

Eurodiaconia

# Toolkit on Social OMC

- How to get involved?

12/12/2008



# EURODIACONIA TOOLKIT ON SOCIAL OMC

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## Introduction

This toolkit has been developed by the secretariat of Eurodiaconia and is intended to be used by members of Eurodiaconia in their work analysing and getting involved in the process of Social OMC, the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. Most of the information given in the toolkit comes from various publications from the [European Commission](#) in particular from [DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities](#).

The reader should be reminded on that Social OMC is part of the Lisbon strategy and as such the interrelation with e.g. the [integrated guidelines for growth and jobs](#), [employment guidelines](#) being part of these, is extremely important and any analysis of Social OMC have to consider the integrated guidelines as well. Furthermore, from a European perspective there is no funds directly devoted to Social OMC but the structural funds, notably the [European Social Fund](#), should support implementation of Social OMC in Member States. [PROGRESS](#) which is an EU programme designed to support the development of EU policies in the following areas: employment; working conditions; gender equality; social protection and social inclusion and; non-discrimination and diversity.

The first chapter of this toolkit gives a very brief overview of the history of social policies on EU level, going back to the 1970's till today. The second chapter describes the concept of Social OMC, its objectives, the indicators used, responsibilities of the Member States and the EU, and the role of the Social Protection Committee (SPC) as well as how mutual learning is taking place.

Chapter three will give a brief overview of the various strands within the Social OMC process; social inclusion, pensions and, the health and long-term care strand. Main outcome from earlier year's joint report for social protection and social inclusion will also be presented.

Chapter four will focus on how members of Eurodiaconia could get involved in the process on national/regional or local level. Whom to contact? What to focus on when preparing a message to politicians?

Most of the information is summaries and for those who would like to know more about the process we kindly advise to use the list of further information in the end of this toolkit.

## **History**

### **- 2005**

In the mid 1970's the EU decided to launch the first European Programme for the Fight against Poverty. Three specific anti poverty programme were piloted to develop new strategies to fight poverty and social exclusion, contributing to common approaches to the fight against exclusion in an enlarging EU. In the beginning of the 90's two council recommendations was adopted one being on minimum income. In 2000 EU leaders decided to make a decisive impact on eradicating poverty by 2010 and member states were asked to send in national action plans on social inclusion. In 2001 the Laeken European Council launched OMC on pension and in 2004 the European Council extended the OMC to also include Health and long-term care.

### **2005**

The OMC is the community method of "soft law" which has been developed by the EU as a way of coordinating policy development between Member States, without resorting to the regulation of hard law (e.g. directives). Although the method was first developed for the European Employment Strategy, in 1997, it has since been transposed to an ever-increasing range of policy fields including social inclusion and social protection. In 2005 an evaluation of the social OMC formed the basis for streamlining the three coordination processes into one single process.

### **2008 – Reinforcing the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion**

Earlier this year 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.

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](#).

## **Elements of OMC – Objectives, Indicators, National Strategic Reports, Joint Report and the Social Protection Committee (SPC)**

### **Common objectives**

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 find in the document describing the [overarching objectives](#).

### **Common Indicators**

An important part of the OMC is to have good, reliable and comparable indicators across the EU. Therefore, much attention has been put on developing indicators within a sub-committee to the Social Protection Committee (SPC). This committee is made up of civil servant from national ministries in the EU.

In 2006 the SPC agreed on a number of so called [overarching indicators](#) and in addition to these a set of supporting indicators used to be able to do a more analytical study of each member states performance. Below you will find the overarching indicators and links to supporting indicators for each of the three strands: [inclusion](#); [pensions](#); [health- and long-term care](#) as well as to the [definition](#) for each of the indicators.

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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.

## **National Strategic Reports (NSR) on Social Protection and Social Inclusion**

This part of the OMC process is essential since Member States should translate the common objectives, use agreed indicators and all other information gathered via e.g. peer-reviews into their own policies. The result of this process will be a national strategic report (NSR) on social protection and social inclusion. In 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. Member States should send in these strategic reports every second year to the European Commission and the Council of Europe. In 2008 Member States should have sent in their reports by September 15 that will cover a time period until 2010. You will find the reports by clicking [here](#). The years in between will be used to focus on certain specific issues and to be able to go into detail and develop indicators/statistics, e.g. in 2007 the focus was on child poverty (see the report from the European Commission by clicking [here](#)).

## **Joint Reports**

A key feature of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) is the joint analysis and assessment by the European Commission and the Council of the NSR for Social Protection and Social Inclusion submitted by the Member States. The Joint Reports assess progress made in the implementation of the OMC, set key priorities and identify good practice and innovative approaches of common interest to the Member States. The Joint Report is translated into all official EU languages and is adopted by the EPSCO council (the council formation made up by member state representatives responsible for employment and social policies) and then submitted to the Spring European Council. All reports adopted since 2000 would be found [here](#). A more detailed report on trends in social policies (supporting documents), only available in English, are annexed to the joint report together with country chapters, English and country specific language. To find these reports please click [here](#).

## **Social Protection Committee (SPC) / Monitoring of policies / Mutual learning**

In 2000 a group of high-level officials has been established to serve as a vehicle for cooperative exchange between the European Commission and the Member States about modernizing and improving social protection systems: the Social Protection Committee (SPC). The Committee's work since its establishment has been largely determined by the strategic goal for the EU's socio-economic progress set out at the Lisbon European Council of March 2000 "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion." The Indicators' Sub-group of the Social Protection Committee was created in February 2001 to support the Committee in its work. In particular, the Indicators' Sub-Group (ISG) is charged of the formulation and definition of indicators to be used for monitoring countries' progress towards the commonly agreed objectives which underpin the Open Method of Coordination in relation to social inclusion, pensions and health and long-term care. To find out more about the opinions of the SPC and the indicator group please click [here](#).

An important aspect of the OMC work is to share best practice among member states. The mutual learning programme for social policy aims at achieving this via peer-review organised by the member

states together with contracted consultants. Over the years a number of peer-review has been held, sometimes with the involvement of NGO's. To read more about these peer-reviews please click [here](#).

## **Different strands of the Social OMC**

### **Social inclusion**

There is an agreement that by 2010 a decisive impact on eradicating poverty should have been reached. So far the results are not convincing. Under the heading of social inclusion following key challenges has been agreed; to eradicate child poverty; to make labour markets truly inclusive; to ensure decent housing for everyone; to overcome discrimination and increase integration of people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and immigrants; and to tackle financial exclusion and over-indebtedness.

Outcome from the NSR 2006-2008 clearly shows that, children have a much higher-than-average risk of poverty in most countries and in some every fourth child is at risk. Studies show that children growing up in poverty are less likely to do well in school, enjoy good health, and stay out of crimes. The vast majority of MS are giving priority to develop an integrated and long-term approach to preventing and addressing poverty and exclusion among children but these are still at very different stages of implementation.

It is also clear that member states put focus on active inclusion to strengthen social integration. Reinforced active labour market policies, possibility to upgrade skills, addressing educational disadvantage etc. are vital elements in a policy mix for active inclusion. But the need to guarantee adequate levels of minimum resources receives insufficient attention...

### **Pensions**

Recently, the EU has also started to promote a closer cooperation among MS on the modernisation of social protections systems which faces similar challenges across the EU.

Pension systems in the EU provide a high degree of income security and financial autonomy for most elderly people. However, figures show that pensioner poverty is still a reality for many of Europe's older citizens. Three key priorities have been set up; adequacy and sustainability of pension systems; portability of supplementary pension rights and; the pension forum – an advisory committee with the aim to improve supplementary pension provision.

From the 2006-2008 assessment it could be seen that structural reforms have taken place in most countries. These build on a life-cycle approach meaning that they should strengthen the link between contributions and benefits; active ageing strategies by reducing access to early retirement and; strengthening incentives to work longer.

### **Health and long-term care**

Ensuring that everyone has access to high-quality health care is an essential element of the European social model. People who need medical or social care should be able to get it regardless of their income or wealth and the cost of such care should not cause poverty to the care recipients or their relatives.

However, despite increase in expenditure and population coverage, important access inequities remain. There is also a need to develop long-term care systems to meet rising demand. Current provision is often insufficient, resulting in high personal costs and long waiting times. There is growing recognition of the need to create a solid basis for financing long-term care and some Member States are moving in this direction.

## **How to get involved?**

### **Make contact**

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.

Make 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.

### **Reading tips**

Important documents to read include:

[National strategic reports](#) for social protection and social inclusion (see above); [joint reports](#) for social protection and social inclusion (see above); do read the reports that [social inclusion experts](#) (contracted by the European Commission) produces twice a year; Thematic reports such as report on [Child Poverty](#) from the European Commission or the European Parliaments [self-initiative report](#) on poverty of the Child Poverty report (also exist in other language).

Reports and position papers from Eurodiaconia would also be good reports to read before or while getting involved in the process.

## Contacts

This process involves many people seen in a European perspective and it would be impossible to list all of them. In the table below some people/organisations are listed. We haven't listed Member of European Parliament but these would of course also be important to talk with. However, the European Parliament does not have so much to say about the Social OMC process but they can always raise questions to the European Commission.

Name	e-mail	Telephone number	Organisation	Function
Jerome Vignon	<a href="mailto:Jerome.vignon@ec.europa.eu">Jerome.vignon@ec.europa.eu</a>	+322 295 4602	European Commission	Director Social Policy
Antonia Carparelli	<a href="mailto:Antonia.carporelli@ec.europa.eu">Antonia.carporelli@ec.europa.eu</a>	+322 299 3428	European Commission	Head of Unit Social Inclusion
Stefano Paci	<a href="mailto:Stefano.paci@ec.europa.eu">Stefano.paci@ec.europa.eu</a>	+32 2 295 1148	European Commission	Secretariat of the SPC
SPC members	<a href="#">List</a>	N/A	Member State	Government officials
EMCO members	<a href="#">List</a>	N/A	Member State	Government officials
Social Inclusion experts	<a href="#">List</a>	N/A	Member State	Academics

Links to European institutions and main European NGO's involved in Social OMC.

[The European Commission](#)

[The European Parliament](#)

[Council of the European Union](#)

[DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities](#)

[DG Justice and Home Affairs](#)

[European Anti-Poverty Network \(EAPN\)](#)

[Social platform](#)