

# **Eurodiaconia Briefing: Reinforcing the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) for Social Protection and Social Inclusion**

## **Introduction**

On July 2, 2008, the European Commission presented a review of, or “renewed” social agenda, its programme for policies in the social and employment area, as part of a “social package”. The package contains 19 initiatives, including in the areas of social affairs, education and youth, employment and health. The package includes proposals for new legislation on anti-discrimination and a communication on reinforcing the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) for Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

## **Content of the Communication**

The European Commission emphasizes that although some progress has been achieved since year 2000, fighting poverty and social exclusion, ensuring pension adequacy and sustainability and ensuring equitable access to health and long-term care remains a challenge.

The communication on the social OMC puts more emphasis on commonly agreed objectives, to further enhance the link between social policy and economic and employment policies but also on having quantified targets on poverty, child poverty and working poverty at EU and national level aiming at making more progress on implementation.

The European Commission points out four main areas, see below, where they think that the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion has to improve if the EU wants to be able to say the Social OMC have made a decisive impact on reducing poverty.

### **Improving political commitment and visibility**

The European Commission proposes to take the strengths from the Lisbon strategy for growths and jobs and transform them to the Social OMC work. As the Commission sees it the strategy for growth and jobs one of its strengths has been that it is based on a partnership approach driven by a commonly agreed policy agenda. The fact that there are a number of quantified targets and good indicators to measure performance which makes policy scrutiny more effective, transparent and credible will make the process more visible. The fact that the Commission also can propose country specific recommendations are also mentioned as strength of the growth and job strategy. The Commission would progressively like to adopt some of these strengths from the growth and job strategy, starting with quantified targets, to improve the effectiveness of the Social OMC.

### **Strengthening the positive interaction with other EU policies**

The Commission emphasises that the Social OMC needs to be mainstreamed throughout EU policies, e.g. competition, internal market, economic policy et cetera. Better and more robust impact assessment on each new policy initiatives should be produced. The EC intends to take this further in close cooperation with the [Social Protection Committee](#).

### **Reinforcing the analytical tools**

To be able to improve indicators robust data needs to be collected. The Progress programme will support this in particular in areas where comparable data is missing. Also more involvement of the scientific community and better links with ongoing research activities would be needed.

### **Better ownership through peer reviews, mutual learning and involvement of all relevant actors**

Peer reviews should be used more extensively and in a more strategic manner and involve more involvement from local and regional levels. The PROGRESS programme offers support for new tools for mutual learning. It is pointed out in the Communication that many member states have made progress in involving civil society and other relevant stakeholders in the policy planning phase but does not continue in the implementation phase. The Commission proposes to make these governance aspects increasingly the subject for mutual learning efforts. Following this, the Commission will develop voluntary guidelines for Member States.

### **Conclusions**

The “new” Communication on Social OMC does not actually bring any major changes compared to before when it comes to reporting for member states. Agreements on common targets and issuing recommendations would enhance political commitment and enhance the visibility of social policies. However, the Communication could be stronger on how to better involve NGO’s on local, national and European level. Some of the proposed measures, such as target setting, would need further discussions with member states and stakeholders.

To read the Communication from the European Commission please click [here](#).

### **Background**

The communication on strengthening the social OMC is part of the renewed social agenda on which the European Commission presented a whole package of initiatives as mentioned above. Its aim is to bring together a range of EU policies to support action in seven priority areas; children and youth; investing in people; mobility; longer and healthier lives; combating poverty and social exclusion; fighting discrimination and promoting gender equality; opportunities, access and solidarity on the global scene. To read more about the renewed social agenda please click [here](#).

In 2005 the Commission launched its new Social Agenda to modernise Europe’s social model when re-launching the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs. The 2005-2010 Social agenda is focusing on providing jobs and equal opportunities for all and see to that Europe’s growth reaches everyone in the society. The 2005-2010 Agenda has two priorities; (i) employment and (ii) fighting poverty and promoting equal opportunities.

Under the employment priority focus is on creating a European labour market through enabling people to take their pension and social security entitlements with them when working in different member states; getting more people into better jobs; updating labour law and restructuring issues via social dialogue. Under the poverty priority focus is on demography; support member states in reforming pensions and health care and tackling poverty; tackling discrimination and inequality etc. To read more about the Social Agenda 2005-2010 please click [here](#).

At the Lisbon European Council (March 2000), the European Union launched the “Lisbon Strategy” aimed at making “Europe, by 2010, the most competitive and most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”. In its Social Agenda for 2000-2005 six main policy headings were formulated among them to realise Europe’s full employment potential but also to establish common objectives for social protection and social cohesion. To read more about the Social Policy Agenda 2000-2005, please click [here](#).

## General objectives of the Social OMC

Within the OMC for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, all the Member States have agreed on common objectives. This means a common roadmap on steps the Member States of the EU wants to take to make the EU a more inclusive society. One should remember that it is still up to Member States to set their own policy within this field (that is to say without questioning the subsidiarity principle). Member States translate these common objectives into national policies through national action plans.

Member States are free to choose how they want to achieve the common objectives. Particularly for social inclusion, the more general presentation of objectives should allow Member States to focus on the policy priorities most important in each national context, for example, homelessness, child poverty and the alienation of youth, immigrants and ethnic minorities, disability, e-inclusion or inequalities in education and training.

The overarching objectives for the Social Protection and Social Inclusion are;

- a) Social cohesion, equality between men and women and equal opportunities for all through adequate, accessible, financially sustainable, adaptable and efficient social protection systems and social inclusion policies
- b) Effective and mutual interaction between the Lisbon objectives of greater economic growth, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and with the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy
- c) Good governance, transparency and the involvement of stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of policy.

To put more focus on the interaction with the Lisbon Objectives is also referred to as the feed-in and feed-out process, which means that "the Social OMC should parallel and interact closely with revised Lisbon, "feeding-in" to growth and employment objectives, while Lisbon programmes "feed-out" to advance social cohesion goals"<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to these overarching objectives there are objectives for each of the three strands; Social Inclusion; Adequate Pension; and Health and Long-term Care which all could be found in the document describing the [overarching objectives](#).

## How does it work?

Member States should translate all the agreed common objectives, use the agreed indicators and all other information gathered via e.g. peer-reviews et cetera into their own policies. The result of this process will be a ***national strategic report on social protection and social inclusion (NSR)***. During the preparation of the NSR Member States should consult all relevant stakeholders in their country. How this consultation process looks like differs very much from one member state to another. According to earlier Joint Reports Member States are likely to consult on national level but not so much discussions with the regional/local level. Stake holders are not likely to be part of the implementation part either which could be further strengthened. To see the NSR from all Member States please click [here](#).

In 2008 Member States will send in reports that will cover a time period until 2010. When the Commission received the NSR they will start to analyse them and also to discuss the NSR with independent experts, one per Member State. The final product of the Commission's work will be the

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<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission "A renewed commitment to social Europe: Reinforcing the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion" COM (2008) 418/4.

draft Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. The draft joint report will after approved by the Commission be discussed in the European Council and finally approved by the Council and put on the agenda for the European Spring Council. To access Joint Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion please click [here](#).

The years when Member States are not sending in NSR to the European Commission will be used to focus on certain policy areas in detail, e.g. in 2007 the focus was on child poverty (see the report from the European Commission by clicking [here](#)). The theme to focus on during 2009 has not yet been decided.

### **How to get involved?**

The Secretariat of Eurodiaconia will during the next years try to offer as much training as possible to members of Eurodiaconia on poverty and social exclusion issues and the Social OMC. The objective is that all members of Eurodiaconia should be able to take an active role in the next round of National Strategic Report to be sent in by member states in 2010.

However, members can already now start to establish good contacts within their own country with representatives for national ministries responsible for preparing NSR and/or members of the SPC (see link below). Important is also to get in contact with independent experts from your own country to discuss issues of concern with them. Take contact with other NGO's on local/regional level and see what they are doing and try to fix meetings with them and focus on how to formulate your message to your national governments on issues related to poverty and social exclusion. It is important to show national administrations what you are doing in this field.

Please do not hesitate to contact the office or Eurodiaconia to discuss how to get involved or to let us know how you are communicating with your national administrations and your experiences (good or bad) of this.

### **Link with other policies**

[Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs](#); [equal opportunity policies](#); [education policies](#); [flexicurity](#), [labour law](#), [economic policies](#)

### **Contacts**

To find out more about social policy in Europe please visit the [DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities web-site](#).

To contact member's of the Social Protection Committee please click [here](#).

To contact the SPC secretariat which is run by the European Commission please click [here](#).

To contact one of the independent experts used by the European Commission to evaluate the NSR please click [here](#).

### **Impact assessment**

Three different options of ways forward were looked at in the impact assessment for the communication on strengthening the social OMC: (i) status quo, (ii) fundamental overhaul and (iii) comprehensive and ambitious reinforcement within the present structure. Main conclusions from the impact assessment was that the best way forward was to adapt the third option which would be closest

to addressing the problems identified without disrupting the current ways of working in the European Commission and in Member States.

A summary of the impact assessment could be found by clicking [here](#).