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Peer review meeting on Citizens' Social Support Networks in Finland

On 23 and 24 September 2004 a peer review meeting took place in the town of Joensuu in eastern Finland. The issue discussed was the so-called Citizens' Social Support Networks (HYVE), a networking model created in 1994 by a voluntary umbrella organisation, the Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health. The model is a strategy presented by NGOs to reform welfare and social services in Finland. The universal welfare services provided predominantly by the public sector were judged to meet citizens' needs inadequately. New solutions were sought through co-operation and partnerships between the public sector, third sector organisations and NGOs.

A process-oriented networking model has therefore been developed, which encourages all partners to consult each other when planning and delivering social services complementary to those provided by the state. Through local co-operation projects and experimental schemes, the model aims to build multi-actor services and improve the involvement of citizens in service structures. The approach aims at tailored services in preventing social exclusion that take local circumstances into account.

The operation of the model takes a bottom-up approach, relying on citizen participation, dialogue and equal partnership between different actors. One of the model's striking features is that work is done in pairs made up of a local government representative and an NGO representative. Another very interesting feature is the fact that HYVE actions are financed through RAY, the Finnish Slot Machine Association (Raha-automaatti-yhdistys). RAY licenses gambling throughout the country, and each year disburses some € 300 million to welfare associations. Although its grants are subject to government approval, this ensures that the voluntary sector is able to preserve a degree of independence.

Contents

- Peer review meeting on Citizens' Social Support Networks in Finland 1
- The Reception and Integration of New Migrants in France 2
- Peer review meeting in Ireland deals with Money Advice and Budgeting Services. 3
- Peer review approach discussed in ESRC research seminars in the United Kingdom 4
- Continuous increase in visits to the programme website . . . 5
- Publication of the synthesis reports 5
- Member States and European Commission decide on the first peer reviews for 2005 6
- Comments and feedback . . 7
- Contributions. 7
- Subscription to the Newsletter. 7





The representatives of Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Malta and the United Kingdom and the two participating European NGOs – the Réseau Européen Transrégional pour l'Inclusion Sociale (RETIS) and Eurodiaconia – visited three local projects: the Kansalaistalo (Citizens' House) drop-in centre, the Kotikartano community for people with mental health problems, and Niskakatu 21, Joensuu's centre for long-term unemployed people. The peers considered that the holistic, tailored, participative HYVE method is in line with EU notions of governance and subsidiarity. It helps poor people by providing services for everyone. It contributes to social activation, to preventing the poverty trap, and to lifelong learning by policy-makers.

http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/b_5_en.html

The Reception and Integration of New Migrants in France

The peer review meeting held in Paris on 8 and 9 November 2004 dealt with the French social inclusion initiative to establish Reception Platforms for new legal migrants. These platforms are meant to give legal newcomers better opportunities to integrate into French society by offering initial information on the country, its institutions and the principles of its social life. Visitors also receive a medical check and can obtain social advice and counselling at the platforms. The social counselling sessions with all newcomers provide opportunities to identify persons at risk of social exclusion and to find possible prevention strategies in close partnership with relevant French actors. France intends that the concept, which was launched in 2003, will be operational in the whole

country in 2006 and that from then onwards about 100,000 new legal migrants will be served every year. One core element of the reception and integration platforms is the possibility newcomers are given to sign a so-called 'integration contract'. When migrants sign such a contract, which 90% currently do, they express their willingness to integrate into French society and to respect the fundamental values of the Republic. Signing a contract is a key also to accessing various types of training, including language training, the duration of which is determined by a test.

The establishment of the platforms relied on the strengthening of interministerial and interinstitutional co-ordination and co-operation. The established interministerial committee for integration, which the prime minister chairs, was one of the elements that drew much attention from the participants of the meeting. The representatives from Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, Portugal and Sweden as well as from the stakeholder organisations attending the meeting, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), the Réseau Européen Transrégional pour l'Inclusion Sociale (RETIS) and the French Regional Observatory of Integration (ORIV) thought this component, together with the systematic approach of developing a contract, as an instrument recognising the reciprocal relationship between the person and society, among the most interesting elements for transferability.

However, the setting in which the platforms operate means that transferability faces several limitations. The French system is very centralised, which on the one hand has the advantage that more care is taken to provide equal access and rights for all. On the other hand, this fact limits the involvement of local authorities, which are responsible for social policy. Most peer countries therefore considered it important to co-operate and co-ordinate more intensively on the local



level and to take local conditions into account. Furthermore, stakeholder organisations strongly argued to involve existing migrant communities in this first step in the migrant integration process and thus to take advantage of their experience.

http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/b_6_en.html

Peer review meeting in Ireland deals with Money Advice and Budgeting Services

Representatives of Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovenia and the United Kingdom, and from the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and the Réseau Européen Transrégional pour l'Inclusion Sociale (RETIS) met on 18 and 19 November in the small town of Carrigaline near Cork City in the southwest of Ireland. They discussed specific actions undertaken in Ireland to counteract problems related to money lending and overindebtedness. In Ireland, 52 independent, locally based companies limited by guarantee assist people to cope with debt and to take control of their own finances. These Money Advice and Budgeting Services (MABS), which started as a pilot project in five locations in 1992, are run by management boards made up of representatives from local bodies such as public authorities, the police, local development projects and non-governmental organisations, health boards and credit unions.

The participants at the meeting visited three different MABS offices in Cork City, Mallow and Dungarvan, and focused on three specific aspects of their operation: data collection and dissemination, the stages of the money advice process, and the Money Advice Manual on which advisers base their work. A number of countries were interested in the Money Advice Manual and would like to consider the possibilities for adaptation to their national contexts. The money advice process is based on one-to-one counselling, and all clients who wish to obtain assistance to resolve their problems can obtain this from trained money advisers. An interesting topic raised during the meeting was whether the service should be more targeted towards the most disadvantaged clients, including lone parents, disabled people and those with low numeracy and literacy, instead of being open to anyone who wants to use its services.

The peers agreed broadly that the MABS would be most transferable to countries where systems offering money advice are not yet developed. The type of service may be difficult to transfer to countries with decentralised administrative structures, e.g. federal states, given the centralised organisational character of MABS. The participants expressed the need for a joint definition of overindebtedness, and emphasised the urgency of 'debt-proofing' policy measures at national and European levels, and mainstreaming overindebtedness in other measures. Particular attention should be paid to developments with regard to the European Consumer Credit directive

http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/b_7_en.html



Peer review approach discussed in ESRC research seminars in the United Kingdom

In the context of the so-called ESRC Research Seminars, which are funded by the Economic and Social Research Council of the United Kingdom, a seminar on Policy Learning Inside and Outside the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) took place on 26 November. This seminar is part of a series of seminars on the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy, taking place in various cities in the United Kingdom. This seminar was hosted by the European Research Institute of the University of Birmingham. The participants were mainly from universities all over the United Kingdom.

One of the questions addressed in this seminar was the role of peer reviews in the OMC learning process. Papers were presented on the peer review process in the European Employment Strategy (EES) and in the Social Inclusion programme. On behalf of the INBAS/European Centre/NIZW consortium, Thea Meinema outlined the peer review process in the social inclusion programme, emphasising its potential for bilateral and multi-lateral exchange and mutual learning in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

In their paper on Peer Review of Labour Market Policies, Bernard H. Casey and Michael Gold identify a number of shortcomings in the effectiveness of peer reviews in the employment programme. Most of these shortcomings seem to have been improved in the design of the social inclusion peer reviews. The audience was interested to see that a number of potential 'flaws' were addressed. The most important critique of the EES peer reviews was that the peer review process was too exclusive, being conducted solely with participants from government and academic levels. The participants were eager to know more about the social inclusion peer reviews, particularly about the involvement of a wide variety of stakeholders including European NGOs and national actors at different levels and from various backgrounds.

An interesting debate arose about the visibility of the peer review programme and its potential target groups. The participants agreed that the peer reviews are of limited interest to the public in general. Their visibility could be strengthened if there were a stronger link with the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAPS/Incl.) at national and local levels and a general familiarity with these NAPs.

The papers presented during this seminar will be made available on the following website:
<http://www.laws.qmw.ac.uk/lisbon/>

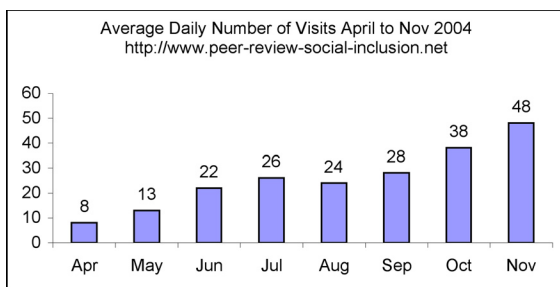


Continuous increase in visits to the programme website

www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net

Since its launch in early April 2004 we can report a continuous and remarkable increase in the number of visitors of the programme's website, apart from a slight decrease in the holiday month of August.

Although website statistics are often quoted in terms of 'hits', since this provides such nice high figures, we are counting 'visits', because this indicator provides far better and more reliable information.



The table above shows that in November, on average 48 users per day entered the website and surfed round in it, which adds up to 1,450 visits during the month. This figure of course includes some frequent users who take a look at the website every few days, so it cannot be taken as being the number of individual users.

A closer look at the November statistics reveals that users came from 16 different EU countries. Government websites from about half of the Member States and quite a number of European and national stakeholders have installed links which have been used to enter the programme website.

In October a page has been installed that enables experts in the field of social inclusion policies to express their willingness to be included in the programme's pool of experts. So far more than 80 experts have used this opportunity, which we think is a very good result. This possibility remains open and may be accessed directly via:

http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/xpt_1.php

Publication of the synthesis reports

All reports and documents prepared for the peer review meetings are published on the programme's website. The synthesis reports bring together all relevant data and information that was considered during the preparation of each peer review and discussed at the meeting itself. In addition to an overview of the specific themes, the reports address issues of adaptability and transferability to other settings and contexts as well as the lessons that can be learnt from the experiences.

All synthesis reports will be printed in English, French and German. They will be distributed widely to relevant public institutions as well as civil society organisations and stakeholders.



Member States and European Commission decide on the first peer reviews for 2005

The aim of the Peer Review Programme is to promote a reciprocal learning process across the EU on the basis of the systematic evaluation of good practices presented in the National Action Plans (NAPs/Incl.). The Peer Review Programme thus intends to contribute to a better understanding of the Member States' policies to combat poverty and social exclusion, to facilitate the transfer of key policies and institutional arrangements which have proved effective in combating poverty and social exclusion in their original context and are relevant to other contexts, and to improve the effectiveness of policies and strategies for social inclusion. Eight peer reviews were held in different

Member States in 2004, involving national and regional authorities, independent social inclusion experts, stakeholders' representatives and European Commission officials.

Several Member States have recently proposed specific activities included in their NAPs/Incl. for peer review. Based on these proposals, the European Commission and Member States have prepared a draft programme of peer review meetings to be carried out before the summer of 2005. The table below provides basic information on the proposed seminars. Clicking on a specific topic will lead you to the abstract on the activity in question.

Topic	Host Country	Expected Date
Preventing the risks of exclusion of families with difficulties http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/b_9_en.html	Italy	February
Mobilising all relevant bodies. Promoting the participation of people suffering exclusion http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/b_10_en.html	Portugal	March ^(*)
Preventing and tackling homelessness http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/b_11_en.html	Denmark	April ^(*)
Field social work in socially excluded Roma neighbourhoods http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/b_12_en.html	Czech Republic	May ^(*)
Basic social services in rural settlements – Village and remote homestead community care-giving http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/b_13_en.html	Hungary	June ^(*)

() to be confirmed*



Comments and feed-back

We would greatly appreciate receiving your comments and reactions to this Newsletter as well as to the programme's website. Messages can be sent via email:

forum@pr-soc-incl.net

Contributions

We also invite you to send us peer review-related articles and information on events and publications, which could eventually be included in forthcoming Newsletters of the Peer Review Programme. Publication of contributions will be considered in liaison with the responsible staff of the European Commission's Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion. Please send proposed contributions to:

newsletter@pr-soc-incl.net

Subscription to the Newsletter

Wide dissemination of the activities and results of the Peer Review Programme in the Field of Social Inclusion is among its major objectives. Please do not hesitate to forward this Newsletter to people and organisations to whom the programme might be of interest.

If you want to receive the Newsletter directly and you are not yet on the mailing list, please send an email to:

newsletter@pr-soc-incl.net

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