

Response by EAPN to Indicative list of questions: Future of the Social OMC

(see also attached: EAPN full position)

Q1. What do you consider to be the ultimate aim/objective of the Social OMC: to feed the social dimension into the Europe 2020 Strategy (i.e. integrated Guideline 10), to organise coordination in the field of Social Protection and Social Inclusion, etc.?

The aim of the Social OMC is to organize and coordinate EU action in the field of social protection and social inclusion, and to develop, deliver and evaluate progress towards an EU strategy for social protection and social inclusion based on agreed Common Objectives (2006) and Common Indicators. This broader strategy, based on national strategies developed together with stakeholders, is vital to provide real substance for inputs on the social dimension of Europe 2020 and into the National Reform Programmes, in relation to the Common Objectives of the Social OMC.

Q2. What are the most important conditions (challenges) for the Social OMC to reach its ultimate objective?

The main challenges are:

- **The need to increase EU social coordination and governance, and to balance increased economic governance. The major challenge facing the Social OMC is the need to take the lead in strengthening social coordination and the social dimension in Europe 2020, in the light of increased economic governance and economic intervention in the social sphere, which is in danger of undermining the social objectives – ie the current focus under the Annual growth survey and Economic governance proposals.**
- **The social dimension needs to be mainstreamed through all policy fields, implementing Article 9 (horizontal social clause) and ensuring that the social impact of all policy proposals are seriously taken on board.**
- **For the Social OMC to become more visible/get better ownership at national level - by embedding better regular stakeholder dialogue at national level in the national strategies and national action plans, including with NGOs and people experiencing poverty, providing better visibility and ownership including through debates in the Parliament.**
- **To gain increased priority for EU funding to social priorities and to implement the Common Objectives, ie in Structural Funds and in Progress (following up on the priority target in Europe 2020), supporting both new and effective grass-root initiatives for tackling poverty and social exclusion, particularly through active inclusion approaches, and by embedding more adequate, quality social protection and social inclusion systems. To make sure that such funds are accessible and available to civil society grass-roots organisations, through simplification, technical assistance, global grant**

mechanisms and calls for proposals under the PROGRESS programme. To ensure funding for improved participation and governance, increasing the engagement of national stakeholders (particularly NGOs and people experiencing poverty) in national strategies and all other aspects of the Social OMC (and also Europe 2020).

Q3. In the light of the Europe 2020 Strategy, choices may have to be made with regard to the EU reporting requirements, notably from an effectiveness point of view (ensure proper reporting on social issues) and from an efficiency point of view (avoid duplication). In such a view, do you have suggestions on how future reporting should be ideally organised both at national and at EU level? (See EAPN input attached)

- ***The National Strategies on Social Protection and Social Inclusion and National Action Plans can provide an essential basis for properly preparing and implementing the social strand of Europe 2020.*** The broader, multidimensional approach, based on the Common Objectives can enable Member States to provide real substance to their NRP inputs and social assessment, developing and delivering complex policy approaches which can encompass the whole range of social protection and social inclusion policies and enable a more coherent approach to preventing and alleviating poverty and embedding adequate and sustainable social protection systems.
- ***They provide the basis for continuing and deepening the involvement of national stakeholders and allow for mutual learning.*** The OMC has 10 years experience of engaging EU and national actors, but clearer guidelines could be put into place to enrich and deepen this engagement. The National Strategies should also be linked to regional and local level, building on the learning of the Peer Reviews. The greater detail and coherence of the national action plans and strategies for social protection and social inclusion can also provide real substance for detailed mutual learning exchanges between Member States and national stakeholders.
- ***The strategies should be linked to the real national policy cycle and provide a report each three years.*** The criticisms of the National Strategies SP&SI as being reports not strategies could be answered by linking the development of multiannual strategies to the national policy cycle, for example the start of a new government. A yearly review would be vital – together with stakeholders, but the actual formal reporting mechanism could be reduced to a three year cycle on the basis of a more focussed synthetic report style.

Q4. What is your view on the relevance and effectiveness of the thematic approach developed over the last years (e.g. in the areas of child poverty, homelessness and housing exclusion, pensions, etc.)? Do you think it should be strengthened, and how?

(See EAPN attached input)

- ***Ensure effective follow up on thematic priorities with strategies and multiannual work programmes.*** The work on thematic priorities through thematic years was generally valued by EAPN in terms of enabling key priorities to move up the agenda and progress consensus on policy challenges and solutions. But continued action has to be guaranteed. A specific EU strategy with multi-annual work programme for key

priorities would enable a long-term plan and approach for delivering sustainable outcomes. The key priorities should be those currently identified under the Social OMC: implementation of integrated active inclusion approaches (including ensuring progress on guaranteeing an adequate minimum income and ensuring access to affordable, quality services, as well as personalized, pathway approaches to an inclusive labour market and quality jobs), child poverty, homelessness and housing exclusion and migration/ethnic minorities including Roma.

- ***Embed thematic strategies such as active inclusion, homelessness and child poverty within an overarching strategic approach.*** EAPN fully supports the importance of long-term work on agreed thematic priorities, enabling mutual learning amongst key stakeholders, practitioners and users and building consensus amongst MS on policy solutions. However, it is clear that the thematic priorities need to be set within an overarching EU and national strategy on social protection and social inclusion, ensuring that they contribute to the achievement of the OMC Common Objectives and to overarching goals, including the eradication of poverty and social exclusion.
- ***Establish SPC Task Forces to work together with the European Platform against Poverty, engaging with a wider set of national and EU stakeholders.*** The effectiveness of the thematic years was weakened by the limited engagement of non-governmental stakeholders at national and EU level, undermining the visibility of the actions and the effectiveness of the policy solutions or their implementation. The SPC working through the Social OMC should establish Task Forces which work jointly with the European Platform against Poverty, and involving a broader range of relevant stakeholders to progress key priorities established under the multi-annual work programme including relevant Social NGOs and people directly affected.
- ***Develop specific mutual learning and governance instruments to enable exchange with a wider set of actors.*** More investment could be made in supporting a more diverse approach to mutual learning, exploring new ways of engaging key actors at national and EU level. For example, the existing peer reviews could be expanded to link to broader thematic reviews on findings with a broader set of stakeholders, which could focus on key challenges as well as good practice.

Q5. How to build on the acquis of the Social OMC with a view to enhance the involvement of stakeholders and possibly to broaden the range of actors that will have a stake in the making of social policy (incl. in pensions and health care), both at the EU and domestic level?

- ***On-going structured dialogue with civil society stakeholders is crucial to get visibility, ownership and accountability and provide input on what policies work/don't work, as well as to deliver policy change and results.*** Recital 16 of the Integrated Guidelines of Europe 2020, emphasizes the importance of engagement of all relevant stakeholders to get ownership for the strategy, however currently there is little engagement of non-governmental stakeholders, leaving social NGOs and people experiencing poverty without a voice or potential to input into social objectives in the NRP. National Action Plans and National Strategies under the Social OMC have built expertise in some countries in effectively engaging stakeholders and can be used to great effect to build

this ownership at national level and EU level as well as providing key feedback/input on effective policy implementation. One-off meetings/consultations should be embedded in a longer term regular structured dialogue with stakeholders to ensure their input into the design, implementation and review of the strategy and specific policy measures.

- *Continue to engage people experiencing poverty and NGOs, in a regular dialogue at National and EU level.* The Social OMC explicitly recognized the importance of dialogue with people experiencing poverty and the organisations that support them, recognizing the importance of ensuring their voices are heard and their essential role in generating better policy solutions. Currently their role is completely absent in the Europe 2020 NRP process. The Social OMC and Flagship Platform needs to insist on their inclusion in stakeholder dialogue at national level in national strategies on social protection and social inclusion and action plans, but also NRP and Flagship Platform Initiatives. This needs to be replicated at EU level by inclusion in regular stakeholder meetings and by strengthening the annual People Experiencing Poverty (PEP) face to face meeting with decision-makers, integrating it better into the decision-making processes of the Social OMC and Europe 2020. EAPN proposes that the PEP meeting should be seen as an integral part of making progress on the OMC objectives and the European Platform against Poverty organically linked to the Annual Convention (the old Round Table), ensuring that their voices are heard. The PEP meeting would provide bottom-up, concrete recommendations to the Annual Convention and EPSCO Council and would review progress in the following year in terms of real impact on people's lives. Encouragement should be given for similar meetings to be organized in all Member States.
- *Create a link with the Social OMC, NRP and European Flagship Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion through national platforms against poverty and social exclusion.* Such national platforms could bring together relevant stakeholders to engage in regular dialogue with national governments providing input to the national strategies on social protection/social inclusion, the identified thematic OMC priorities, the NRP and also any specific initiatives of the European Platform against Poverty. These platforms could build on the expertise of EAPN and other similar platforms at national level.
- *Establish regular dialogue with EU Stakeholders including NGOs and people experiencing poverty with the Social OMC (and Poverty Platform).* The practice of regular meetings and consultation with NGOs and with social partners should be embedded, enabling regular review of the OMC Common Objectives, key priorities and key challenges in the context of Europe 2020. Particular priority should be given to the Social Platform, to EAPN and other platforms/organisations representing NGOs engaged with the national processes of the Social OMC and Europe 2020, as well as key EU thematic NGOs to progress work on agreed thematic priorities.
- *Embed guidelines and promote mutual learning on good practices. Good governance needs good mechanisms.* Common guidelines need to be established, with indicators for monitoring progress. A database should be established with examples of good

practice and learning points, as well as mutual exchange including Peer Reviews to promote mutual learning on what works.

- ***Ensure funding for good governance.*** Embedding good governance will also require financing. The awareness-raising programme of PROGRESS has provided vital funding for engaging in the governance of the OMC, and raising visibility and ownership amongst stakeholders and other key actors. It will be crucial to use PROGRESS funding to back governance initiatives – particularly for embedding effective engagement of NGOs as well as people experiencing poverty at national level in the national strategies on social protection and social inclusion and national reform programmes.
- ***Supporting social inclusion and poverty reduction as a binding priority for all community funds and ensuring access to funding to NGOs.*** With the poverty target agreed in Europe 2020, it will be important to press for funding for OMC priorities i.e. developing guidelines to support proposals for a more holistic approach to promote integrated active inclusion approaches, as well as priorities like child poverty and homeless/housing exclusion including strengthened access to quality social protection and public services. Support to community-based projects by small NGOs will be essential to develop effective pilot grass-root approaches for social inclusion and will need to be backed by global grant mechanisms and technical assistance support units at EU and national level.

Q6. Which “entry points” do you consider essential from a participatory point of view: the NRP, NSR, Poverty Platform, Peer Reviews, Joint Reports, ...(See Attached EAPN Paper.)

- **We see as essential participation of key stakeholders – including people experiencing poverty and NGOs in all elements of the Social OMC at EU and National level.**
- **We propose the development of National Platforms (against Poverty), but this could be broadened, to include other pillars of the Social OMC, which would provide the base for engagement in the social dimension related to the EU processes, ie to provide input into the National Strategies SP&SI and NAP inclusion and the NRP, and appropriate European Poverty Platform initiatives**
- **At EU level it will be crucial to ensure the link with the Poverty Platform, particularly in the thematic fields, enabling the engagement of relevant stakeholders in the development of sub strategies, and multi-annual programmes, but also in terms of the overarching frame of the Poverty Platform, particularly in relation to the delivery on the poverty targets in the rest of Europe 2020.**
- **The People experiencing Poverty EU meetings are essential and need to be strengthened, given more visibility, and a strategic role, linked to the Annual Convention – both as pivotal reference points to review progress, and should be replicated at national level..**
- **The involvement of stakeholders in the Peer Reviews is crucial, but broader thematic reviews, involving a wider range of grass-roots stakeholders involved in delivery of services and measures or as users, need to be developed to engage a broader exchanges.**

Q7. What efforts could be made to promote a wider and more systematic involvement of regional and local actors (policy makers, stakeholders and civil society) in the learning process?

See above and in the EAPN response.

The three key methods are through:

- **Regional and Local Action Plans:** Many regional and/or local action plans on poverty and social exclusion, that incorporated the agreed EU Common Objectives (SP&SI) were developed as part of the social OMC. The development of such plans allowed for a real connection between the local, regional, national and EU levels and should be promoted and encouraged as part of the future OMC. The plans allowed for the regular engagement of local actors including anti poverty NGOs and people experiencing poverty as well as other regional and local actors, linking the local and regional to the National and EU levels of the Social OMC.
- **Direct engagement in regular structured dialogue on the development, delivery and evaluation of strategic overarching strategies for social protection and social inclusion (including national action plans).** This should build on the Peer Reviews learning in this area and take it to a broader set of stakeholders. The emphasis should be on regular dialogue, drawing on the best practice from some MS, using flexible methodologies, based around common guidelines and exchange of good practice.
- **Participation in EU thematic clusters/working groups around OMC priorities – eg active inclusion, child poverty, homelessness and housing exclusion, ethnic minorities and migrants, including undocumented migrants, inputting on multi-annual strategies and work programmes.** This format could also be reproduced at national level.

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