conditions is a precondition for favouring a child's development, education, and general well-being.

In its 2007 stocktaking of child homelessness in EU27, FEANTSA draws attention to two main trends of child homelessness in Europe: children in homeless families (including children in temporary accommodation, children in domestic violence refuges, children in families threatened with eviction, children living in very poor housing conditions) and unaccompanied homeless adolescents (including chronically homeless children, runaway youths, unaccompanied asylum-seekers, children leaving care institutions).

The phenomenon of children chronically experiencing homelessness is still only an emerging problem which can, and should, be stemmed as soon as possible by improving prevention policies (both systemic and targeted) to reach out to the many children at risk to avoid them entering a cycle of homelessness in adulthood. The causes of child homelessness seem to be a complex combination of structural, institutional, relational and personal factors. It is clear from FEANTSA's analysis that child homelessness cannot be tackled in isolation from poverty and homelessness *experienced by adults*, especially as many children experience homelessness as a result of their parents going through crisis situations.

There are different approaches to tackling this problem mainly founded on a prevention ethos and the need to catch the problems as early as possible. There are structural policies linked to housing, social welfare, education and health which serve to prevent crisis situations and to detect imminent crisis situations. Other policies are developed for children who cannot benefit from these mainstream measures. These therefore tend to be specialised policies which target children (and their families) who are already living in difficult situations.¹

How effective are the governments' approach to combating child poverty?

Overall, networks believed that a specific child centred approach founded in children's rights, may be necessary in addition to a general preventative strategy. Networks indicated that such an approach must carefully work through issues concerning gender rights and parental responsibilities as well as rights of children.

Concerning current approaches, a thin majority of responding networks said that their government's approach was effective in its own limited terms of increasing incomes from employment. However, this is not the same as combating child poverty. Networks very clearly wanted a preventative strategy that keeps families out of poverty, a family policy that supports families to stay together and take up their responsibilities and upholding of children's and gender rights, including children's right to childhood.

The Bulgarian network stated that as a whole the policies could hardly be evaluated as effective. They are based on fragmented studies on regional and national level and there is a lack of systematic information and independent monitoring. According to the network, at best, the strategy is palliative that is it includes measures to alleviate extreme problems, but it does not tackle the generators of child poverty. And even the alleviation of extreme problems could be questioned – the network said that in September 2007 another six-month old baby was officially reported to have died from hunger.

The Danish and Czech Republic networks are present in states with relatively low child poverty. The Danish network believed that overall their government's approach was effective, but noted that there was no specific initiative on child poverty. The Czech network noted the risks associated with low levels of inequality but in a situation where large numbers are on the margins of poverty.

The Spanish network said that their government had hardened the punitive policies but there was insufficient emphasis on prevention.

It is concerning that some of the networks least satisfied with the effectiveness of their governments' approaches were in wealthy northern states, including some Nordic states.

¹ Child homelessness in Europe : An overview of emerging trends (FEANTSA , 2007)

Despite its wealth, child poverty has risen in Norway. The Swedish network is another that was succinct on the effectiveness of their government's approach to child poverty – “so far – not”. The network referred to the strong Swedish economy, but reflected that poverty did not decline in the last upswing and inequality rose.

In the UK network believed that the potential of the government's high priority on tackling child poverty is damaged by seriously rising inequality and the increasing social segregation that has followed it. It remains to be seen whether the new government's, Ministry for Children, Schools and Families will effectively 'join up' children's strategy and cut poverty, school drop out rates and address multiple disadvantage.

The German network believed that the Hartz welfare reforms had increased poverty and that their government's approach is not focused on the least advantaged.

What are the key risks preventing a successful fight against child poverty?

Most networks felt that as one risk of poverty was reduced, other risks were rising. The most frequently mentioned risks related to lack of universal social rights. These risks were further identified as follows:

Conditionality for lone parents and the feminisation of poverty

The Dutch network is one that referred to increased conditionality in access to social assistance. For example lone parents must seek part time work when their children are aged six years; however there is a package of support measures such as better provision for lone parents with care of sick or disabled children, higher financial support, 'one-stop' youth and family centres and simplification of the organisation of youth care. The UK network too reported that the government is proposing greater conditionality for lone parents and an earlier age of children at which it applies.

Networks are concerned about the impact of such measures on the health and well-being of the children, but also the lone parents, mainly women. As commented in the EAPN UK seminar on child poverty which responded to the 'light year' questionnaire, lone parents are usually the best placed to judge how feasible full-time or part-time work may be, assessing the options available for well-paid work, the access and cost of childcare and other support services. Recent studies, for example in the UK (National Council for One Parent Families), have highlighted the effectiveness of positive incentives and support particularly when matched with active involvement of employers compared to increased conditionality, in terms of helping lone parents into sustainable employment.

Some networks are concerned also about the **rights of children to care by one of their own parents** and the impact on child development of rapidly expanding

care without parallel investment in ensuring the quality of care. For example, the Austrian network was one of many to note a rising concern with work-life balance and with the **costs of childcare but also the costs to children of absent parents**. The network pointed also to the increased risk of ill-health and poverty for lone parents confronted with the emotional as well as practical burden of work life balance in the current labour market, especially if they are pushed to re-enter the labour market with ever younger children.

Like the Austrian network, many networks thought that current employment-focused strategy is targeted on the apparently 'easier' part of reducing poverty rates and that **secure benefit incomes**, regardless of employment status, that are adequate to a life in dignity, are a primary requirement to lift out of poverty other families with more complex problems.

Impact of low pay

Many networks are concerned about the impact on child poverty of low pay suffered particularly by women, particularly single mothers (but also for any parent with care including single fathers) especially the downward pressure on pay arising from the restricted mobility of the parent with care and the restricted choice that conditionality imposes on single parents. Whilst tax-credit and job subsidies are assessed as being helpful, networks highlight the underlying problem of low wage levels, hourly and daily rates, and even the level of minimum wages, which fail to provide an adequate level for one person to keep a family and to keep the children out of poverty.

Falling through the gaps - low take up of means tested benefits and patchy provision of basic services

The Irish network defined the limits of the work focused approach as: it is unsatisfactory for those unable to work, those confronting low pay and poor conditions and parents struggling with work-life balance and access and costs of childcare. The network gave examples of the risks of underdeveloped welfare systems, especially in service provision, that are applicable to many other member states. They reported problems of welfare benefit take-up, severe poverty traps for lone parents and large families, high housing costs and lack of access to decent housing, only incremental increases to childcare provision but with no aim of achieving universal provision. They noted that Ireland spends below the OECD average on social services.

The Czech network reported their low child poverty figures, but noted bad practice concerning Roma children, the very poor living conditions – in their local areas and in children's homes - and the lack of good social housing. Poor housing and living conditions increase the risk of family breakdown and subsequent removal of children by the state. Access to adequate affordable housing is a strong concern for many networks and one that was addressed in some of the NAPs Inclusion 2006-8, such as the one from Luxembourg.

Inadequate measures for specific vulnerable groups – some examples

- The Austrian network welcomed the fact that migrants were mentioned for the first time in the 2006 NAP, but did not think there were the right measures.
- The Belgian network reported that no specific attention was paid to special needs related to gender, ethnic origin, migration and disability in relation to addressing child poverty.
- The Czech network reported that lone parents, disabled children and socially excluded Roma are more in focus; however women's issues generally and migrant issues are not priority issues.
- The French network reported that access to health is difficult for residents of poor suburbs and that there is weak implementation at local level of policies for Roma.
- The German network believed that while there are measures for unemployed parents, migrants and people with a disability, they are not adequate.
- The Irish network felt that income support is not adequate for poor children, especially children of lone parents, those with disabilities, children of migrants and unaccompanied minors.
- The Luxembourg network believed that measures for migrants, lone parents and large families are not adequate.
- Several networks believed that discriminatory behaviour is not dealt with effectively. Ireland and the UK also specifically referred to the position of asylum seekers. In Ireland, asylum seeker adults get 19.10 per week, with children receiving half this sum, while they are in directly provided accommodation. The UK network highlighted that some asylum seekers are at risk of destitution and are living in the streets or in appalling hostel accommodation, on incomes (or vouchers) worth less than the minimum social assistance given to other groups. Those families receiving vouchers had difficulty in purchasing cheap and healthy food for their children and some had lack of access to cooking facilities.
- FEANTSA highlighted the plight of unaccompanied minors and children in homeless families.

Lack of implementation and lack of monitoring and evaluation

For many networks, it was difficult to assess the effectiveness of strategies and policies, because of a lack of specific targets, timeframes and budgets, as part of a transparent implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes.

The Spanish network reported that difficulties arose because of the split between national and regional responsibilities with decentralised responsibility for policy delivery but no **clear political leadership** on child poverty and **no adequate budget**.

The Portuguese network was one of several to report that it was not yet possible to say whether the child poverty approach was effective, due to new governments and policy changes and also to **lack of evaluation** evidence.

The Polish network was concerned also with lack of **implementation** in some policy areas. But key measures are being put in place for integrated family support (Family Centres, youth centres, childcare, support for fostering and counselling services and planned tax changes to support families with children) as well as income support and housing subsidy. However, the network pointed to a **lack of targets, data and evaluation of impact** ‘so (we) do not know the degree of commitment to achieve aims’.

Similarly, the Czech network referred to increasing demands on the services of NGOs. ‘The Government strategy is... more conceptual, hypothetical, rather than concrete responsibilities in an action plan. Efforts are rather fragmented...(e.g. there is no Roma monitoring so there is no factual data on Roma level of integration e.g. into education, the same with child poverty, or child poverty within specific groups)’.

The Belgian network noted also lack of **consultation** of some of those affected by policy – for example young people themselves were not consulted explicitly for the NAP Inclusion. In the UK, there are consultations with children, but not specifically directed towards preparation of the NAP Inclusion.

Lack of policy coherence and mainstreaming of the anti-poverty goals

There was no network that believed that either combating poverty in general or child poverty specifically, was effectively mainstreamed across government - even in those cases where there were institutional mechanisms, some of them brought into being by the NAP Inclusion process. Many highlighted contradictory approaches and a lack of coherence.

For example, the Portuguese network reported their government’s attention to school quality and to supporting schools but noted that European monetary union through the stability pact and the framework of the macroeconomic guidelines imposed constraints on public deficits. These constraints have resulted in their government closing small schools; this is likely to worsen child poverty, especially in rural areas.

The German network stated that

“...important measures for children are child benefits and income tax exemptions. There are other child related elements of social benefits but they do not complement each other. Savings on tax for higher incomes are higher than child benefits”. Like the Luxembourg network, the Portuguese and German networks are frustrated by the lack of mainstreaming in government of the goal of combating poverty.

Some examples of good practice in addressing child poverty

Several networks highlighted examples of current new developments which they considered to be good practice in the fight against child poverty

Ministerial focus:

The Irish network reported on the establishment of an Office for the Minister for Children with a junior Minister and a cross departmental and inter-agency approach. The Irish network also reported that the latest Irish Social Partnership Agreement now includes a section specifically on children, but there is no clear co-ordination mechanism as yet. A broad cross cutting approach is evident in the new UK Ministry for Children, Schools and Families, established in 2007 and not foreseen in the 2006 NAP Inclusion.

Right to basic utilities:

The Belgian network reported as good practice for combating family poverty and family breakdown, the prevention of eviction or cutting of gas and electricity in the winter months. This law was a major lobbying point for the Belgian Network.

Developments in services – childcare and language support:

The Norwegian network reported positively on the goal of kindergarten provision for all children. The Austrian network reported two service developments that are also expanding in many other states: an increase in childcare places and language support for migrants and their children, but they would like to see equal attention to a wider package of support for migrant integration. Regarding childcare places, it is part of a suite of initiatives in Luxembourg – including ‘activate the parents’, ‘boost the village community life’ and ‘validation of acquired knowledge by experience’ (to help women’s career development).

Cuts in user charges:

The German network reported as good practice, an initiative to reduce school fees.

Financial management support:

The Dutch network reported on an initiative for budget training in schools to help children’s money management skills and debt awareness.

Key EAPN concerns, messages and recommendations

Key EAPN Concerns

Everybody only gets one life

Everybody has a right to a life free of poverty. Child poverty is a vital focus, but needs to be embedded in universal, preventative rights-based approaches to combating poverty for all.

There are no rich children in poor families

Child poverty cannot be considered separately from family policy. Effective policies should prioritise integrated, multidimensional approaches which support the family in all its forms and a better environment for the child.

Listen to children and to parents

Policies must be based on human rights, human dignity and participation of all. This means promoting the rights and participation of children and young people, but also of their parents, recognising gender concerns and broader models of family and household care.

Key messages

Tackle the causes of poverty and not the symptoms

The tendency to 'blame' parents and root the causes of the 'transmission of poverty' in so-called 'dysfunctional' family practice cannot be allowed to displace discussion of the structural causes of poverty. Significant reductions in child and adult poverty cannot be made without tackling inequality and committing to redistribution of income.

Ensure adequate family income for a dignified life

Child poverty cannot be tackled narrowly, through employment focused policies. Reinforcing the family benefits system, ensuring adequate income, regardless of employment status, is essential to combating child poverty. The single most effective way of cutting child poverty is to provide universal non-means tested child benefit and adequate minimum income schemes related to real needs. Activation measures that cut welfare benefits to force parents into work and which keep benefits below declining low pay rates has disastrous effects on children's and parent's welfare.

Supporting access to decent work

The majority of children living in poverty live in families with paid work². Work must provide a way out of poverty, not only through in-work subsidies and tax

OECD Report: What works best in reducing Child Poverty OECD social, employment and migration papers: 51.(2006)

credits but through the payment of a decent living wage which can provide sufficient income to provide for a family. This will ensure the independence of the poorest households and will provide the best incentives for members of these households to take up work.

Promoting child and adult welfare, rooted in life-long learning support.

Universal provision of quality pre-school care benefits children and parents is a vital need, but should not be invoked only as a spur to employment, but as a social right committed to improving children's welfare. Addressing school drop out requires stronger financial incentives to keep children in school, and must recognize the pressures on low-income families to supplement income with youth employment. Education is not purely a means to employment. Governments need to underline the commitment to lifelong learning for all children and adults focused on personal and social development.

Supporting families to provide a better life for their children

Stronger preventative actions need to be taken to support families who choose to stay together, rather than sanctioning families in poverty by taking the child out of the family, which is likely to lead to further transmission of deprivation and exclusion. Parent's must be supported in their work/life choices in a manner that genuinely benefits children and family life and respects choices to participate actively in the care of their own children, rather than to take up jobs at any price.

Unaccompanied minors, street children, child labour and trafficking are a growing problem, particularly in some 'new member' states, as well as Spain and Portugal. Policies need to be developed which to provide support for the families coping with new pressures of economic immigration, whilst promoting active measures to combat organised crime.

Pro-active measures to tackle inequality/discrimination

Deliberate exclusion of some groups from benefits and access to services – for example migrants (Denmark, Ireland) asylum seekers (UK) minority ethnic groups, Roma (Czech Republic) will counteract other policies aimed at reducing child poverty as well as being an infringement of human rights. There are many children across Europe who are experiencing difficult housing conditions (street homelessness, living in shelter accommodation, living in poor housing conditions, threatened with eviction, etc) which can lead to a cycle of homelessness, if adequate support is not provided.

Guaranteeing rights and participation

Children's rights must be defended and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child actively implemented. Children's rights should be seen as part of an integrated human rights approach where the rights of all family and household members are respected. Listening and learning: it is essential to ask parents and children in poverty what they want and what works, as well all other groups that

experience poverty and social exclusion, at all stages of the policy making process.

Getting effective implementation

A child poverty strategy needs to be effectively implemented and evaluated. This depends on good data, the establishment of specific targets and budgets, transparent monitoring and evaluation involving all stakeholders. The Open Method of Coordination on social protection and social inclusion must play a key role ensuring that mutual learning leads to real policy impact.

Recommendations for an effective strategy to address child poverty

- 1) Promote effective child poverty strategies based on **universal, rights-based preventative approaches which support families to provide a positive environment for their children**, backed by tailored measures for children and specific groups.
- 2) Develop a strengthened EU framework to reinforce **the right to an adequate income for a dignified life for all**, regardless of employment status.
- 3) Prioritise **social investment** in adequate family benefits with particular emphasis on **universal child benefits**. Bring coherence to the macro, micro and employment guidelines, supporting **investment in public services**.
- 4) Agree a more **radical approach to challenging inequality of income** as well as opportunities, through stronger redistribution mechanisms. Without these, child poverty will be continually reproduced.
- 5) Ensure that active inclusion and positive **activation measures support parents** including lone parents, rather than merely pressurizing parents into often unsustainable work.
- 6) Establish the objective of a **decent living wage** which can support a family, backed with interim measures on employment subsidy and tax credit.
- 7) Implement the **Barcelona Targets on childcare**, and aim for universal coverage and access to quality, affordable childcare for all - not only as a labour-market strategy, but as an instrument to promote child development and a better quality of life. Prioritise the focus on improving **child welfare and development**, linked to measures which support low-income families in their right to care for their children and achieve an adequate work/life balance
- 8) Implement **pro-active anti-discrimination** policies which ensure and monitor access to rights, resources and services of specific groups of children, particularly children of migrants, asylum seekers, Black and minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities.
- 9) Invest in **territorial approaches to child poverty policy** in areas of deprivation and high new migration, providing integrated services for social, employment and cultural development.
- 10) Recognise and address the **relationship between child poverty and gender** discrimination in an approach that supports households and families in all their diverse forms.
- 11) Include **explicit objectives in the NAPs Inclusion for participation** of children and youth, as well as other people experiencing poverty, linked to all

stages of policy development –diagnosis, policy setting, programme delivery, monitoring and evaluation.

- 12) **Establish a road map** to demonstrate how the outcomes from the focus on child poverty in the “light year” will result in clear new priorities to address child poverty which will continue to be addressed, implemented and monitored in future rounds of the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

Active Inclusion: An EAPN Assessment

EU background and activities on Active Inclusion

EU background to Active Inclusion as a priority

Another key focus for the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the Social Inclusion field this year is “**Active Inclusion**”. This is the term proposed by the Commission and currently used at EU level to describe an integrated strategy to promote social inclusion involving **activation, minimum income and access to services**. EAPN has closely followed the development of this strategy, as it represents one of the strongest possibilities of developing a more coherent and comprehensive strategy to fight poverty and social exclusion. However, EAPN members have strongly highlighted their concern that active inclusion should not replace the agreed objectives and priorities established previously by the OMC to eradicate poverty and promote social inclusion.

Minimum income is one of the cornerstones of social protection systems and historically one of EAPN’s key policy concerns. On the 24th June 1992, the European Council agreed unanimously to lay down common criteria on minimum income which they titled “sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems” ([Recommendation 92/441/EEC](#)). Since then most Member States have introduced minimum income systems, but there are significant differences in how these schemes work and their impact on vulnerable people.

In the Social Agenda published in February 2005, the Commission reiterated its commitment to publish a communication on the issue. This was finally published on the 8th February 2006, in the form of a **Consultation “On action at EU level to promote the active inclusion of the people furthest from the labour market”**. It set out a new comprehensive strategy for supporting those furthest from the labour market based on **3 pillars: adequate income for a dignified life, access to services and active labour market measures** and raised questions about the need for further EU action and what form this should take.

EU actions on Active Inclusion

The Consultation received over 70 responses, but relatively few from Member States (11). In September 2007, the Commission published its [Synthesis Report](#), in which many of EAPN and Social NGOs’ concerns were taken on board. Currently the Commission has commissioned an impact assessment (from ECORIS), to analyse the various legal and policy options. The mid-term report was presented at the conference on Active Inclusion which was held on June 15th 2007 in Brussels, involving academics, stakeholders and key decision-makers. The Commission is preparing a second Communication as a result of this process which should recommend the next steps in following up this approach.

At the same time, in 2006 the [independent experts](#) funded by the Social Exclusion programme, carried out independent reviews of each member state’s

implementation of the NAP Inclusion and specifically focussed on policies relating to active inclusion and minimum income. [The independent experts' findings in their national reports](#) and the synthesis report: "[Trends, recent developments, active inclusion and minimum resources](#)" have been fed into the current assessment being carried out by the Commission.

Visibility of Active Inclusion approach in the National Action Plans on Inclusion

Despite **active inclusion** being identified as a priority to be followed up in the Open Method of Coordination and the activity at EU level on this subject in the last year, networks reported that this integrated active inclusion approach has not been visible in the follow up of the National Action Plans on Inclusion. Rather the more limited concepts of "**employment activation**" and "**make work pay**" continue to influence the policies and actions at the national level. It therefore follows that there is much more to report in relation to activities connected to employment activation in this period rather than to issues to do with minimum income schemes and access to services.

Employment Context and the National Action Plans on Inclusion

Levels and trends in employment and unemployment

Networks' reports show that employment, unemployment and activity (employed plus unemployed actively seeking work) rates and trends vary greatly across the member states. Employment rates vary – higher employment rates are found in Scandinavian states. The Belgian network is one that said that the Belgian employment rate of 61% in 2005 was below the EU average.

Relatively low rates of unemployment of between 3-5% were reported by the UK, Ireland, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Norway. At 8% in 2006, the unemployment rate in the Czech Republic was close to the EU average and this year unemployment has fallen to 6.4%. In Bulgaria, due to the active labour market measures, the unemployment rate has officially decreased from 17% to 7% within 5 years. The Networks reporting relatively high unemployment of around 12% were those in Belgium and France. The highest reported unemployment was in Poland, 20%. The Polish network also had a very low activity rate of 50% (employed plus unemployed seeking work).

Regarding trends in unemployment rates, the Czech, Danish, French, German, networks specifically said that unemployment is falling. The registered UK unemployment rate is historically low, below 3%. Most of the networks saying that unemployment was falling attributed it to a growing economy influenced by strong world demand for goods and services.

Only the Belgian and Portuguese networks specifically mentioned that unemployment was rising. The rise in Portugal has been quite steep – from around 4% in 2003 to 8% in 2007.

The accuracy of measurement

Problems in the consistency and accuracy of measurement across Member States should be noted, but also comparability over time. A number of networks noted changes either in the way unemployment is measured or in eligibility for inclusion in the registered unemployed. The key change has been the shift of people out of the insured unemployment system onto disability and sickness registers. The Norwegian network was one that said its 3% unemployment rate would double if the long term unemployed now classed as disabled and inactive, were included in the unemployment figures. The UK network reported that more than twice as many people of working age are categorised disabled compared to registered unemployed. The German network reported that only one in three of the unemployed are in the insurance system and the other two in three are long term unemployed; as recently as 2005 the proportions were roughly equal. The network attributed the changed proportion to a combination of better economic conditions and the Hartz IV reforms. Seven million people including 2.1 million children are supported in the context of Hartz IV. These include both people not counted as unemployed because they are in education and training and working poor people.

The distribution of unemployment

The pain of unemployment is not evenly distributed across households: 'workless' households (in which no member of the household has a paid job) are a particular problem in the UK and Poland. In other member states (e.g. Portugal but also the UK), in-work poverty is one of the main problems.

Vacancy rates for different groups indicate that employment opportunities are not equally available for all occupation groups. The Luxembourg network noted that despite a 69% increase in vacancies over the previous year, there are many more job seekers than vacancies in sales, semi-skilled and skilled work. Only office worker posts are roughly in balance. The Czech Republic network showed the extent of regional variation in employment opportunities. On average there are just over three applicants for every vacancy, but in the Jeseník region there are nearly 28 job seekers for every vacancy. The German network pointed to the much greater difficulties in eastern Länder. The Belgian network also reported big regional differences in recent unemployment figures for Flanders: 8.4%, Wallonia 17.9% and Bruxelles capital 20.5%. The UK network pointed to severe regional differences not only in unemployment but in numbers of young people not in education, work or training and numbers of people registered as disabled and inactive.

Groups more at risk of unemployment

Despite a decade or more of interventions, the same groups remain at more risk in most states. Some of these are briefly referred to below.

Women: According to the networks, the gap between male and female employment rates is falling in most states. For example, in Belgium, the gap has fallen each year since 1990 (20% gap) and in 2006 the gap was under 5%. The Swedish network said that women's employment is high due to the widespread availability of childcare and relatively long duration of parental leave.

However, in most states except the UK and Ireland, women are still more at risk of unemployment than are men. In Denmark, 54% of the total unemployed are women. In Belgium, the biggest differences in male and female unemployment currently are between male and female part time job seekers. The Luxembourg network said that men benefit more from employment measures including temporary contracts despite there being about the same numbers of men and women insured unemployed. According to the Dutch network, the Netherlands has one of the larger proportionate differences in unemployment rates between men and women – in May 2007 female unemployment was 5.8% and male unemployment was 3.8%.

Women's pay is also lower than men's. The UK network believes that their state is an example of the impact on women's risk of poverty of trends in inequality and shortage of affordable childcare. There is a very large gap in pay much of which is due to the position of women in part time work - they are often practically excluded from full time jobs and career opportunities. Pay gaps are also much wider in the private than public sector, although there is a large pay gap between men and women at the lower paid end of public sector employment. The 'glass ceiling' and soaring male pay at the top end of the income distribution has meant that the gap between male and female pay has begun to widen.

People outside the 'prime' age groups 25-54: Age is critical to risk of unemployment. Young people under 25 are more at risk of unemployment in most states. For example, in Belgium the unemployment rate in 2005 for 15-24 year olds was close to 20%. In the UK, there is one of the highest rates in the European Union of young people not in work, education or training. The Luxembourg government is an example of one that has committed to a job or training offer for every young person.

Young people, though, are also more likely to be subject to education and training initiatives than those aged over twenty-five, who in many states have no access to free adult education and therefore limited opportunities for life long learning except through employment.

The Belgian age group most at risk of unemployment are those aged 55-64. In 2005, nearly 32% were unemployed. In the Netherlands, 300,000 older people of working age were in receipt of welfare benefits in May 2007.

People vulnerable on the labour market due to ill-health or disability: The Danish network noted that vulnerable people – early retired, disabled, etc., are not classified as unemployed.

Rates of people registered as disabled have been rising, for example in Germany and Poland. The Polish network wrote of a process of *deactivation* (over fifteen years) as a means of dealing with unemployment. In the last three years, the network said, there has been a process of *reactivation* – mainly through cuts in benefits. As indicated earlier, this approach is widespread in Member States.

The UK network noted that the 2006 NAP Inclusion included the aim of getting one million people off disability benefits and into paid work. Following the Freud Review of welfare in 2007, it is proposed to have more conditionality in the disability regime. One current additional development is the UK government's controversial intention to close down many of the factories operated by the sheltered employment agency REMPLOY, now being reconsidered following pressure from trades unions and some disability organisations.

The Norwegian network said that people with chronic ill health or disability are the majority of the inactive in the labour market. There are special measures for people with drug dependency problems and for ex-prisoners, but they have a lower rate of social assistance on these measures. The Norwegian network would like to see mainstreaming of the best measures to all groups.

The Swedish network also mentioned the situation of people with a history of substance misuse and mental illness - they confront stigma and have great difficulties in re-entering the labour market. They spoke of a parallel labour market: *'A minor group among those who are furthest from the labour market can find work in different programmes in the social economy sector, but mostly this is parallel, often short time projects, and a system that does not lead into the general labour market'*.

Minority ethnic groups including migrant groups: The French and Belgian networks referred to the integration difficulties faced by minority groups, especially in capital cities and the suburbs of some large cities. The UK network said that all Black and minority ethnic groups faced discrimination but that people of Pakistani/ Bangladeshi origin were often most likely to be both unemployed and to be working poor. Other very disadvantaged groups include recent migrants of Somali and Portuguese origin. The Czech network referred to whole communities of Roma living in very poor housing districts, few of whom have regular paid jobs. The Slovak network highlighted the development of new housing support for Roma, in segregated areas without adequate infrastructure – transport, shops, schools or childcare which weaken the chances of getting employment. Especially acute in Bulgaria is the problem with very long-term unemployment of Roma people. Discrimination is a key driver of higher risk of unemployment mentioned by all networks.

Asylum seekers, migrants and refugees: In most states, asylum seekers do not have a right to work while their claims are considered, this can take years and mean asylum seekers and their children can face destitution and exploitation. They may be forced to work illegally in very bad conditions. As the UK network said, *“it’s not so much the right to work but the right to be paid for the work they do”*.

The Belgian, Dutch and Swedish networks mentioned the vulnerable position of migrants. In Sweden, two-thirds of migrants are poor. The Belgian network reported that the employment level for people who are not EU nationals is one-third lower. Though rather dated, the figures the network quoted showed very high levels of poverty for non-EU nationals. In 2001 55.6% of Moroccans and 58.9% of Turkish people had income levels below the poverty level. This compares to the Belgian average of 15%.

Assessing Governments’ current approaches: activation or active inclusion?

As indicated earlier, there are large variations in labour market activity, employment and unemployment although in most states the same groups are more at risk of unemployment and poor labour market conditions. Networks reported that governments everywhere are continuing with much the same strategic approach in place for more than a decade

Labour market activation

The overarching strategic approach is the one promoted by the European Commission over many years and now the core of the Employment chapter of the National Reform programme – **labour market activation**. There is little evidence so far that the more progressive approach of **active inclusion** has made it into governments’ strategies.

The mismatch between labour market activation and active inclusion is very well demonstrated in Bulgaria, where the success in decreasing the official unemployment rate has been accompanied with very low salaries and wages, increasing the phenomenon of working poor (currently the minimum monthly wage is 90 euros).

Nevertheless, according to the Austrian network reintegration into the labour market is seen as the *‘magic bullet’* to solve poverty. No national EAPN network reported the holistic combination of active inclusion (well resourced, sufficient in scale and well targeted) of adequate and secure minimum income, positive activation measures and equal access to high quality services. Without this combination networks doubt that activation policies will combat poverty effectively. Further, networks had doubts about the adequacy and sustainability of the measures even in their own terms. Further elements that need to be taken into consideration are the need to boost the demand side, access to and creation

of decent jobs and adequate progression in employment, and the recognition that effective inclusion policies cannot only focus on work but should aim at social participation and development of the whole person.

FEANTSA welcomed the active inclusion approach as a useful strategy for inclusion into occupational activities and employment of groups with very complex needs, including people who are homeless. Good practice exists in a number of countries (see upcoming 2007 report on employment and homelessness³), However there is a need for more in depth analysis of the different pillars - minimum income, employment, and access to services - and to improve interaction between all 3 pillars.

In most Member States, networks reported that labour market activation policies have an increasing emphasis on **active case management** and **conditionality**, expansion of education and training opportunities and special measures for vulnerable groups including subsidised employment - these are the core areas reported on by networks. However, the Portuguese network commented that there have been four governments in seven years and no recent changes to the activation strategy. Nevertheless, there is in Portugal a programme called 'New Opportunities' which offers training and certification to all unemployed people but the network believes that there may be access problems, particularly for the most excluded groups in society.

Transition from school to work

A focus on school drop out is widespread. However, the Luxembourg network had not seen any progress in the key policy area of early school leavers. The German network referred to a Federal government expansion of education and training measures to lower school drop out. The network listed the following measures: access to education and training and to foundation qualifications for vocational training qualifications; support for employers to hire unemployed young people, allocating part of what would have been the unemployed young person's state benefits. However, the network felt that '*Federal employment offices favour those with most capacity and possibilities*'. The network added that some education costs are not securely covered – e.g. payments in kind. In some regions private foundations are being formed to secure access to education for poor children. But, as a rule, adults no longer have a legal right to free education, despite rapidly changing occupational opportunities.

Regarding the value of training and especially qualifications and certification, the UK network pointed to evidence that employers are more interested in *experience* than in qualifications – can the person *do* the job as opposed to *study* the job? Have they got the *soft skills* of communication, teamwork, personal discipline, initiative? They therefore asked whether the current focus on achieving qualifications at various levels is the most effective approach?

³ Multiple barriers Multiple solutions : Inclusion into and through Employment for People who are Homeless in Europe (FEANTSA, 2007)

Measures for groups far from the labour market

Most networks mentioned additional measures for target groups who are further from the labour market. The Irish network was one that reported a very active strategy. They referred to a raft of measures in their NAP Inclusion which are a consequence of the Social Partnership programme 'Towards 2016'. These include a more active approach to case management, earlier access for older people to employment action measures, new money for measures for a wide range of vulnerable groups and funding for 420 special projects each year for the most marginalised groups. The Irish network reported measures for additional targeted actions for lone parents, people with a disability and Travellers under activation measures identified in the Social Partnership Agreement 'Towards 2016'. However, the network has several concerns about the success and sustainability of the strategy: First, - whether consultation and participation is adequate for target groups to 'own' the strategy. For example, there has been a withdrawal of government engagement and consultation with Traveller organisations. The network believed this is likely to affect the success of the measures taken. Second, whether investment in flanking measures is adequate – the network is concerned about the limited investment in care services. Finally, much of the strategy is not implemented yet.

Subsidised employment

Subsidising employers to take on harder to place unemployed people is a quite widespread policy. It was specifically mentioned by the Norwegian, French, Belgian, Dutch, German and Austrian networks. It can aid disadvantaged groups to get the work experience that employers want.

The Norwegian network reported positively on the employment subsidy of up to 50% of an unemployed person's salary for 3-18 months. Another positive measure is that disabled pensioners can bring their pensions as a subsidy to their working contract for longer than before.

The Dutch network mentioned that the new coalition government has reached an agreement (still to be confirmed) with organisations of employers, and local authorities and trade-unions to provide 200.000 (mostly low paid) jobs, for young people, women, elderly and migrants. As the network stated, "*Employers are willing to provide jobs if 50% of the wages-costs are paid by the government*".

However, the German network had strong concerns about the *sustainability of measures* on subsidised employment following the end of the special measures for the target groups of those aged under twenty-five and over fifty years old. There is also an occupation bonus for people harder to place in the labour market – people with addiction problems and people who are learning disabled. The network questions sustainability of employment following the end of the employer subsidy, especially for 'additional jobs'.

The French network referred to the '*Contrats Aidés*' policy which supports businesses or associations to offer subsidised employment to people far from the labour market. The jobs are usually low paid and precarious but the network pointed out that they enable access by people far from the labour market. In this case *policy sustainability* is an issue. The government has announced a 30% cut in the number of contracts because unemployment is falling – yet unemployment may not be falling equally fast amongst the vulnerable groups.

In Bulgaria, active labour market policies are increasingly restricted to subsidising employers. While the active pressure by EAPN Bulgaria succeeded in including social economy and social entrepreneurship as a priority in the Operational programme "Human Resource Development", the current official interpretation of both concepts tends again to replace them by subsidising employers.

However, a drawback referred to by several of the networks is that employers then 'raise the bar' on what they want – some networks suggested that employers then wanted to control who they take and raise the entry qualification or extend the subsidy to other groups, especially higher skilled groups. There has been limited take up also by employers in some states – they do not need to hire. Besides the sustainability of such policies and measures, other important concerns are the 'deadweight' (where the person would have got a job anyway) and 'substitution' (simply replacing one group by another) effects and the role of subsidised employment in undermining a more pro-active campaign by governments on low pay levels related to wage levels and types of contract (e.g. part-time and atypical contracts).

Are Activation measures in the NAPs Inclusion effective in getting people into decent work?

A variety of useful measures

Below are some of a range of measures networks referred to as positive developments that could be transferred to other member states.

- Higher benefit levels and instruments to review benefit levels regularly: The Belgian network referred to a 'Pact for Solidarity Between the Generations': Social welfare resources stagnated in the 1980s but from 2008 this Pact foresees two-yearly welfare benefit reviews and reviews of replacement income levels, as some benefits have been below the poverty threshold. There has been also a big growth in training opportunities, though still below the EU average. The Norwegian network said that in some regions there are pilot tests of higher rights-based unemployment benefits and training.
- Making work pay: Most networks have been critical of make work pay approaches, particularly where the main focus is the deliberate lowering of benefits, to make low-paid jobs attractive. But some networks highlighted new hopeful initiatives. The UK network referred to measures, especially for lone

parents, to ease the transition into work and to enhance the security of benefit income if the job does not work out. There are additional resources and measures also in an initiative called 'Working for Families' but it is a Scottish initiative only and even so is not 'rolled' out in the same way across the Scottish territory.

- The Czech network referred to a new law (January 2007) to ensure work pays better than not working (it includes also measures relating to social work and counselling). However it is not well related to living wage need. A proposed rise in the minimum wage to combat the '*poverty hooks*' was actually mentioned in the NAP Inclusion but is not in place yet.
- The French network referred to a pilot programme in some departments - the RSA – (*revenu de solidarité active*) to reinforce the financial incentive for RMI (social assistance) or API (payment to lone parents) beneficiaries who take up a professional activity. It 'makes work pay.' But it seems the new government has committed to a roll-out of the programme before it is evaluated
- The German network referred to child bonus that helps low income families with at least one working person.
- Supporting social and economic integration: The Norwegian network referred to the NAV 'one stop shop' offices which will be established in every region by 2010, providing integrated, multidimensional services for unemployed people. The Danish network referred to a good programme for vulnerable groups called 'A Chance for Everybody.'
- The Polish network referred to an increased role for social integration clubs, development of social integration centres to promote equal opportunities for those at risk and reinforced support for NGOs implementing integration programmes. However, while there are interesting ideas, they are not put into practice.
- The Spanish network referred to local plans that are good practice when they have a single agent and take into account territories, social as well as labour insertion. They gave the Asturias government action as an example of good practice.

However many networks highlighted their doubts about the outcomes of such policies, in terms of **long-term sustainable decent employment**, which is the vital need for people experiencing poverty.

Strategy not comprehensive nor coordinated with other policy areas

The Luxembourg network believed that the lack of a comprehensive strategy and the limited range of measures albeit some good ones, meant that the strategy would not be effective for all groups.

The Spanish network pointed to the lack of co-relation and coordination between employment and social welfare policies, with social welfare being the most damaged by this problem. One particular issue is that regions have taken varied approaches to minimum income and in some regions minimum income is replaced by inclusion policies. The network believed that a national state minimum income was an essential foundation for other policies.

The Bulgarian network considered the economic and fiscal policies as the main poverty generators and questioned the possibilities of the narrow inclusion policies to have impact on them. On the contrary, while the country is characterized by the lowest basic incomes in Europe, the intentions of the government to enforce 10% flat income tax from January 1, 2008 and the 10% tax on profit will most probably result in a new increase in the poverty rates and further pressure on the living standards for low and even middle income groups.

The Age Platform (for older people) pointed out the inconsistency in labour activation measures and gave an example of government's rigidity in fighting unemployment among people over 50 in Germany: the threat of a 25% cut in basic social security benefits when people refuse to accept a "one euro job" (Hartz IV arrangement) or the application of the so-called "unemployment benefits II" requiring the use of saving accounts or a cash contribution in life insurance policies.

Working poor

Like the German network, several networks pointed out that the fall in unemployment was concentrated amongst the short term unemployed and that as well there had been a parallel rise in the numbers of 'working poor'. Between October 2005 and 2006 the number of working poor in Germany rose from 850,000 to one million people. The network referred to this as a '*consolidation of structural unemployment*'. The UK network reported a very low rate of registered unemployment but one of the highest rates of working poor – and this was acknowledged in the 2006-8 UK NAP Inclusion. The Belgian network reported relatively low rates of working poverty.

The Spanish and UK networks commented on the low absolute level of minimum wages, although in each case the rate has risen in recent years. The Spanish network pointed to the perverse effect of unattractive, low quality, low paid jobs in de-motivating and deactivating excluded people. The network believed the greatest impact was on migrant groups.

Not enough jobs or training

While the Belgian network referred positively to the relatively low rate of working poverty in their member state, they were one of several networks that pointed to the shortage of jobs and training places. Young migrants, people aged over 55 and women seeking part time work have most difficulties.

The Irish network was positive about many of their support measures and that so far there had been few developments along the lines of compulsory activation and withdrawal of benefits, but they were concerned at the lack of attention to quality in work and also *“...there is a gap in the numbers of those leaving social welfare supports and those leaving benefit and those entering training and employment and the fate of this group is not clear”*.

The Spanish network was concerned that European Social Funds are inadequate to support labour market integration for disadvantaged groups.

The Portuguese network stated that there are not enough decent jobs: *“Of course this is not effective in helping all the excluded people into decent work. Most of the people living in poverty cannot – even with very supportive measures – find a decent work, simply because there isn’t a decent work for them. Taking in consideration their professional skills and in a great number of cases, their age, the actual employment market (where the ‘decent work’ lives) is not open for them. Young people without studies and older people (more than 45 years old) are “condemned” to continuously live in a social exclusion condition (even and when they find a job). When we take in consideration the number of working poor in Portugal it’s quite easy to understand what we’re speaking about”*.

So, many networks had doubts about: **whether there are enough jobs; whether there are enough decent jobs and whether the most disadvantaged can get them**. This is why in practice they are so concerned about conditionality, compulsion and cuts in pensions and other benefits. Rather than providing an incentive to take paid jobs, they believe these measures are a driver of poverty both directly (benefit incomes below the poverty threshold) and indirectly – by enabling employers to adjust their offer at the lower end of the labour market. No network reported that governments had put in place any new measures regarding the obligations of employers or the need to provide decent jobs with good wage levels and conditions, although some states without a generalised minimum wage were still discussing or consulting on it.

What about the people who cannot work?

The Spanish network thought their government had not given enough thought to people of working age who cannot take paid work. As the Czech network said – *“The overwhelming focus is on getting a job and keeping it. Any other outcome is not judged a success”*.

The area of ensuring adequate minimum income and promoting quality support mechanisms to support social inclusion and participation is noticeably absent.

The Belgian network was one that referred to stigma, loss of confidence, poor living conditions and poor health and family breakdown. Most networks believed

that at least some social assistance minimum incomes were below the poverty threshold and like the Belgian network, felt that access conditions had tightened up. For example, the Danish network referred to adequate benefits but more people failing to qualify as sufficiently vulnerable to receive the benefit. The German network said that the threshold for being assessed as invalid is much higher than in the other member states: only 370,000 working age (18-65) people (0.6%) receive social security without having to be available for work. The Swedish network was blunt: *“They are getting poorer as the benefits are being lowered”*.

Only the Dutch network expressed optimism about the future, saying that while there was not much change in the position yet, *“EAPN sees a slow changing policy towards the fight against poverty, mainly by the communities”*

The UK network saw some good signs in the new approach of their new government, but they were very disappointed by the new government taking up the Freud review recommendations, which effectively recommend creating a greater risk of poverty as an incentive to work; policy continues also to neglect single adults without dependents. The network is concerned also at the letting to profit making firms of large financial contracts to get vulnerable people off the incapacity figures, but without anti-poverty floors or targets.

The Portuguese network was not hopeful and was concerned at the perverse effects: *“In this case everything gets worse. We might even say that in these cases this kind of approach produces very hard perverted effects. These types of measures are clearly drawn theoretically for people still able to get into work (no matter what kind of work). When these measures are applied to other groups – which for different reasons and at least at this stage have to “make different roads”, in general and because these measures are not adequate for them, it reinforces dependency, lack of self-esteem and the belief that poverty is their destiny and there is nothing they can do about it”*.

Minimum Income: Are welfare benefits sufficient to keep people out of poverty?

There is a growing concern about how the central issue of adequate welfare benefits has become an invisible topic. Within the “Active Inclusion” debate, it is given attention but it remains to be seen how strong the final recommendations will be in this regard. For all networks, there is continuing concern about insufficient coverage and inadequate levels, with key new concerns related to the changing face of poverty and the very weak position of immigrants to and in Europe. An increasing concern also is the real purchasing power of minimum social assistance incomes. EAPN Spain highlighted particular problems with purchasing power of pensions - How much do these benefits buy? Do they cover the rising cost of living and services (food, housing, transport, childcare, medicines, school materials and basic utilities such as power fuel and water) and

do they recognise the reality of debt that families are facing, and the implications on disposable income of re-payments.

Some networks highlighted positive developments, for example the Dutch network described a local policy to increase rights to supplementary benefits and the development of local conferences in which people experiencing poverty participate to discuss adequacy. The UK network highlighted positive measures for debt alleviation. However, the majority of networks emphasized the stagnant or declining levels of benefits and the growing inadequacy of mechanisms which fail to link social assistance levels to real spending needs and costs.

Absolute Poverty

Benefit cuts in less wealthy countries are more likely to increase the risk of absolute poverty – the Czech network was concerned about a new law on ‘material need’. However, according to the networks, in the wealthiest countries also, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants have a high risk of living in absolute poverty, as do some vulnerable adults especially those subjected to welfare benefit penalties. The German network referred to a law in force since January 2007 that punishes people by cutting their benefits if they do not accept state demands to work on the ‘second labour market’. According to the network, this had tragic results: *“Because of this in March 2007 a young person died of hunger because he did not get any more money from the state (no rent as well) and he was not able to ask for vouchers for food any more”*.

Relative poverty

As the Swedish network said *‘the reality you experience is the only reality you have’*. Relative poverty matters a great deal not only for material social inclusion but for emotional well-being and integration possibilities.

The Belgian network was one of many to refer to benefits set below the poverty threshold. The network said that for a single person, the revenue for integration is only 75% of the poverty threshold, the unemployed allocation is 91% and the invalidity pension is 100%. For a single parent of two children, the integration revenue is 91%, for a couple with two children it is 69% and for a couple with no children it is 67%.

Cuts in benefits and rising living costs

The Swedish network pointed out that incomes adequate for social inclusion must include *‘a margin for the unexpected’*. Yet benefits are going in the other direction – stagnant or reduced. Networks concerned about cuts in benefits included the Danish network: social benefits have been cut significantly for those aged under 25, for families with many children and families where both parents are long term unemployed. The network believed the heaviest impact falls on minority and migrant groups.

The German network said that from July 2007, the minimum income rose 0.50 euros but energy and purchase taxes have risen, so that people are no better off, indeed worse off. As indicated above, faster rises in living costs for poor people, more of whose income goes on food, rent/ mortgage and basic utilities, was a concern for many networks. Being uninsured and severely in debt is an increasingly prevalent condition of poor households. The Portuguese network highlighted evidence that reductions in minimum income are not effective in getting people into work, but only increase hardship.

The Age Platform warned about a general decreasing value of disposal income of older people in many member states, i.e. pensions are eroded quickly as monetary increases do not keep up with inflation or the cost of living. Additionally, pointed the Age Platform, national pension schemes fail to assess adequate income on the basis of what people need to spend – including on healthcare, heating and transport costs – as poverty cannot simply be measured in terms of monetary income.

Access to services: Are quality services accessible and affordable for all?

The third pillar in the context of ‘active inclusion’ is **access to services**. In this area, Luxembourg was one of many networks that commented on the growing tendency to put real resources mainly into **expanding services** that are seen as **directly related to getting people into employment**, such as childcare. Yet even that focus is limited. Mental health services are relatively neglected in many member states despite the relationship to fitness for employment

Networks reported that service providers are increasingly being forced to justify themselves in terms of the link with employment rather than a reinforcement of the right to services as a fundamental condition for social inclusion. Concern was raised also at the narrow interpretation of social services, rather than a focus on all services of general interest. Many networks highlighted worries about the impact of increases in prices as well as the costs of medicines and school material and reduced access to basic utilities. These changes were often seen as related to the growing privatisation and liberalisation of services which render them increasingly inaccessible to low-income families on benefits or low wages and put poorer people at risk of chronic over indebtedness, excluding them from the capacity to participate in social life. Networks were angry at the consequent severe risk to children’s development and also the impact on family and household stress.

The right for all to decent housing.

There were some positive developments reported and these are outlined below. But all networks highlighted concerns about affordable access to decent housing, which has an impact not only on the possibilities of accessing employment and increasing material and also social deprivation but is a denial of a fundamental human right and the right to family life.

Despite government ambitions to increase housing supply, the Luxembourg network missed a general policy on housing. Lack of sufficient housing, costs of housing and the impact on mobility and social segregation concerned the UK network. The new government has made a commitment to raise house building, but the financing of it relies a lot on the private sector. Also, housing allowances for social assistance recipients are financially capped and can result in people paying part of their rent out of already very low incomes.

The Czech network referred to social housing and inadequate facilities in crisis housing. However, the network gave a good practice example of a holistic service provided by the NGO IQ Roma – a combination of field social work, social and legal counselling and legal aid. It has now expanded beyond the city of Brno to nine other locations. Key activities include housing advice and negotiation with landlords, debt and negotiation with creditors, supporting families to stay together, benefits advice, employment counselling, drug and alcohol awareness and protection against discrimination.

The Belgian network gave several examples of good practice in access to housing; these included an initiative to enable direct access to housing for street homeless people in the Brussels capital region. It is a partnership approach and it includes a youth association. A key part of the approach is that people are integrated into community housing to help them re-learn socialisation and support rather than being isolated in individual units. The model is being extended to other regions.

The French network reported a new law DALO (2007) – which guarantees the right to housing for all those who are not in decent housing – people can take their case to tribunal and the state can be fined. But the network said it will require rapid construction of housing by the public sector. The German network anticipated a new law on access to housing. However, a law providing incentives to house builders was delayed.

The Maltese network noted that housing was one of the three cross-cutting issues (the others are employment and education) through which the Maltese NAP Inclusion proposed to address the nine target groups.

Homelessness/access to housing policies and initiatives are developing in around two thirds of European countries. Some countries have adopted national strategies, or are about to (Sweden, Hungary, Belgium), other countries are reviewing and assessing their current strategies (the Czech republic, France, Denmark, Ireland, UK, the Netherlands, Finland), and some countries have carried out national stocktaking exercises of homelessness to develop a solid evidence base for future policies (Luxembourg, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Denmark, some regions of Poland). These initiatives are mentioned in some of the NAPs 2006-2008, but not all. In fact there are very few homelessness and housing targets in the NAPs which push national administrations to develop

solutions to homelessness. The urgency of the issue and the increasing visibility of homelessness are an important driving force (see FEANTSA social realities stocktaking, 2007). Work on improving measurement and monitoring of homelessness and housing exclusion is ongoing, and FEANTSA is promoting the recommendations of the European Commission “Study on measurement of homelessness at EU level”.⁴

In relation to children, FEANTSA (the network on homelessness) welcomed the opportunity of the ‘light year’ to undertake a detailed analysis of child homelessness. In 2007, they published a report on child homelessness which identified two emerging trends:

- Children living in emergency and other temporary accommodation and in very poor housing conditions
- Unaccompanied adolescents – homeless, ‘runaway or throwaway youths’ unaccompanied minors and children in or leaving institutions.

FEANTSA wanted to see a greater emphasis on a preventative approach to all children at risk as well as targeted policies to ‘at risk’ groups.

Access to health care

A noticeable growing area of concern amongst networks is reducing access to health, through rising prices, qualifying criteria, differential access due to discrimination or rural location and the unequal provision of services to certain groups, particularly to asylum seekers and migrants.

This is seen by many as a further element of a creeping reduction of the universal welfare state provision and the increasing dominance of the market in the provision of key services. Networks concerns related to this field, are dealt with in the section on responses to the broader National Strategic Reports on social protection and social inclusion.

What is the impact of Active Inclusion policies on risks of poverty?

Networks had concerns about the political priority for fighting poverty but also about the assumptions underlying the activation approach. EAPN Spain pointed out the need for a comprehensive set of measures to prevent social exclusion risk factors.

Whilst welcoming the broader active inclusion approach, networks reported that there is little evidence that this broader concept is informing policies and actions. In order to make this shift the Commission will need to be very strong in its recommendations about how to go further with the active inclusion approach. It will be necessary that there is real political ambition behind this broader approach and to ensure that there will be a strong process to ensure that it is taken up in future rounds of the Open Method of Coordination on social protection and social inclusion and in the National Reform Programme process. There will need to be a thorough assessment of the extent to which Member States are pursuing this

⁴ Study on measurement of homelessness at EU level (Commission, 2007)

broader approach and the extent to which it creates a renewed priority for ensuring adequate income and access to decent services.

In the absence of this more comprehensive approach networks are inclined to believe that against the uncertainty of gaining decent jobs capable of improving their life chances, vulnerable people are being put at higher risk of poverty by the current activation approach. For example:

The Swedish network did not think that activation programmes reached most of those furthest from the labour market. The French network was concerned about the rising number of suspensions of benefit taking place under the current activation policy. Even if these cuts could be justified, there would need to be real decent jobs available to all who want them, which is clearly not the case at the moment. The Danish network was one of many to point out that in parallel to positive activation measures there are cuts to benefits for migrants and Danish citizens but with no evidence to support the intention of the policy: *“The level or length of social benefits is decreased for specific weaker groups who beforehand lack education and are living excluded from the labour market as well as socially. The idea of cutting down is to motivate for work, but until now there has been limited documentation for this effect. The Governments policy seems full of contrasts. Politically, there is a clear expression of support to vulnerable groups, and at the same time there is restriction in economic resources to benefits, expenditures for rehabilitation, sheltered jobs etc”.*

Key messages and recommendations for an effective active inclusion strategy

1. Active Inclusion must be seen as only one strategy contributing to the eradication of poverty and social inclusion

Active Inclusion has an important role to play in broadening approaches to activation, but must not be allowed to replace the commitment of Member States through the Open Method of Coordination to the objective of social inclusion and eradication of poverty and the commitment to develop **multidimensional, integrated strategies** to deliver on all the priorities identified in the 2005 and 2006 Joint Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

To ensure a clear **picture of poverty and its causes** and to dissipate what the Bulgarian network referred to as ‘*social smoke*’, reports on poverty should address the **many faces of poverty** and include the **many voices** of those at risk.

Poverty cannot be separated from wealth. Eradicating poverty implies tackling inequalities of income through redistribution. As well as reports on poverty there should be well researched **reports on wealth**. Such reports would allow also a better assessment to be made of the possibilities to finance high level social protection schemes, including minimum income schemes.

Broader definitions of social inclusion are needed, Social Inclusion policies should maximize the capacities of all, including the most vulnerable people and social groups in their daily lives, encouraging their individual and collective autonomies and full integration into society. This must take into account a multidimensional perspective: economic, social, environmental and housing, family and personal

2. Ensuring integrated approaches to Active Inclusion

Most member states are pursuing employment activation rather than active inclusion policies. More priority must be given to the elements related to **ensuring minimum income, access to quality services (not just employment related ones) and access to decent jobs.**

3. Positive activation which supports people on the road to decent jobs

Activation policies are focussing on active case management and increased conditionality and are in danger of pursuing an increasingly **punitive approach to cutting benefits**, to force applicants to take jobs. This creates increased deprivation for people on low-income and key target groups like migrants/asylum seekers, single parents and their children, as well as people with long-term illness or disability.

Insufficient attention is being paid to the **type and quality of jobs** which are available to disadvantaged groups and there are not consistent pro-active measures to creating new opportunities and emphasizing the responsibilities of employers to provide decent work. Social enterprises have a key role to play and are not being sufficiently supported.

The overriding focus on the labour market neglects and even undermines the social inclusion of those who cannot access it. **Positive activation policies should support pathway approaches** which help people in their personal development and empower them to actively engage in their communities. However, such pathways should lead to mainstream employment for those who want it and are able to take it up.

Social participation, should be valued in its own right as well as recognising that it may lead to employment. Indicators must be developed and revised to value 'soft' outputs that demonstrate better quality of life and greater social inclusion, rather than only focusing on outplacement in jobs.

4 Moving forward to ensure social standards for all

Ensuring **access to quality services** must have a central role, encompassing all services that affect social inclusion. Housing and health care become two new outstanding priorities, but also **access to basic utility services of general interest** e.g. water, electricity, transport.... Cross-cutting themes must be:

tackling discrimination in access to services and tackling affordability and quality of provision, whether provided by the public, 'for profit' or 'not for profit' sectors

Indicators need to be developed but also **benchmarks of social standards** which should be developed through the Open Method of Coordination, involving all key actors and stakeholders. The 92 Recommendation on Adequate Income for all, is not being implemented effectively. The EU needs to move forward on building consensus for a strengthened **horizontal framework on minimum income** that will ensure that no child or adult is denied their right to sufficient resources to have a decent life.

Insufficient public investment is being made to support both adequate pathway approaches to work and to ensure access to services. Macro-economic policy must serve social as well as economic needs to promote social inclusion.

5. Moving beyond fine words – implementation and ownership through active governance in the Open Method of Coordination

It will be necessary that there is real political ambition to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty behind the launch of the next stage of the Active Inclusion approach. This should include a strong process to ensure that this broader approach is taken up in future rounds of the OMC as well as in the National Reform Programmes. There will need to be a thorough assessment of the extent to which Member States are pursuing this broader approach and ensuring that the active inclusion approach leads to a renewed priority for ensuring adequate income and access to decent services for all. A revitalised and more dynamic OMC involving all stakeholders including those most affected, will help to drive the ownership and implantation of this vital agenda.

Monitoring progress on other commitments in the National Action Plans on Inclusion and the health and long term care and pensions strands of the National Strategy Reports (2006-2008)

EAPN is concerned that this year there has been no obligatory monitoring or evaluation of the overall implementation of the NAPs Inclusion or the Strategic Reports. This makes it difficult for networks to highlight new concerns or priorities or to assess the extent of follow up and implementation of the plans and strategies. In the absence of the requirement to make such a report we asked our member networks to comment on what progress they saw on the implementation of the other commitments made in the National Action Plans on Inclusion and the other strategies identified in the Strategic Reports for 2006-2008.

Progress on key priorities identified in the NAP Inclusion

Some examples of progress on priorities and processes offered by networks are given below.

Changes to income benefits: The Portuguese network referred to minimum pension as a positive development. The network also referred to the new integrated interventions in poor neighbourhoods and social local contracts, but with reservations concerning the selection criteria and the lack of involvement of NGOs and people experiencing poverty.

Changes to services: The Dutch network referred to regional Education Centres to combat illiteracy.

New projects and initiatives: The Czech network referred to several new positive developments. These included successful community planning processes and European Social Fund projects led by NGOs which had some impact in cities. They hoped that a new law on social services would shift the emphasis to prevention from institutional care for children at risk.

The German network expected a new law in 2008 concerning disability and also developments in charity law.

The Irish network reported as a good example, funding to mainstream the Rural Transport Initiative – but the network said that better coverage will need more resources.

Changes to processes: The Norwegian network pointed to a better debate and participatory planning structure for the NAP inclusion. The German network noted that NGOs are participating in the next national report on poverty and that some Länder have started on their own reports. The Spanish network also reported better participation by social organisations.

Influence on the anti-poverty agenda: Three networks – those in the UK, Denmark and Ireland, reported that they had got matters of concern to them referred to in the 2006 NAP Inclusion. The UK network's activity on working poverty resulted in a reference in the NAP Inclusion to working poor, which has helped to raise its political priority. The Danish network was able to get in a reference in the NAP Inclusion to the difference in life expectancy between regions. The Irish network was able to raise the priority accorded to poverty traps and there is now follow up development. But the Irish network pointed out also that while the Irish National Plan has a poverty target (for consistent poverty) the Plan produced for the OMC process does not. However, the first Irish National Plan aimed to eradicate poverty by 2007.

Overall, however many networks could see little progress yet, but there has been only one year for change to occur. FEANTSA said that there has been policy development and they hoped to see in future years an impact on homeless peoples' lives.

The Swedish network referred to government promises to provide more resources for housing and long term care, for education and integration of migrants and to improve learning quality in schools but the network said '*we have not seen any of this*'.

There is concern in networks that the streamlined strategy reports were barely launched before debate began at European level on further changes in the process. The elimination of the requirement to write a 'light year' progress report was announced without explanation or guidelines. In the absence of the requirement to make an implementation report key actors began thinking about the 2008-11 report and the current one faded from view.

Important priorities missing in the follow up of the NAPs Inclusion

The three missing policy priorities most commonly referred to by networks concerned strong anti-poverty policies for **minority ethnic groups and migrants** including undocumented migrants; **welfare benefits sufficient to keep people out of poverty** and **access for all to decent housing and other services**. These latter issues were taken up in this report in the section on Active Inclusion as part of the assessment of access to quality services. However, networks also identified a missing **process** priority that would enhance the democratic credibility of the NAP Inclusion and the likelihood of implementation. This is dealt with in the following chapter on governance.

Anti-poverty policies for minority ethnic groups and for migrants: Many networks were concerned at the high risk of poverty for minority ethnic groups. For example the Belgian network referred to the very high risk of poverty for Arab and Turkish origin minorities and the UK referred to the very high risk of poverty for Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin minorities as well as Black British of African Caribbean origin. This is despite relatively stringent anti-discrimination law and

illustrates the need to tackle poverty directly. The network pointed also to wide variation in the experience of poverty and exclusion and the differing dimensions of risk of different minority and migrant groups and cautioned against stereotypical assumptions and 'one size fits all' approaches.

The Age Platform pointed out the lack of specific policy measures to strengthen social inclusion of older people living in rural areas, especially in Central and Eastern EU member states. Equally important, the issue of the terrible conditions of Travellers in rural areas of the UK was also mentioned. With a high infant mortality and a life expectancy of just 48 years, Travellers are 'ageing' younger and this needs much more attention.

The Age Platform said also that host country governments had not yet recognised the impact of settlement. New migrants from the European Union, for example Polish and Portuguese people, are beginning to bring their families and older relatives to join them.

The German network referred to positive developments for migrants. There is currently a National Integration Programme for migrants – civil society groups and ministries are working also on a national integration plan. There is also the possibility of legal status for undocumented migrants – if they have a job and can finance themselves. The network is concerned that people will take precarious jobs. Also a positive development is the possibility for some migrants of getting access to student benefits.

However, the German network noted also that some positive integration measures for disadvantaged groups – for example projects for women migrants, counselling services for migrants and measures for people with a disability – were in place and implemented before the 2006 NAP Inclusion. Despite these positive developments, the German network expressed particular concerns about cuts in access to welfare and levels of benefits for migrant groups. They reported efforts to prevent migrants accessing the minimum income system and a plan to extend the time during which asylum seekers get reduced state benefits. They felt also that there was very strict practice of asylum law – for example, sending Iraqis back to Iraq – and the network added that the UN Convention on children's rights does not apply to unaccompanied migrant children.

The Irish network too referred to access to employment for migrants – the (Migrant) Employment Permits Act 2006. This law reduces exploitation and increases mobility by allowing migrants to hold their own permits, rather than the employer holding them. However, the Irish network was concerned about the negative impact on risk of poverty of the Habitual Residency Condition concerning access to social welfare payments. The network was very concerned also at the lack of family reunification for migrants, which affects their human rights: *"they are seen as workers but not as members of families"*.

Discrimination, exploitation – especially of **undocumented migrants** – are all areas of high concern to most networks who see migrants as a new face of 21st century poverty. For example, the Norwegian network was concerned about restrictions on undocumented migrants and politicians' attitudes to them, viz., *“fortune hunters and other negative descriptions have been more common by government officials/ politician during the last year”*.

Other missing priorities: referred to by networks included:

- The Danish network was concerned about education and employment and was disappointed to see no change in government policy.
- The Dutch network pointed also to the lack of measures for working poor employees and self-employed people.
- Age (Platform for older people) wanted the Commission to launch a study on the abuse of elderly. They also wanted the Commission to adopt a 'life course' approach to poverty and social inclusion.

Networks' comments on pensions and healthcare sections of the National Strategic Reports

Few networks made comments on other parts of the National Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion. Some networks just have not the resources to follow up all parts of the Strategy and have decided to put their limited resources into the NAP Inclusion part of the Strategic Reports, although some are now reconsidering this decision. This does not mean, however, that the issues are not of growing concern.

Pensions and poverty

The Dutch network said that everybody aged 65 who has lived in the Netherlands for 50 years has the right to state pension (AOW). But people aged over 45 have difficulty finding a job which affects their pension rights and risks poverty in their retirement. This was a common concern in networks – people are living longer but the age at which employers believe people are too old to be up to date, flexible etc., is getting younger. The Irish network was one of very few to refer to increases in welfare payments - in this case an increase above inflation in state old age pensions. However, the basic social welfare payment is still below the 60% poverty threshold.

The Belgian network noted that their government has raised the minimum income guarantee for older people – just up to the poverty threshold – an important precedent – and asked why not for other minimum income groups?

The French network was particularly concerned about pensions. The network said that the pension process focuses on controlling pension expenditure and not on the reality of life for older people. For ten years the pension minimum in France has been lower than the poverty threshold. Low levels of state pensions and pension insecurity were strong concerns of the UK network. In Bulgaria the

minimum and average pensions are below the poverty line and the situation has engendered mass protests by many and different NGOs this year.

The Maltese network was concerned that the government should provide a full adequate first pillar pension and pensions properly linked to an appropriate measure of adequacy and properly adjusted for wage inflation.

Although surveys in the EU reveal that older people are at a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than the rest of the population, only few national reports identify them as a target group, noted the Age Platform. Consequently, most of the reports did not examine the connection between pension provision and poverty, such as the increasing poverty risk due to the shift from State pension to 2nd and 3rd pillar schemes; higher pension poverty among older women and older migrants; inadequate pension indexation; or the use of means testing in access to social assistance at old age.

Health and long term care and poverty

Access to health and the link with poverty, is an increasing worry for most networks. Key concerns were **exclusionary changes to health insurance**, with the risk of two-tier access due to user charges and extra insurance based fees creating difficulties for access for all to adequate and affordable quality healthcare.

Health care fees: The Dutch network said that the health system changed in 2006. Insurance Health Companies were privatised. Basic health insurance is the same for everyone but more cover means additional insurance. Premiums have gone up in 2007 and 270,000 people are not insured. The German network referred also to reforms to the health system that came into force in April 2007. A good development is that everyone will have access to health insurance. But insurance companies can ask poor people for extra fees and these costs are not included in minimum incomes. This could be a further step to a two tier system of access to health. They noted also that the government has decided to reform long term care insurance.

User charges: The Belgian, German and Norwegian networks are concerned about the impact of user charges on the health and budgets of poor people. For example the Belgian network said that poor people struggle to find the costs especially for certain medicines and for dentistry (a concern also of the Norwegian and UK networks). The Belgian network felt there was a need for improvements throughout the health care system including: access to social security systems; additional medical centres; better information on healthcare; improved access to healthcare and better training for healthcare workers in dealing with disadvantaged people.

Access to healthcare for particular groups: FEANTSA referred to access to healthcare for people who are homeless as an essential part of active inclusion.

The Maltese network referred to concerns about access to appropriate treatment for children and adults with attention deficit disorder and financial and service support for people with a disability and parents with children who have a disability. It was noted that disability pension is very low and that financial and service developments are needed for people with a wide range of disabilities including visual impairment, mental health and learning disability.

A number of networks referred to access problems for minority ethnic groups and migrants. For example the Czech network referred to access problems for Roma people – due to regulations, costs and area of residence. The Irish and UK networks referred to access for migrants. In the case of the UK, the network reported that a migrants' group that is a member group of their network had collected cases of the impact on asylum seekers of their lack of legal access to anything other than emergency health care. This law is not new, but there is no sign of change in it. The member group said that **lack of healthcare access was implicated in the death of one of the people they worked with** and had put serious pressure on the mental as well as physical health of others.

Assessment of the effectiveness of the “streamlined” process

Most networks have found it difficult or impossible at national level to access the pensions, health and long term care processes. Networks are not resourced nationally to participate even in the NAP Inclusion process and are seeing little policy return for the effort expended. They see little or no concern with poverty in the other areas and an overarching concern with cutting expenditure.

They also highlight strong limitations currently with how the “streamlined process” is working. The OMC is completely dependent on the attitude of national governments – including their attitude to civil society participation. The OMC's streamlined framework has not been reflected in the reporting process and the links between social inclusion, social protection, and health and long-term care processes are still missing. This seems to demonstrate a lack of external and internal co-ordination between the various ministries involved in drafting the reports. The Age Platform for older people also highlighted that more validation should be given to the Trans-national Exchange Programme and its projects which demonstrate the value of sharing information at other than at the governmental level.

Generally, most networks believe that the potential to increase the impact of inclusion concerns through “streamlining” the inclusion, pensions and health care processes has not yet been realised. As the Portuguese network said *“There is no co-ordination between these different strategies and therefore streamlining is not working. As we were afraid, social inclusion is losing ground”*.

Conclusions – the Strategic Reports 2006-2008 and poverty

- The new **“streamlined” process** involving social inclusion, pensions, health and long-term care has not so far delivered on its promises of better

mainstreaming, and more coordinated and effective policy impact. Stronger guidance needs to be given by the Commission on the need for coordination between the three strands in the development of the strategies, stakeholder involvement and reporting

- Even so, networks strongly underline the **importance of the NAP Inclusion as a separate entity and process**, and would wish the Commission to highlight the need to continue to develop the plan, and to provide the full details of the plan in the supplementary report to the strategic report.
- The **lack of systematic implementation reports, during the light year** on the NAP Inclusion or indeed the other parts of the Strategic Report, has made it impossible for EAPN members to make a coherent assessment of progress made, or the need for new measures. Networks have clear concerns about the lack of progress on stated priorities as well as the lack of action on important new priorities. Unless monitoring and evaluation of the NAP inclusion is carried out systematically, at national and EU level, the whole NAP process risks being weakened and undermined.
- EAPN want to see **greater**, rather than **less** activity at national level: this means: more participation, more and better monitoring and evaluation through better indicators and benchmarks with resources and timelines clearly defined – as the Spanish network said *“the method is part of the solution”* if the OMC is to move forward to deliver a real policy impact on poverty.

Governance and Network engagement in the National NAP

Inclusion Process

This chapter highlights networks' perceptions of the current state of play on governance and participation in the National Action Plans on Inclusion. It assesses the quality of networks' current participation in the NAP Inclusion process and the progress on participation of people experiencing poverty. It also analyses the impact of the 'light year' and the current engagement of networks in the streamlined Strategic Reports on health and long-term care and pensions.

In general, most networks reported new developments and increasing their NAP Inclusion related activity, but this is not matched by increasing engagement by the member states or significant impact. The 'light year' process has been useful in providing a concentrated and deeper focus on a specific policy area (as long as policy impact from this focus is followed up). However, the 'light year' is seen by most to have undermined the OMC governance process. Whilst recognizing the potential of the streamlined OMC on social protection and social inclusion, most networks have little capacity to engage without new resources, because they are unwilling to take resources from their direct work with people at risk of poverty. This highlights their concern with the longer-term impact on the NAP inclusion.

Networks' current participation in NAP Inclusion processes

About half of the responding networks reported developments or improvements in network engagement, but few reported new policy impact from the NAP Inclusion or from their engagement in it. The Czech network reported improved involvement and was one of the few to have followed up NAP Inclusion impact - on the long term unemployed, the Roma and homeless people in three Czech regions. The network is active also in regional and community planning processes and has lobbied for change in social services law.

Networks' activity with their national governments

The Norwegian network said governance has improved because NGOs are consulted more than before. The network said that it was principally active on the issues of minimum income and participation. The network meets the Minister for Work regularly and is taking part in participation forums of the public service 'NAC'. The network noted that for 2007, the government did not want to arrange a poverty hearing. Therefore the EAPN network organized a hearing with a trade union partner. In August 2007, there was a meeting with politicians and the Minister of Finance and other NGOs – to review the whole NAP period 2002-2007. The hearing was financially supported by the Directorate of Health and Social Affairs. Finally, the network said that to achieve some impact, it is necessary to build stronger alliances with other

stakeholders. The network aimed to improve its coordination of activities with disabled people and migrants especially to create better position papers.

The Swedish network was one of the organisers of a big conference in 2007 - for NGOs, politicians and official stakeholders. The name of the conference was *D - Dialogue and Democracy*. The network believes itself to be a significant actor in ongoing debate. In 2007 the regional networks are trying to implement local NAPs in four cities. This is important because welfare systems are built upon municipal level decisions. The network hopes to put pressure so that the local level plans feed into the national level.

The UK network reported improvements including the further development by the Department for Work and Pensions of the Stakeholder group of civil servants from central government departments, devolved government, NGOs and local authorities. It was established in 2005. But in 2007, it has become better focused and requires some follow up work by the government departments. A further development is the regular participation in the meetings between the Social Policy Task Force of NGOs (led by EAPN), the unit responsible for writing the NAP Inclusion and the Social Exclusion Task Force, a cross-cutting Cabinet Office team responsible for driving policy for the small percentage of multiply disadvantaged groups. A further new development in 2007 was the first UK people experiencing poverty conference of over 100 people experiencing poverty, people who work with them and civil servants from the Stakeholder group. It was addressed by a Minister and took place over two days and was jointly developed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Social Policy Task Force of NGOs and funded by DWP. Also in 2007 the network held a national seminar of NGOs and civil servants on child poverty (funded by EAPN UK, and DWP) and the report was submitted in response to the 'light year' questionnaire on child poverty. Finally, in 2007 the Social Policy Task Force of NGOs launched their second NAP Awareness project which is undertaking pilot participatory 'peer reviews' of NAP Inclusion policies in three local authorities in three of the four nations of the UK. However, the network reported that it has no ongoing resources to market its work effectively to the very large NGOs or the media or to do real and ongoing follow-up work with large groups of people in poverty. Therefore it is very difficult to capitalise on the network's experience and credibility and to promote the mainstreaming of the European processes.

The French network reported that EAPN has been involved as usual. UNIOPSS and ALERTE have followed up government policy. The principal victory has been the law on the right to housing. The network said governance had improved because the CNLE (Conseil national des politiques de lutte contre l'exclusion) which follows up the NAP Inclusion, now includes NGOs. It gets involved in implementation and preparation of the NAP Inclusion.

The German network reported that its engagement was mainly around raising awareness for people experiencing poverty. The national anti-poverty network (NAK) organised a large meeting with politicians. But there has been no official consultation or meeting concerning the NAP process. The regular group in which NAK has a permanent member met only to consider the PROGRESS funding programme. The national network also organized a conference on child poverty. However, the network also noted that *“We observe that during the period of German EU presidency some regular European activities are displaced by the work for the presidency”*.

The Irish network raised its profile by a well received presentation to the Parliamentary inter-committee on social and family affairs. The Office for Social Inclusion and the Combat Poverty Agency also made presentations. Otherwise there has been no official engagement.

The Luxembourg network said that *“As usual it took part in the – very limited - consultation – and organised a meeting of people experiencing poverty’*. The network added that *...the consultation process was even less open this year, but formally it was correct”*.

While the Dutch network said there was no improvement in consultation, they added: *“Of course we are engaged - we engage ourselves, but is very difficult to get all the information and reports (e.g the National. Reform Programme, the Employment NAP, the report from the independent expert: are like asking for the ‘crown jewels’!!)”*

EAPN Bulgaria said that it has taken an active part in the elaboration and consultation processes linked with many important official documents, such as Joint Inclusion Memorandum; NAP inclusion, the National Reform Programme, the National Development Plan 2007-2013, the Operational programme “Human Resource Development”, etc. However all these documents remain, to a great part written declarations, while powerful economic processes contradict and weaken their ability to positively influence developments.

The Portuguese network is busy on an Awareness project funded by the European Commission and being run by the NGO, Non Governmental Forum for Social Inclusion, in partnership with the Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity. *‘This includes ME’* aims to use five big NGOs to give visibility and drive a public campaign on poverty and exclusion. There have been several workshops around the country to try to persuade people the NAP includes them. However, the Portuguese network said also that because it was a ‘light year’ there was nothing else to get involved in. They added that *“The problem is the 2006-08 NAP was done without space for strategic and consolidated*

participation before the next one began preparation. Lack of impact is killing the strategy”.

Most networks would agree with the Portuguese network’s comment. Networks are active in their own work and in whatever European OMC actions they can push their way into, without funding or often encouragement from government. The Maltese network believed that their government is recognising the importance of the voluntary sector but should better collaborate with the voluntary sector and grassroots groups.

It could be a good idea as 2010 approaches for national networks to co-ordinate their key national activities around the NAP processes.

FEANTSA said that stakeholder consultation on policies for homeless people is improving and there is increasing activity at European and national level, but not all countries are developing homelessness strategies. However, the FEANTSA believes that for effective engagement at European level there have to be more avenues for consultation and there has to be more awareness of diversity of views in the NGO sector.

Regarding **engagement in other areas of the National Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion**, most national networks had no involvement. The Dutch network had engaged on pensions and health on their own initiative, and the Norwegian network had engaged only on the links between pension levels and minimum income.

Involvement of people experiencing poverty in NAP Inclusion processes

The French network said that an interesting development is that UNIOPPS has asked the president of the CNLE to set up a college of people experiencing poverty to define policies. The network would like to see a compulsory requirement for consultation. Also, in the context of a European project, the Salvation Army and three regional members of UNIOPPS held a meeting of people experiencing poverty and social actors to understand the NAP Inclusion and to be able to contribute to next one.

As indicated above, the UK network worked with national government on the first UK people experiencing poverty conference, modelled on the European conference and judged a great success by all participants, but there are no resources to follow up the people or the output and build on the success. The network is working also with national and devolved government and local authorities on participatory peer reviews in three local authorities, funded by the NAP Inclusion awareness programme. But as indicated above, there is no ongoing national resource for the work and so far, no clear route to the content of the next NAP Inclusion, though discussion is ongoing.

The Swedish network reported that the 'Network Against Exclusion' (in which EAPN is a strong member) is the dialogue partner with government. The network also has two delegates on the 'User's Delegation' that meets with the Minister of Social Welfare and Health, four to six times per year.

On the other hand, the Irish network reported very little involvement of any of the target groups. However, there will be a National Social Inclusion Forum in November including people experiencing poverty and groups representing them. There is a European Peer Review on it. There will be also an Annual Social Inclusion Report covering commitments across all government policy. It will be informed by the Forum and will be developed with stakeholder involvement but the process is not clear yet.

The most common view of the networks was that not all target groups of people experiencing poverty are involved in either NAP Inclusion policy or NAP inclusion governance and that even where they are involved there is little evidence of impact so far. For example, regarding policy, the Czech network said that the main focus was on the Roma minority and to some extent here was a focus on people with a disability and older people but that women's and migrants' issues were not a priority.

The French network mentioned that older people are not a policy target group despite the poverty reported by the National Poverty Observatory. Neither are they a participation (governance) target group. There has been a late consultation to enable AGE-France to put their views, *"but no remark has been taken into account"*.

Similarly, the UK network felt that migrants' and especially asylum seekers' issues were not addressed in the NAP Inclusion despite the active and praised engagement of these groups in the earlier 'Get Heard' initiative to feed in to the NAP Inclusion 2006-8.

As the Danish network said *"Most of them are involved in the sense that their organizations are consulted in hearing processes, but with few exceptions they do not feel they are heard. Some are represented in the governmental 'Council for the Socially Excluded People', which has gained some impact"*.

The Dutch network said: *"target groups are involved – by EAPN"*.

Overall, networks largely reported a range of 'one off' activities, often conferences or seminars; most ongoing initiatives with people experiencing poverty that were reported on seem to be funded by NAP Inclusion Awareness budgets. No networks reported innovative structures for national or local dialogue with people experiencing poverty that had a formal and recognised place in developing the NAP Inclusion.

Networks' assessment of main barriers to participation

There was a strong consensus amongst networks over the main obstacles to participation. Lack of political will and the guarantee of adequate resources were seen as the most crucial. However, equally important was the lack of direction from the Commission about governance and participation in their guidelines and advice to member states, particularly in the “light year” focus on child poverty. However it is the lack of results and impact which are seen by most as the determining factor. Although a few networks highlight important examples of their perceived policy impact, the failure to increase the overall quality of their engagement is likely to be crucial in determining the sustainability of their engagement in the NAP Inclusion process.

Lack of will and resources to sustain engagement

Although many networks reported increasing the frequency or intensity or level of their own engagement with government, few felt there had been overall improvement in the governance process or in their own impact. For example the German network said ‘*no changes*’, the Irish network said ‘*no real improvement*’, The Dutch network said ‘*No improvement in consultation, implementation and monitoring*’, the Portuguese network said ‘*Nothing very new happened*’ and the Luxembourg network said there was less consultation.

One reason for the limited effect is evident in the Swedish network’s comments – a common experience for many networks “*About the same process as earlier governments: We are invited, but at a late stage of the process. We have been able to add some comments and suggestions and we keep on asking to be involved earlier in the process*”.

The following quote from the Portuguese network can explain some practical reasons for limited developments in governance or follow up from engagement: “*The structure responsible for NAP coordination is making a big effort on awareness, participating in seminars, workshops and conferences, but this is a ‘one woman show’. Despite the inter-Ministerial Commission for the Implementation of the NAP, mainstreaming is not happening. NGOs intervene in dissemination events and EAPN has a lead role in the Non Governmental Forum for Social Inclusion. The monitoring process is purely quantitative and does not show real impact on the life of people*”.

No specific process for consultation on the child poverty ‘light year’ questionnaire

Specific to the only new activity in the ‘light year’, no network reported a real consultation process on the ‘light year questionnaire’ on child poverty. This was a **real step backwards in governance**. Some networks were given a few days during the peak holiday period to comment on a draft and that was all.

There was a lot of NGO dissatisfaction at the European Commission's perceived discouragement of national governments' preparation of a 'light year update', which resulted in no activity at all on the NAP Inclusion in some states. Many members raised concerns about what will happen after 2008 when there are two 'light years'?

Most networks believed that the government NAP Inclusion teams are much too small, there is no budget for activities and the NGOs are under-resourced and must be careful where they put their efforts, so that even with good faith amongst the actors, it is difficult to raise awareness and to mainstream through the bureaucracy of government.

Even where there are very well developed structures for consultation and participation that pre-date the NAP Inclusion, there is no guarantee that there will be real engagement and impact. As the Irish network said, the partnership processes have improved, but are still exclusive.

In states where there are not such well developed structures, many networks would agree with the Czech network's comment that *'The NAP is just a report of the current situation, not a plan. The policy content is not improved except a little in the area of social services for people in poverty and at risk'*.

What policy impact?

Although the general perspective was difficulty in achieving policy impact, some notable examples were given of positive developments, highlighting the potential of the NAP Inclusion.

The French network reported influencing a change in **housing** law (Law DALO).

The UK Social Policy Task Force (led by EAPN) did get **working poverty** referred to in the NAP Inclusion and it is now higher on the political agenda but the response has been to announce better enforcement of existing law rather than better law for minimum wage and 'agency' (temporary) workers. SPTF and partner organisations were able also to get changes to the regulations in two areas that are important to people experiencing poverty and brought to SPTF by people experiencing poverty. The two areas are first, volunteers' expenses – an important change as the existing regulation was preventing people on welfare benefits from being able to volunteer – and second, government telephone benefit advice lines - the network and its partners lobbied successfully for a change from charging to make a profit to being free to use.

The Norwegian labour organisation has taken up the Norwegian network's principles about development of a **minimum income** scheme for benefits/pensions – they have 900,000 members and a lot of influence.

The Danish network said that **involvement of NGOs and people experiencing poverty** had improved in the sense of NAP awareness projects funded by the European Commission and the national government. But the network said *'it is difficult to see how the recommendations from the awareness projects are implemented in the general policy'*

The UK network would agree - it is not clear yet how the conclusions of the UK people experiencing poverty conference or the local authority peer reviews will be taken up in the NAP Inclusion or in wider policy, though they will be published in some form related to the next NAP Inclusion.

However, most networks felt they had **little or no policy impact** – perhaps getting an issue mentioned in the NAP Inclusion or a little higher on the agenda was the total of immediate impact. But the UK network was more nuanced in its response. The network said that its participatory work highlighted issues to government in advance and in a very real way that later hit the news agenda – over-indebtedness, working poor, the living and working conditions of migrants. They argued that vulnerable people are hit first and hardest by global developments and weakening in social protection mechanisms. Participatory work with anti-poverty NGOs brings their plight to the fore in a way that statistics that look backwards and cover large numbers of people cannot do. Policy decisions are too often made 'on the hoof' when the problem hits the TV news. They argued that there were real benefits to governments from engaging in the participatory processes that have emerged from the NAP Inclusion. However, changing culture and thinking takes time and effort and their government had acknowledged their influence. This slower but deeper and longer term opportunity to change the policy making process could be true also for the large number of networks who reported better access to their government and improved status as a result of the NAP Inclusion process.

Conclusion: NAP Inclusion - an undervalued, novel dimension to policy making, but lacking support for further development and implementation

It seems that the main resource for NGO participation at national level that NGOs are putting into the NAP Inclusion is being diverted by them from their other work – using existing financial resources and volunteer labour.

Networks believe that the evidence is now there that more effective and sustainable policy on poverty requires **participatory democracy**. But for the exciting work of developing better models of engaging people experiencing poverty and the NGOs that support them as a dialogue partner, it seems the main new money is coming from NAP Inclusion awareness funding with some 'one-off' resources from national governments. There appears to be in most states no other commitment from any source, at national or European level.

The approach of the Commission to fund European level Anti Poverty Networks needs to be mirrored at National level.

The current effort from NGOs on the NAP Inclusion is not sustainable - and without sustained resources, neither can there be created a politically acceptable route to engagement in the policy development process that adds a participatory dimension to support representative democracy. The creative and novel work engendered by the NAP inclusion is being killed off because of lack of resources as well as the political will to use participative processes to guarantee real policy impact.

Networks proposals for improving the process of engaging with the NAPs

Re-balancing the economic and social powers inside and outside government. The Norwegian network reported that “*Government listen more to the Minister of Finance than the Directorate of Health and Social Affairs. This means government does not use public service and NGO experience*”.

As well as national governments, the European Commission must take seriously participatory democracy in their own processes.

There is the need for:

- *A much more open process* (Ireland)
- *Real participation and not only a formally democratic process* (Luxembourg)
- *Giving NGOs a real not only a paper influence* (Netherlands). The network made the point that after consultation, negotiation and agreement took place behind closed doors with the social partners – employers and trades unions. This seems to be the case to some extent in Ireland also. According to the UK network, business people get invited to breakfast meetings with the Prime Minister, who has also set up a council of business advisors, but no council for any other group, whether trades unions, NGOs or people in poverty.

A stronger role for Parliaments and regions:

The Spanish network was one that suggested the NAP Inclusion should be approved by Parliament and also that there were correlating mechanisms for the regions

Feedback and Transparency:

The Irish network noted that real dialogue requires **feedback and transparency on impact of the proposals made**. The network said that ‘*There is a need for a commitment by policy makers to have a dialogue involving feedback on views expressed by those experiencing poverty and those that represent them. At present consultation involves NGOs giving their*

views with no real dialogue or feedback. If as is often the case NGO views are not adopted no reasons are given'.

Invest in local level NAP Inclusion processes:

The Swedish network emphasised the importance of working at **the local and regional level** *'This year our regional networks have tried to implement local NAPs in four cities. The welfare systems are very much built upon decisions on municipal levels and therefore we see it as important to activate local actors, both NGOs and local politicians. We hope to put pressure on a local level so that they in their turn will put pressure on national actors. We see it as a way of making the Lisbon agenda more legible also on a local level and have been rather successful so far in the cities where we have tried this method'.*

The UK network is working on pilot **local government participatory peer reviews of NAP Inclusion** policy areas with partners from all levels of government and local people experiencing poverty. The first one has been judged a success by all actors but there are still questions about how well the learning will be transferred widely across devolved and local governments, who are partners but not resourced.

It is clear that to improve the involvement of local government will require demonstrating the benefits of being involved but will also require the allocation of specific resources and demonstration of clear lines of accountability.

Age Platform and the UK EAPN network wanted national governments to support users of services to be trained to monitor and evaluate them.

Core budgets for NGO partnership working, communication and dissemination.

There are added costs to NGOs of working effectively for a changed priority and vision for anti-poverty strategy, as opposed to delivering particular services for a particular client, including research services. In most Member States there is no current funding for civil society work on the national dimensions of European strategies, or for public understanding and dissemination in the anti-poverty field. NGOs cannot raise taxes nor charge profit making market prices for this work. It will not get done effectively without government support.

Radical comprehensive action to redynamise the process

The Portuguese network wanted comprehensive change: *'More political will, more transparency, more horizontal and transversal participation, more resources, more strategic approach (real coordination between different strategies and strands of national programmes) and, probably above all, give*

time to this strategy to be implemented and to have the necessary space to become structural, culturally shared and produce the desired expectations’.

Sustainable frameworks for civil society participation

In the context in which Sustainable Development may become an overarching European strategy, this is an appropriate moment for the member states and the European Commission to put in place a sustainable framework for civil society participation in a NAP inclusion that has strong links to national policy and implementation processes. Getting out of poverty and exclusion takes longer than the voting cycle for most poor people,

Benefits and Weaknesses of the NAP Inclusion Process, Recommendations for Improvement.

In this chapter, we asked EAPN networks to assess the benefits and difficulties experienced with the process at national level, both more generally in terms of the impact on poverty and more specifically for the networks/NGOs themselves. We then highlight their recommendations for improvement in the NAP Inclusion process and strengthening the OMC at national and EU level.

General benefits from the process

From the responses to the questionnaires received, the following benefits were identified:

Puts combating poverty explicitly on governments' agenda

The Belgian, Swedish, Dutch and UK networks all said that a benefit of the NAP Inclusion process is that it has put poverty and social exclusion explicitly on their government's agenda. This should not be underestimated as a benefit – to have to address poverty consistently over a number of years successively. The Swedish network said that *'Sweden has very much denied the fact that we, as being a rich country, have poor people'*.

European reflection and exchange

The Danish, French and UK networks thought that their government's participation in a European process enabled a better European level reflection (France) and exchange of ideas (UK and Denmark) and even influence. The Spanish and UK networks also thought that their government had seen that added value and defended the NAP Inclusion process when it was under threat during the Lisbon reform period. However, the UK network thought that equally they had been excluded from the economic and employment processes as well as the other social processes.

Convergence of thinking on key policy areas (e.g. Child Poverty)

This has resulted in sharing good practice and exposing gaps in policy thinking and implementation, through the Peer Reviews including the Social Protection Committee's gradual development of its own peer review process, as well as the Joint Report and the Laeken indicators. However, the risk of 'groupthink' can result in the promotion Europe wide of regressive policies, such as narrow activation, or the wholesale transfer of policies despite evident and large national diversity and specificities.

Benchmarking participation and increased governance.

Despite most networks dissatisfaction with the impact of participation and involvement of stakeholders in the NAP Inclusion process, it stands out as a beacon of good practice in comparison to other European processes for example, the National Reform Programmes.

Difficulties and weaknesses

Difficulties in articulation with existing national processes

The Belgian, German, Irish networks highlighted existing national processes and reports (respectively, the Poverty Report, with the participation of people in poverty, the Poverty and Wealth Report and the Irish National Action Plan and the social partnership process). These pre-existing processes have had an effect on the relative importance of the European NAP Inclusion process in these states. However, the Irish network thought the European NAP Inclusion was significant because it clearly outlines government policies and some specific targets – for example the previous NAP Inclusion had a target, although unstated, regarding the relationship between social welfare minima and gross average industrial earnings.

In the German case, there are additional problems due to the European NAP Inclusion being perceived as having an entirely national role in a Federal state. Seven years on, none of these difficulties have been resolved. For example, the German network explicitly stated that their NAP drew neither on policies from the European nor Länder level. *“...the European policy did not give a push to German policies helping to reflect German policies on the basis of what is done in other countries. It only reflects German policy in this field. The national report is considered to be a national competence and therefore there is no real involvement of the Länder or the local level. The NAP has not been used by the government as an instrument to develop a real strategy with targets and monitoring in cooperation with the Länder and the local level”*.

It is clear that a better NAP Inclusion outcome in these states means explicitly addressing these issues of how European, national, regional and Community processes articulate. Could there be synergies instead of barriers?

NAP Inclusion...report or process?

Other member states only avoid some of the issues about the place of the European process by keeping the NAP Inclusion process very low key and informal. Some networks believed the NAP is currently adding little value – these included the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The main reason is that it is seen as ‘only a report to Brussels’.

The French network said that the NAP Inclusion is not the principal instrument in the fight against poverty - it is only the assembly of texts on diverse measures that are already decided. However, they said it could get further if the NAP Inclusion process was the occasion, every three years, to define a new policy or to take new measures.

The Danish network believed the NAP Inclusion process is helpful but has reservations: *“The NAP process is without any doubt a helpful instrument, but*

it is not a strong weapon. The Danish NAP is mainly a summing up of policies, standards, grants etc. already decided. Yet it gives an overview and a platform for debate which is unique. It is heavily stressed by the Danish authorities, that e.g. social policy is decided in Denmark, not in EU. But at the same time the policy is heavily influenced by our membership. This relation is also reflected in the NAP”.

The UK network too distinguished between the *processes* associated with the NAP - which adds value to the national debate and potential policy ‘universe’ - and the *document itself*, which, though it refers to some of the outcome of the debate and sometimes reflects some changes in priorities, is not a Plan and is not linked to the national policy making processes. However, the NAP Inclusion Stakeholder Group (established 2005) of central government departments and devolved and local government and civil society could be a way that a link could be developed.

The Portuguese network is not so hopeful; they believe the influence of the NAP Inclusion is declining in importance and effect: *“To be short, we clearly see that this added value is losing ground. In 2000 and 2001 it was clear that the Social Inclusion strategy was producing these kinds of effects and giving a strong impetus to the national policies. Nowadays it seems more a ‘paper work exercise’ and even under very innovative fields (like the active participation of people experiencing poverty) we see that there is a loss of energy (also from the NGOs sector) and some of these innovative areas are nothing more than words and power-point presentations’. ‘...we feel we are going backwards (and fast). All the profits we made in 2001 and until 2003 are disappearing. Of course an organization like EAPN Portugal continues to be quite relevant and one of the major stakeholders in this process. However we have the feeling that everyone is agreeing with us and our visions but nobody is acting to concretize what we defend”.*

Benefits and weaknesses of EAPN national network participation in the NAP Inclusion

Most networks were agreed on the main benefits and weaknesses resulting from their engagement in the NAP Inclusion process.

Higher profile with NAP inclusion responsible department of government and a ‘right’ to engage with government on poverty policy

The main benefit perceived by national networks’ follows on from the original fourth Objective of the NAP Inclusion process – one that networks believe has been weakened by the streamlined social process. It is that anti-poverty NGOs and people experiencing poverty have for the first time had an explicit voice, even if not a formally constituted one, in national policy development.

The networks’ profile and status has improved vis-à-vis social ministries of national government and national NGOs (examples include Belgium,

Germany, Ireland, Spain, Netherlands and Portugal (at local level) and the UK), where they are frequently the key national dialogue partner on the NAP Inclusion. This is due to their efforts over years on the NAP Inclusion process nationally and their awareness of the EU social agenda and their active participation in it – as the Belgian network put it *“The NAP framework has enabled the Belgian network to work better on European level decisions that affect ever more people in poverty – e.g. liberalisation of utility markets. The Belgian network is nearly the only NGO that knows what goes on at the European policy level – due to the EAPN network – it gives the network an authority – a value added”*.

Networks aim to use their improved status to promote the concerns of people in poverty more effectively.

But...lack of support for civil society engagement

The Irish network has been able to get national Parliamentary and media engagement, which many other networks have not. However, the Irish network has the advantage of a pre-existing national action process (from 1997), a social partnership framework and funding from a national anti poverty network programme. Most other networks are not funded for their core engagement in the European social processes – though some – such as UK, Belgian, Portuguese and Czech networks have NAP Inclusion Awareness funding for specific projects.

The Spanish and Portuguese networks have been able to get a strong regional presence due to regional and project funding.

However, network engagement has not usually resulted in funding or other effective support for EAPN engagement in the process – as the Czech network put it – it has resulted in nothing more than *‘oral support’* and as the Danish network said *“We still need to experience this”*.

Some networks, like the Czech network, plan to be more proactive in preparation of the next (2008-11) NAP Inclusion and will put forward concrete input on specific target groups. Others are already active and have been throughout the life of the NAP Inclusion, but can no longer sustain it or expand their activities without core funding for participation in the processes. The Dutch network suggested building funding round EAPN management of national websites on the social process.

The Norwegian network wished the process could be extended to the EEA.

Conclusion – recommendations for an improved national and European process.

There are clearly barriers to member states' developing the NAP Inclusion process as a planning tool. In addition to the political/ administrative competency questions raised above, some of the barriers put up by governments are a reaction to its 'European' provenance in 'Eurosceptic' states – though this does not stop much more rigid frameworks being adopted in the economic processes where there is a rather common ideological underpinning. It seems therefore that a key barrier is the political priority accorded to combating poverty as a goal in itself, especially where such an approach might conflict with the economic and employment policy approach. At least the NAP Inclusion process has made it obvious where the blockage is located.

Its very European provenance has though been positive for government in terms of sharing learning and experimenting with a more open process of policy development. This aspect of the NAP Inclusion process could be strengthened to make a real test of it in the next NAP Inclusion.

For seven years, networks have wanted to see national governments and the European Commission do more on NAP Inclusion/ NSSPSI **visibility**. The rest of the NSSPSI has even less visibility than the NAP Inclusion. This means **political will and investing in active stakeholder involvement, communication and a stronger political process**. **Generating concrete outcomes** from the process would be one of the best ways to get visibility and wider interest.

The French network said they would try again with the new government to get the NAP Inclusion to be a **policy planning process and report** rather than an administrative summary of existing actions. Other networks wish the same, but some have given up trying.

The Luxembourg network summed up many of the essentials of a better NAP Inclusion process – **better governance, a more strategic approach and more account taken of the needs of the vulnerable**. The German network added **impact assessment** - especially because the reform programme appears to have had a negative impact on poverty. The Dutch network added **openness and transparency**.

As can be seen, the networks share a strong consensus on difficulties and weaknesses and on proposed solutions. These have been reiterated over the years by EAPN at EU and national level. The questions really arise: – **is their sufficient political will to revitalise the OMC** as a strategic, participative planning process which really delivers policy impact on poverty and social

exclusion, as well as promoting information exchange between member states?

Is there a commitment to **strengthening the social priorities within the broader Lisbon framework** and within an overarching social, economic and environmental strategy for sustainable development?

The following section summarises key elements of the EAPN proposals for improving the OMC process at national and European level. Several are drawn from the EAPN Portugal's conference and report: From **Lisbon 2000 to Lisbon 2007** held in March 2007 (See www.reapn.org), others from discussions with EAPN groups, particularly the EAPN Social Inclusion Review group, the Employment and Structural Funds Task Forces and the EAPN Executive Committee. (See also EAPN position paper: strengthening the social dimension of the Lisbon Strategy, July 2007: www.eapn.org)

The proposals cover 3 levels:

1) Overarching framework: strengthening the social and poverty dimension of Lisbon

Reaffirm social cohesion as the main objective of the Lisbon Strategy, rather than an assumed consequence of growth. The OMC on social protection and social inclusion needs to return to its roots and reaffirm the central priorities of the original Lisbon Agenda for the European Union. The OMC on social protection and social inclusion must be a demonstration of this commitment, not an apologist for reductionist safety net approaches.

Revitalise the OMC as a dynamic, strategic and participative instrument (see next section) The OMC on social protection and social inclusion is a vital means to move forward on the EU objectives for social cohesion. It must be defended as an independent process, but contributing actively to the broader Lisbon vision. Increased effectiveness will only come by dynamising the national action plan process, including safeguarding the NAP inclusion as a dynamic, participative, strategic policy instrument.

Reinforce the social dimension of the revised Lisbon Strategy by revising the integrated guidelines to create a coherent, social, economic and environmental approach embedded in the EU sustainable development strategy This means **insist on feeding in** – putting the NAP Inclusion at the service of the National Reform Programme – **but even more on feeding out** – putting the National Reform Programme at the service of the NAP Inclusion

Strengthen the joint processes and mechanisms: joint meetings, joint responsibility and joint reporting in the National Reform Programme and the NAP Inclusion, and the broader Strategic Reports at National and EU level.

Make Structural Funds a “driving force” for social cohesion: Ensure that the funds deliver on their promise to deliver on social inclusion. Establish effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms involving active stakeholder participation and monitor assessment through the NAP Inclusion and the National Reform Programmes

Reinforce participation, improve governance and ownership of EU poverty and social exclusion goals: Improve the participation of social actors – including people experiencing poverty and the NGOs that support them, in the identification of problems, the design, implementation and evaluation of policy initiatives through all the key processes, (OMC on social protection and social inclusion, National Reform Programmes, Structural Funds, but also other OMC). This is vital to increase the effectiveness of mutual learning, but also to ensure ownership of common objectives and to move forward in the delivery of real policy impact on poverty.

Reinforce the role of the European Union in the fight against poverty in a global context: The EU can no longer deny its responsibilities in the globalized world, nor the links with immigration as: the “new face of poverty”. The EU must develop an integrated, coherent and sustainable social vision and policy framework which actively combats poverty in the EU and across the globe based on fundamental rights.

2) Revitalise the OMC as a dynamic, participative and strategic tool

More strategic: ensuring a real impact on national policy and on poverty

- **In-build systematic poverty impact assessment of all policy developments.** Broaden the sphere of analysis to include new key concerns e.g. the privatisation and liberalisation of services, the impact of immigration policy.
- **Link the EU planning process more closely to national policy planning.** Consider allowing governments to submit their National Action Plans in line with their own policy cycle, whilst retaining annual implementation reports coming from member states to inform yearly monitoring and evaluation of impact horizontally at EU level.
- **Reinforce the links with National and EU Parliaments** and promote the discussion of the NAPs in the National and Regional parliaments.
- **Better coordination and co-relation.** Economic and social ministries and stakeholders should be expected to coordinate more closely through joint meetings and reporting procedures, as well as in engagement with stakeholder.

- **Strengthening the role of the Social Protection Committee**
The Committee has a vital role to play in safeguarding the social dimension. However, this could be strengthened by ensuring an increased strategic role in monitoring the social impact of policies. A more structured dialogue could also be held between the SPC and NGOs regarding the evaluation of the Open Method of Coordination and its application in different member states.
- **Establish clearer goals and target, and ensure effective monitoring and evaluation.** The OMC has to move forward to establishing specific targets, and then monitoring results. The Commission should evaluate Member states performances, and provide advice and stronger recommendations for areas to improve.

More participative: invest in promoting innovatory, quality engagement

- **Pilot and mainstream innovative ways of promoting participative democracy** and involvement in the NAP and Strategic Reports involving directly people affected as well as other stakeholders with more dynamic, open methods and processes. Promote more active partnership approaches e.g. organizing and financing joint activities with NGOs (Czech Network). Prioritise funding through the awareness-raising programme and from PROGRESS to this end.
- **Provide detailed guidelines for benchmarking quality of participation.** Draw up clearer guidelines and good practice examples of what constitutes good participation and why? Differentiating between consultation, participation and on-going structured dialogue. Explicitly target the direct participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Introduce explicit evaluation and benchmarking on progress in the NAP Inclusion and Strategic Reports
- **Emphasize the necessity of quality feedback and transparency.** Member State Governments and the Commission must go further in showing how they integrate proposals from consultation processes and give honest and transparent feedback on inclusion and rejection of proposals, leading to a real on-going dialogue. A good practice example is incorporating NGO opinions in the final version of the NAP Inclusion documents.
- **Promote the development of local/regional NAPs** that can feed into the national NAP process, as a dynamic process to increase ownership, engagement and effectiveness of policy outcomes.

- **Invest in participation.** Not all stakeholders have equal means. Active involvement of people experiencing poverty and grass-roots NGOs means ensuring adequate resources and support at national level.
- **Develop a “life course” approach to participation.** The AGE Platform highlights the need to consider the issue of people experiencing poverty from an intra-generational perspective, which could help achieve lasting change. This needs to be combined with ensuring participation of people experiencing other key areas of discrimination because of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation.
- **Support and deepen the People Experiencing Poverty meeting** Move beyond a one-off meeting at EU level to on-going structured dialogue. Support the development of national and regional meetings as well as innovative peer reviews involving people experiencing poverty with other stakeholders

More dynamic: Ensuring visibility and deepening the yearly process at national and EU level

- **Increasing visibility** – the Commission and national governments need to invest in giving greater visibility .Partly this is achieved by active stakeholder involvement, but a stronger, explicit political will and good use of communication media and resources is essential – focussing on results e.g. The Commission should have a **poverty tracker** on the front page of Europa which monitors the trends on poverty
- **During the ‘light year’ promote a thematic focus at EU level, while ensuring yearly reporting process at national level.** FEANTSA (the network on homelessness) believes that the thematic light years are a good way to genuinely make progress on implementation of national strategies through in-depth research and more focused learning opportunities. However, most networks are sceptical about the impact on the NAP outcomes and reaffirm the need for a broader yearly process at national level, to monitor implementation and flag up new concerns.
- **Introducing new mechanisms to focus on new themes eg Active Inclusion.** Using the yearly process to promote mutual learning and monitor actively the implementation of the 92 regulation, in order to review the effectiveness of current EU mechanisms and assess the need for new EU frameworks.
- **Ensure that quality of life and well-being is taken into account when measuring the impact of social inclusion.** Monetary definitions of poverty are essential, but it is important to move towards broader definitions which encompass a decent standard of living and well-being,

This process could be linked to the development of regional tables which bring together people in poverty but also ordinary people to establish these standards, and monitor progress towards implementation. (See EAPN Ireland's social standards project) and AGE Platform contribution.

3. Develop specific new tools and instruments

It is vital to develop some new tools and instruments which demonstrate visibly the renewed commitment and vigour in the process. Some examples are:

- ***The establishment of a new European Poverty Programme within the framework of the Open Method of Coordination capable of reinforcing this strategy and overcoming some of its main handicaps.***
- ***Enlarging the focus of the OMC to report on wealth as well as poverty:*** This should include the development of indicators, as well as effective reporting monitoring and evaluation mechanisms
- ***The development of a common horizontal EU framework ensuring a “package” of common minimum standards (benefits and services)*** in order to make social rights effective. Establish social standards' benchmarks in key areas for combating poverty, so that there is shared meaning to decent work, adequate minimum income for a dignified life and affordable, accessible, appropriate quality services and that states' performance can be compared to the benchmarks.
- ***Increase the profile, ambition and ownership of the European Year for the Eradication of Poverty 2010*** to actively move forward at EU and national level on delivering the goals of eradicating poverty and consolidating the role of the OMC .