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## The Peer Review Agenda for 2007

Eight Peer Review seminars are scheduled for the remainder of 2007, making for a busy year of activity for the Open Method of Coordination in the field of Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

They encompass a range of topics, including social services and housing, integrating groups that are often the subject of discrimination in the labour market and society, human trafficking, and involving stakeholders in policy-making. Two of the seminars will address issues related to older people, covering active ageing and ways to enable people to stay in their own homes as long as possible.

In the following you will find a short description of the up-coming Peer Review seminars of 2007:

### Belgium: The future of social services of general interest

Social services of general interest cover a vast range of needs, and are organised and financed in varying ways in different countries. In April 2006 the European Commission issued a Communication aiming to clarify the specific nature of these services and what a European framework can contribute.

The Peer Review will analyse different ways of organising social services of general interest, especially with regard to non curative long-term care for the elderly. The question of the balance between the internal market and competition rules on the one hand and the vital social objectives these services are aimed at on the other hand will be discussed.

### Malta: ACCESS - Cottonera Community Resource Centre

The Cottonera region in Malta combines high population density with low academic achievement rates and high unemployment. The ACCESS complex offers a one-stop resource centre, bringing together a range of services such as housing and family care, social security, training and employment.

It helps disadvantaged people to take control of their lives and become more independent. The Peer Review will focus on the services offered to children and families, comparing the ACCESS approach to initiatives in some other Member States.

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### **Sweden: Freedom of choice and dignity for the elderly**

Sweden's national policy for elderly people lays emphasis on their right to independence and respect, to lead active lives, and to have access to good healthcare and social services.

Enabling older people to live in their own homes as long as possible is a key principle, and this Peer Review will examine the mix of services and facilities required to achieve this.

### **France: National Action Plan against substandard housing**

The National Action Plan has been underway since 2001, following legislation passed in 2000 on 'solidarity and urban renewal'. A national centre involving different ministries coordinates the initiative, which includes legal, practical and financial measures and departmental and local action plans.

The Peer Review will explore current good practice aimed at making the right to housing for all a reality within the EU, and follows work in the European Parliament to draw up a draft European charter on housing.

### **Spain: Multi-regional operative programme to combat discrimination**

Empowerment of individuals is the key aim of this programme, which is designed in particular for groups at high risk of social exclusion, such as Roma and homeless people, single parents, immigrants, former prisoners and drugs addicts - with a particular focus on women in all these situations.

The programme offers individual paths into work and society, bringing together different forms of assistance including social services, financial support and action against discrimination, with special emphasis on training.

### **Ireland: The NAP Inclusion Social Inclusion Forum**

The Irish Government set up the Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) in 2002 in a bid to bring together the different actors involved in combating poverty and social exclusion. It enables state agencies, NGOs and social partners to meet with people experiencing poverty, who can in turn play a part in formulating policy responses.

Forum meetings have proved to be an effective way of consulting and gathering feedback from those who are directly experiencing poverty, their representatives and those who have a stake in making the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion work.

### **Finland: Active ageing strategies**

Finland took up the cause of active ageing in the 1990s, when it launched the Finnish National Programme on Ageing Workers (FINPAW).

The programme includes measures to prolong the working life of workers through inclusive job opportunities and combating ageism in the workplace, for example. It also led to a thorough reform of the pension system, which came into force in 2005.

### **Denmark: Social aspects of human trafficking**

Human trafficking is by definition a cross-border problem, so it is important for different countries to work together and learn from each other's experiences.

The problem derives partly from hardship in the countries of origin, but also contributes to social problems in the areas people are trafficked to, and can be personally devastating for the individual victims, especially women and children. The Danish Peer Review aims to promote mutual learning by bringing together countries of origin, transit and reception.

For further information on individual Peer Reviews as well as the dates, please consult our website:

<http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/>



## Child poverty: a key priority for national social inclusion independent experts in 2007

A key priority for the EU streamlined Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process during 2007 is to examine in more depth the issue of poverty and social exclusion among children. A significant body of work on this issue has been planned by the Commission and Member States for 2007. In the light of this, a priority task for the Commission's Network of independent national experts on social inclusion throughout the year will be to contribute to this examination of policies on poverty and social exclusion amongst children.

In the latter part of 2006, the Commission and Member States established, under the Social Protection Committee's Indicators Sub-Group, a **Task-Force on Child Poverty and Child Well-Being**. The Task-Force is currently preparing a report which will consist of an in-depth evaluative review of ways of measuring child poverty and social exclusion among a number of EU countries and a set of concrete recommendations for a common framework for analysing and monitoring child poverty and social exclusion at EU level as well as at national and sub-national levels. The final version of the report is due by the end of September.

In a parallel initiative the SPC has sent a questionnaire to Member States, Questionnaire on poverty and social exclusion of children in the EU Member States. This will gather detailed information on the policies being developed by Member States to prevent child poverty and social exclusion. Member States are due to complete and return this by mid July.

The contribution of the Network of social inclusion experts will be twofold. The first experts' reports (submitted at the end of April) focus on Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children. These reports examine the nature and extent of child poverty and social exclusion in each expert's country, describe and assess the overall policy framework for coordinating and developing policies for preventing and alleviating child poverty and social exclusion, analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the main policies, assess national arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the impact of

policies. On the basis of these reports the Network Core Team is preparing an overall synthesis report for the Commission on the issue. In September, the national experts will draft brief assessments of the replies to the SPC questionnaire that are to be submitted by Member States in July (see above). These again will be synthesised by the Network Core Team for the Commission.

As well as the work being done by the Commission, the Task-Force, Member States and the national experts many of the European Networks active on social inclusion issues such as EAPN, EUROCHILD, the European Social Network and FEANTSA are also giving particular attention during the year to the issue of child poverty and social exclusion and are preparing reports on the issue. All these various reports will feed into and inform an SPC Peer Review on child poverty (on 4 October 2007). They will also inform the preparation of the 2008 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

It is hoped that by the end of all this work during 2007 there will be a much firmer basis for developing effective policies on the social inclusion and well-being of children. This should help to ensure that the mainstreaming of this issue in the policies and programmes of Member States and the Commission takes a significant step forward. Furthermore, as result of the work, it is to be hoped that a baseline can be established on the extent and nature of child poverty and social exclusion in the various EU countries; that indicators and arrangements can be agreed to improve monitoring and assessment of progress made; that a better understanding of the policies and programmes in place in the different Member States can be established and that this in turn can help to enhance and deepen the exchange of learning and good practice between all countries and all actors.

If the work is successful this year on the issue of poverty and social exclusion among children it can also provide an important model for examining other key issues in the EU Social Inclusion Process in subsequent years. This should help to move the whole process on to a new, more focussed and effective level.



## 2007 Joint Report reveals benefits of pooling experience

Recent progress towards greater social cohesion across Europe is encouraging, according to the European Commission's latest **Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2007)**. Almost all Member States are carrying out reforms to make their social protection systems better at responding to individual needs in a changing society, and introducing new measures to encourage people to be active, whether on the job market or in their communities.

Europe-wide cooperation, enabling Member States to share knowledge and experience through the Open Method of Cooperation (OMC), is making a significant contribution. This is the first year countries have submitted integrated National Reports covering social inclusion, pensions, healthcare and long-term care, and the results demonstrate how this broader view can help to tackle the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and exclusion.

However, while the verdict is upbeat on the general direction, it is far from complacent. Launching the report, EU Social Affairs, Employment and Equal Opportunities Commissioner Vladimir Špidla referred to "big challenges ahead". More than one in six Europeans lives at risk of poverty and 10% are in jobless households. Even people with jobs are not always better off, with 8% of workers across the EU living under the poverty threshold. "But through mutual learning and by stimulating countries to set common goals, Europe can bring a real added value to national efforts to reinforce social cohesion," declared the Commissioner.

### Getting involved

European citizens are becoming more aware of shared social values through the OMC, and stakeholders are increasingly involved in decision-making at national and EU level, with civil society and the social partners taking part in the preparation and implementation of strategies. However, there is still a way to go in this respect, and particularly in improving mechanisms for evaluation and feedback.

One important development is that Member States recognise more clearly the close link between social cohesion and social policies, and economic growth and competitiveness. Good strategies for child welfare, healthcare, training and getting people ready for the labour market, for example, all contribute to a strong and healthy economy, whereas growth allows for investment in better services. This mutually supportive 'feeding in and feeding out' process is reflected in some Member States' National Reform Programmes under the revised Lisbon Strategy.

### Priority issues

The Joint Report highlights activity in a number of specific areas. Children run a higher risk of poverty in most Member States, and deprivation at an early age - often leading towards poor health, low academic achievement, unemployment and crime - is easily carried on to the next generation. The majority of governments have responded to the European Council's March 2006 appeal for action to counter child poverty.

There is a growing consensus in support of 'active inclusion', which is based on three main pillars, namely: (i) a link to the labour market through job opportunities or vocational training; (ii) income support at a level that is sufficient for people to have a dignified life, and (iii) better access to services that may help some individuals and their families in entering mainstream society, thereby supporting their re-insertion into employment. This entails tackling homelessness, and special support for ethnic minorities, immigrants and disabled people who encounter more employment problems.

However, the report finds that while Member States are getting better at assessing the gender impact of what they do and mainstreaming women's interests into policies, they still need to put more effort into the pursuit of equality between women and men.



Presenting their plans on healthcare and long-term care, Member States showed strong commitment to ensuring equal access for all to these services. However, significant inequities remain. There is also a consensus among member states on giving priority to home care services and introducing new technology, which can help to enable people to live in their home for as long as possible.

General structural reforms have taken place in most Member States to ensure adequate and sustainable pension systems. They build on a life-cycle approach by strengthening the link between contributions and benefits. Furthermore, they focus on active ageing strategies by reducing access to early retirement schemes and strengthening incentives to work longer. However, the report finds that this must be matched by progress in opening the labour market for older workers. Continued rises in employment rates of older workers are encouraging but no reason for complacency.

To view the full report and the country profiles, please visit the following website:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/social\\_inclusion/jrep\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/jrep_en.htm)