

Transparency, dialogue, responsiveness

Discussion Paper

Hugo Swinnen
Verwey-Jonker Institute

Introduction

The initiative presented by the Irish government to be discussed during the Peer Review concerns the NAPS Social Inclusion Forum. This forum is part of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) and was established in 2002 by the Government as part of the new institutional structures for the NAPS. It provides an opportunity for people at local level, who are not directly represented in the social partnership process:

- to hear at first hand what is being done to combat poverty and social exclusion, both at the national and EU levels, and the key developments and challenges for the future;
- to put forward their views and experiences on key policies and implementations issues relating to the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion;
- to identify barriers and constraints to progress and how best these can be tackled; and
- to provide suggestions and proposals for new developments and more effective policies in the future¹.

The Social Inclusion Forum is convened by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) and prepared by the Office for Social Inclusion.² This year 2007 the fourth NAPS Social Inclusion Forum will take place on the 15th of November and the peer review participants will have the occasion to take part in that meeting as observers.

This Peer Review will look into the role of the NAPS Social Inclusion Forum as an element in the policy development and implementation process. It will be an attempt to assess the importance and impact of the event and its relevance for other countries. But also what Ireland could learn from experiences in peer countries will be on the agenda.

This paper will start with a European perspective on governance in the framework of social inclusion policies and current and previous debates in this field. It will take into account some experiences in other countries and discuss impact and transferability issues. A short description of the Social Inclusion Forum, its preparation, programme and follow-up will lead to an overview of the results so far, including participants' views on these and related host country debates.

This paper will end with suggesting some topics and issues for exchange, reflection and discussion during the Peer Review meeting. This is where the title of the paper refers to: transparency, dialogue and responsiveness.

¹ NESF (2006) Third Meeting of the NAPS Social Inclusion Forum, 15th February 2006 Royal Hospital Kilmainham: Conference Report. Dublin: NESF, p. 2.

² An overview of relevant structures, key institutions and their roles is to be found in annex 1.

1. European discussions and developments

Within the overarching objectives of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) for social protection and social inclusion the Irish Peer Review subject is at the heart of the third objective, i.e. "(c) good governance, transparency and the involvement of stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of policy"³. More in particular, the coordination and partnership instruments present in Ireland aim at the third more specific objective within the strand "eradication of poverty and social exclusion by ensuring: (...) (f) that social inclusion policies are well-coordinated and involve all levels of government and relevant actors, including people experiencing poverty, that they are efficient and effective and mainstreamed into all relevant public policies, including economic, budgetary, education and training policies and structural fund (notably ESF) programmes."⁴

These objectives of the OMC on social inclusion touch a number of issues that are discussed in a wider policy context on European level. These include at least the following:

1. The comprehensiveness of policies, i.e. including all relevant policy domains to tackle a (social) issue (mainstreaming);
2. The integrality of the approaches, i.e. problem oriented instead of sectoral;
3. The partnership between different government levels, within contexts of de-concentration and decentralisation;
4. The partnership between government and other partners, i.e. civil society, social partners, NGOs;
5. The involvement and participation of target populations in the policy process.

The discussions about these issues at European level are a mirror of - and to - discussions on all other levels of government within Europe. The background for them are developments in the fields of citizenship (participation, personal rights and responsibilities), privatisation (less government), deregulation (other government), and (de)centralisation (local government / subsidiarity).

At European level promotion of partnership and participation / involvement of local governments, non-governmental partners and target populations in social inclusion policies are present in a multitude of policy domains, programmes, networks and organisations. If it comes to social inclusion issues, local and regional governments, their networks and programmes are particularly active in this (See e.g. Urbact – RETIS (regions and cities) – Eurocities). However, the distinction between the five aspects as mentioned above is not always clearly present.

³ European Commission (2005). *Working together, working better: a new framework for the open coordination of social protection and inclusion policies in the European Union*. COM (2005) 706 Final. Brussels: European Commission, p. 5.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 6.

1.1 European countries

In all the NAPs Inclusion the issue of involvement of different levels of government and relevant stakeholders is discussed, more or less extensively⁵. An extensive overview of governance developments in social inclusion policies in all Member States is given in the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2007's supporting document⁶. The governance chapter of this document discusses four major governance related issues: mobilising stakeholders and raising awareness; mainstreaming social inclusion; gender mainstreaming and use of indicators, targets, monitoring and evaluation. We discuss these four issues briefly.

On the subject of **mobilising stakeholders**, the report mentions that "The bulk of Member States have made progress, since the previous NAPs for inclusion, in mobilising and consulting those concerned. Among the arrangements for preparing the 2006-2008 National Strategy for Social Inclusion a number of new good practices have emerged, building on the experience gained so far in the OMC.

In many countries (DK, BE, CY, CZ, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, LU, MT, NL, PT, SE, UK) the process of drafting the NAP was open, from the outset, to participation by NGOs and social services providers, allowing thorough discussion. Nonetheless, in all Member States there is scope for improving the quality of this involvement, ensuring that it actually impacts on policies and priorities, and for extending it beyond the preparatory phase."⁷

In the framework of social inclusion policy development different more or less interactive methods are being used in several Member States to gather the views of civil society. There are more centralised and more local or regional approaches. Some approaches are directed more to organisations, while others target also the larger public. It would be certainly worthwhile to construct a European directory of these methods, as they could be a source of cross-national inspiration.

The Joint Report 2007 insists on the issue of resources and capacity building to insure genuine consultation. In this context the importance of time has to be stressed, for civil society organisations and certainly for organisations representing people experiencing poverty and exclusion. We observed regularly that the time to react on government's proposals or requests for input is (too) short in order to enable organisations to gather views of their members.

Within the National Action Plans assessment framework, it seems difficult however to compare the extent and quality of participation of civil society in different Member States. This makes the overviews essentially descriptive. Also, the national independent experts and representatives of civil society seem only able to judge the involvement of stakeholders and actors within the national framework and without very explicit criteria. A recent report, based upon a study commissioned by Caritas Europa and co-financed by the Commission, describes an attempt to come to such comparison. The researchers use a case study approach and the rating – on a participation aspects' list – by national experts. It would be worthwhile giving some attention and

⁵ see i.a. the MSI project – www.europemsi.org

⁶ European Commission (2007). *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. Supporting document.* SEC(2007) 329. Brussels: European Commission, pp. 59-66.

⁷ European Commission (2007). *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. Supporting document.* SEC(2007) 329. Brussels: European Commission, p 59.

time during the Irish Peer Review to further exploring the possibilities and methodologies for comparative participation assessment.⁸

Mainstreaming social inclusion can be seen both as aim and result of social inclusion policy development. It needs co-operation between different government levels and sectors, but could also use the input from civil society organisations. In order to stimulate mainstreaming, a specialised co-ordinating body at sufficient high policy level and focal points in the crucial government departments and levels are key. The French example is given in the Joint Report 2007: "The FR strategy comprises a political and administrative framework, a targeted approach, and cross-cutting policy objectives directly built into the budgetary process, with indicators to monitor progress."⁹ Furthermore, the report mentions a Belgian experiment with on-the-spot mediators (trained "lay-experts") in poverty and social exclusion placed in 10 branches of the federal administration, and it refers to focal points in each ministry in Portugal for assessing the contribution to mainstreaming.

One dimension of mainstreaming is not so much developed in the Joint Report 2007: the role of / and relation between different government levels. In all European countries, the role of local and regional government in the fight against poverty and social exclusion is important and growing. This has to do e.g. with devolving policy responsibilities, but also with changing views on the role of minimum income schemes (often administered at local level) as potential activation mechanisms. In some countries this leads to local or regional Action Plans on inclusion. Therefore communication and dialogue about social inclusion policies between government levels becomes an ever growing necessity¹⁰. At the same time the necessity to think about civil society participation in *local* policy development is growing. In several European countries, local authorities have the obligation to install consultative boards of users in general or for specific policy domains (e.g. municipal social service users boards in the Netherlands). And one could ask how these local (or regional) participation tools and structures relate to local or regional consultation for National Action Plans on Inclusion.

On the input side, **gender mainstreaming** is seen by the European Commission as a central element of all policies. In Lithuania, says the Joint Report 2007, the gender aspect is consistently present in the social situation analysis and is mainstreamed into all policy priorities. In Ireland, gender equality is to be reached, i.a. by *Positive Actions to Promote Gender Equality* and *Equality Proofing*. The National Women's Strategy is a cross-departmental strategy aimed at enhancing the socio-economic status of women, their well-being and their participation in decision-making and civil society.

⁸ Francis Davis, Jenny Rossiter, Jolanta Stankeviciute (2007). *European Public Value and The Caritas Social Vision – An Interim Assessment of Europe's National Social Inclusion Strategies*. Report, produced by the Von Hügel Institute, St Edmund's College, Cambridge within the CONCEPT project, co-financed by the European Commission. Brussels: Caritas Europa.

⁹ Id., *ibid.* p. 61.

¹⁰ The Discussion Paper for the Peer Review on Social Inclusion in Paris, June 2006 refers extensively to this issue of relationships between government levels: H. Swinnen (2006) *Social inclusion policies: Coordination and partnership – Discussion paper – Peer Review: Social inclusion cross cutting policy tools – "Document de politique transversale (DPT)" Paris 29-30 June 2006* -. Brussels: OSB, CEPS, IES. <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/peer-reviews/2006/social-inclusion-cross-cutting-policy-tools-2013-201cdocument-de-politique-transversale-dpt-201d>

Within a participatory development process of social inclusion policies, the **use of indicators, targets, monitoring and evaluation** can (should?) play an important role. There is a great variety of monitoring and evaluation practices throughout Member States. The involvement of non governmental stakeholders is rarely systematic all over the process from indicators, over target setting to monitoring and evaluation. Most initiatives to include NGOs and people experiencing poverty are ad hoc or at one moment in this process. An interesting experience to be mentioned is the Belgian initiative to include (organisations of) people experiencing poverty in the construction of indicators. Starting point for the Belgian “responsive” policy development was the poverty report in 1994 – 1995. This report was built on a lot of qualitative data reflecting experiences of poverty. It was decided to create a national service for combating poverty, social exclusion and precariousness. This service has monitoring and organising dialogue as its central functions. Secondly, an inter-ministerial conference is the steering body for the development of national social inclusion policy. Thirdly, government chose a partnership approach between different levels of government and between public authorities, civil society and private partners for developing concrete actions. Finally, a bi-annual report and the recommendations included in it are the basis for the actualisation of the political agenda. Intensive consultations with semi permanent groups (people experiencing poverty as well as professionals) in specific fields, provincial round tables and political debate in parliament are part of the evaluation and development process. This is a dynamic process that leads to new debates. Currently the issue of “poverty proof” (poverty impact assessment) of public measures, rules and laws is under discussion.¹¹

In some Member States, NGOs and social partners assist the government in developing the monitoring framework and to assess results. As to evaluation arrangements, according to the Joint Report 2007, there is little information available. As an example of ex ante evaluation, Ireland’s Poverty Impact Assessment is to be mentioned.

1.2 Peer Reviews

In many previous Peer Reviews on Social Inclusion, the issue of mobilising all relevant bodies and stakeholders played a more or less important role in the debates¹². This has been the case in 10 out of 15 Peer Reviews organised over the periode 2004 and 2005. In 4 of these Peer Reviews, the practice under review itself had a clear link to the involvement of stakeholders or target groups:

- Sweden 2004: Local Development Agreements to stop segregation in vulnerable metropolitan areas;
- Finland 2004: Citizens’ social support networks (Finland)
- Italy 2005: Preventing the risks of exclusion of families with difficulties
- Portugal 2005: Socio-community development – mobilising all relevant bodies and promoting participation of people suffering exclusion.

¹¹ H. Swinnen (2006) *Peer Review: Social inclusion cross cutting policy tools – “Document de politique transversale (DPT)” Paris 29-30 June 2006 - Synthesis report*. Brussels: ÖSB, CEPS, IES, p. 7; <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/peer-reviews/2006/social-inclusion-cross-cutting-policy-tools-2013-201cdocument-de-politique-transversale-dpt-201d>

¹² NN. *Final Report: Implementation of the Peer Review Programme 2005, Main Results of the Peer Reviews 2004 and 2005*. (2005) Brussels: INBAS, NIZW, European Centre, pp. 31-34.

These practices however focused on local or regional initiatives for actor involvement. In its comments, the report insists on transversal issues, such as political consensus and the involvement of NGOs and the role of civil society. About political consensus it says: “the ensuing government commitment form a powerful promoter. Strong backing at high government level will contribute to public support at all levels. For some policies – e.g. the fight against poverty – political consensus will be self-evident, whereas for other policies – for instance migration policies or alternative housing for homeless people – there will be more controversial opinions. In both cases, however, political support will have a positive effect.” And about NGOs and civil society: “In addition, and perhaps even of stronger influence, was the way in which NGOs and civil society organisations were involved. NGOs in these instances may exercise a wide variety of roles and responsibilities: representation, advocacy and lobbying, client / interest groups, self help, service provision, social partners, charitable organisations, etc. The diversity in the use of the NGO concept at the same time indicates the multiple added value which they contribute to and the variety of roles that specific NGOs play in the good practices under discussion. This added value is clearly illustrated also in the fact that NGOs are so deeply involved in the Peer Review process. They speak on behalf of people who have no voice in the policy debate. European NGOs approve of the method adopted and Member State governments have become more active in inviting NGOs.”¹³

The Peer Review in Paris (June 2006) on Social Inclusion Cross Cutting Policy Tools – “Document de politique transversale (DPT)” was even more than the ones from 2004 and 2005 focused on similar issues as the Peer Review to be held in Dublin. It was about policy development and implementation as an interactive process to improve government and governance. Some of the elements mentioned at the end of that Peer Review’s synthesis report, could also inspire the Peer Review in Dublin. At the end of that synthesis report, it was stated that “there is a continuous need for methodological reflection about tensions to solve or to live with. A few examples:

- Between structures and dynamics: one could create the most comprehensive structure for co-operation, but without a continuous effort to create and maintain a partnership culture the best structure will fail. To sign a local charter is fine, but there has to be a co-ordinator to make it work, as the local French example showed.
- Between coping with complexity and simplifying existing structures: a lot of energy in policy making goes to overcome structural complexity, without touching existing competencies, territories and power. Is this always the most productive and efficient choice?
- Between change and security: in changing existing structures, also in terms of policy making procedures, one should realise that this causes feelings of insecurity. The Dutch expression “never throw away old shoes before buying new ones” is perhaps not an absolute law, but should lead to some reflection in processes of policy renewal.
- Between slowing down and speeding up: time is an important issue. At the one hand, everybody underlines that the creation of a culture of participation and partnership takes time. Everybody understands also that real involvement of people experiencing poverty needs some slowing down of the policy making process. At the other hand, there is a

¹³ NN. *Final Report: Implementation of the Peer Review Programme 2005, Main Results of the Peer Reviews 2004 and 2005.* (2005) Brussels: INBAS, NIZW, European Centre, p. 35 and p. 37

great sense of urgency both from the side of (political) policy makers and vulnerable people.

- Between leadership and partnership: there is a lot of expectations in terms of possibilities for involvement in the definition of policies, while at the same time people expect government to show strong leadership. This does not necessarily have to be contradictory, but needs new visions on both leadership and partnership. In terms of the policy making process, “soft steering” as it is used in the OMC on European level seems to be very useful also in national contexts, more in particular for the relationship between national and local governments, but also for the relation with non-governmental partners. It is about influencing and steering without (formal) power.”¹⁴

1.3 From Ireland to Europe

In his speech at the start of the 2005 NAPS Social Inclusion Forum, Jérôme Vignon underlined the importance of the Irish contribution – leadership in his words – to social inclusion issues at European level.¹⁵ He mentioned the role of Ireland as “supporter” of a strong European dimension to social inclusion policies; its role in fostering the development of the Union’s social inclusion process, including hosting conferences such as the third European meeting of People Experiencing Poverty; the active participation in the work of the Social Protection Committee; the support given, i.a. by the Combat Poverty Agency, to new Member States for the development of their first National Action Plans; and the assistance to the Commission’s work in the implementation of the social inclusion process.

Ireland is one of these countries developing consistency between its own social inclusion policies and those at European level, both in terms of content and in terms of the development process. As to the content, the Irish government follows closely the European employment and social inclusion agendas. This paper is more in particular interested in the policy development process. Through the Social Partnership and a strong consultation process leading to a public debate on the NAP Inclusion, the latter has become a policy document in its own right and not, as in some other countries, a compilation of policy measures from different Ministries.

This consultation process includes both the “lower” government levels and civil society. Also in Ireland we see the double movement – described when talking about mainstreaming in European countries (under section 1.1.) – that consists of using the Social Inclusion Forum for national consultation with local government representatives and civil society at the one hand, and insisting on involvement of civil society actors in local and regional policy development.¹⁶ The peer review meeting in Dublin could be an opportunity also to discuss the means for improving the information and communication between the European and local / regional level developments in the Social Inclusion Policy development and implementation processes.

¹⁴ H. Swinnen (2006) *Peer Review: Social inclusion cross cutting policy tools – “Document de politique transversale (DPT)” Paris 29-30 June 2006 - Synthesis report*. Brussels: ÖSB, CEPS, IES, p. 24.

¹⁵ NESF (2005) *Second Meeting of the NAPS Social Inclusion Forum, 26th January 2005 Royal Hospital Kilmaham: Conference Report*. Dublin: NESF, p. 13-15.

¹⁶ Office for Social Inclusion (2007). *EU Peer Review of the Social Inclusion Forum – Dublin 15-16th November 2007 - Host Country Report*. Dublin: OSI, p. 5.

Some aspects of the Irish policy development model that might interest other European countries – even if these are open for improvement – are:

- The political visibility and public debate about social inclusion, through an open consultation process and the NAPS Social Inclusion Forum;
- The function of the Social Inclusion Forum as a bottom-up / top-down meeting point of actors;
- The positioning of the National Economic and Social Forum and the Social Inclusion Office at high level in the administration hierarchy;
- The Social Partnership and Social Inclusion Forum as a form of multi level, multi issue (sector) and multi actor governance;
- The official social partner status of the Community and Voluntary Sectors.

To date the Social Inclusion Forum has not been subject to a full evaluation. At the end of the 2006 Social Inclusion Forum, participants were asked for their opinion about the meeting, but no independent evaluation has been carried out¹⁷.

It would be interesting to hear from peer countries if similar initiatives have been evaluated and what the outcomes were. Such evaluation should take into account both strategic issues (did we choose the right approach) and issues of a methodological nature (did we use the right methods). Aspects to take into account in such evaluation would include¹⁸:

- The comprehensiveness and transparency of the policy process;
- The choice of stages and degrees of involvement of different partners;
- The choice and approach of partners to involve;
- The methods used for the actual participation;
- The preconditions for adequate involvement.

Studies of participatory democracy initiatives in different (country) contexts and on different governance levels show that within these aspects different choices can be adequate, as long as these are explicit and mutually consistent¹⁹. As to the preconditions for adequate involvement however, some general rules are worth to be mentioned. These rules have to do with time, support, recognition, visibility, public debate and dialogue.

To be adequate, involvement needs indeed appropriate time schedules. In different countries we can observe a certain bias as to the time used by government bodies to prepare their policies in relation to the time accorded to non governmental partners to realise their involvement. More in

¹⁷ NESF (2006) *Third Meeting of the NAPS Social Inclusion Forum, 15th February 2006 Royal Hospital Kilmainham: Conference Report*. Dublin: NESF, p. 82.

¹⁸ H. Swinnen (2006) *Social inclusion policies: Coordination and partnership – Discussion paper – Peer Review: Social inclusion cross cutting policy tools – “Document de politique transversale (DPT)” Paris 29-30 June 2006 –*. Brussels: ÖSB, CEPS, IES, p. 10. See also: Francis Davis et al. (2007) o.c. p. 22.

¹⁹ See i.a.:

M. Carley (ed.) (2004) *Citizens, Innovation, Local Governance – A 21st Century Approach – Report and Guidelines from the Demos Project*. Edinburgh: City of Edinburgh. (The Demos Project was supported through the European Union's Fifth Framework Programme for Research).

M. Davelaar et al. (2004) *European cities and local social policy - Survey on developments and opinions in six European countries*. Bern: Federal Social Insurance Office. (also available in French and German).

particular the less powerful or professionalised partners are often put in an uncomfortable position.

Linked to the previous condition is the condition of giving sufficient government support to grassroots organisations in order to enable their development and functioning. Otherwise, their involvement in the policy development process and more in general in the process of social inclusion can not be assured.

In addition to participating in the policy process, there must be recognition of the different but equally legitimate roles of actors as co-producers but also as consumers of public policy and services. Therefore, mechanisms for responding to citizens' concerns (role of consumers) and for individual and collective defence of interests have to be in place. If these different mechanisms do not exist or do not function well, citizen input will come at times and places where they can't be used productively.

The whole policy development and implementation process, including the internal government processes, should be as visible as possible to all invited non governmental partners. Since the internal processes are mostly like black boxes, partners can't understand the time schedules used and their own place in it.

Finally, in order to motivate partners' involvement, but also to organise checks and balances, public debate and open dialogue are crucial. This has to take the form of formal political debate in parliament of course. It is somewhat amazing to see how little social inclusion is debated in parliament in some European countries. But also public debate and dialogue through public meetings and conferences is important to keep social inclusion on the public agenda. Last but not least, dialogue has to be also an integral part of the actors' involvement process itself. This means that public authorities not only listen to these actors, but also give feedback and discuss about what happened with their advice.

2. The Social Inclusion Forum, its policy context and outcomes

A full description of the Social Inclusion Forum, its history and its place in the Irish policy context is given in the host country's paper.

The overall policy development process, in which the Social Inclusion Forum is one consultation instrument, could be described as systematic, well structured and comprehensive, i.e. including all relevant sectors of national government. In the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 the wider context is summarised as follows: "The Government is committed to a coherent strategy for social inclusion based on the lifecycle approach set out in the national partnership agreement *Towards 2016*. this National Action Plan for Social inclusion (NAPInclusion), complemented by the social inclusion elements of the National development Plan 2007-2011: *Transforming Ireland – A Better Quality of Life for All*, sets out how the social inclusion strategy will be achieved over the period 2007-2016."

Seen from the perspective of government, the Social Inclusion Forum is one instrument – within a complex setting of institutional structures²⁰ – for consultation of organisations and people not

²⁰ See annex 1

structurally involved in social inclusion policy development through the Social Partnership. This consultation is essentially about participants' views on policy priorities and progress. Furthermore it is a means for giving information about government's views on these policy priorities and progress.

From the perspective of participants, the Social Inclusion Forum seems to be a means for getting into debate with policy makers and government officials, in order to influence future social inclusion policies and to evaluate the progress of current policies. This is what one could read in the points made in the evaluation forms at the end of the 2006 Social Inclusion Forum.

These two perspectives are not conflictual, as might be deduced from the general satisfaction with the Forum, but participants have the impression that too little attention is given to their own perspective:

- "Social Inclusion Forum should make the policy and decision-makers more accountable";
- "Too few opportunities to engage with policy and decision-makers";
- "The workshops were too crowded and large, and there was not enough time for all views to be heard";
- "Assumption of too much knowledge – introduction or overview of NAP/Inclusion process needed at the start".

A certain feeling of being part of a one way process with no or too little feedback on the use of consultation outcomes was also expressed during the roundtables in the 2006 Social Inclusion Forum.²¹

The inputs as well as the outputs of the Social Inclusion Forum are very well documented. The consultation process concerning the NAP Inclusion and used in the Social Inclusion Forum 2006 for instance has been extensively reported²². The same goes for the focus groups organised by the EAPN Ireland with the support of the Combat Poverty Agency.

From outside however, and probably also for several actors in Ireland, it is difficult to assess the impact of the consultation processes, including the Social Inclusion Forum, on the actual policy development. A transparent feedback about what elements or aspects have been translated in policy measures is lacking. The host country paper testifies of the impact of the Social Inclusion Forum on government policy strategies. This includes putting new needs or "forgotten" target groups on the political agenda. This is certainly an important added value (European Public Value²³) of participation to the quality of Social Inclusion Policies. But the host country's paper also insists on the importance of more transparent and participative policy-making and implementation. Monitoring and evaluation are crucial in this, as well as the publication of its results for wider debate by the public at large.

²¹ See i.a. NESF (2006) Third Meeting of the NAPS Social Inclusion Forum, 15th February 2006 Royal Hospital Kilmainham: Conference Report. Dublin: NESF, p. 27.

²² Office for Social Inclusion (2006) *Report on the Consultation for the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2006–2008*. Dublin: OSI.

²³ Francis Davis et al. (2007) o.c.

On a few other evaluation criteria mentioned in the previous section, the impression seems to be that:

- There is clear support for grass roots organisations and organisations representing people experiencing poverty and exclusion (e.g. through the Combat Poverty Agency) to organise their input in the consultation processes;
- The time schedule for non governmental actors to provide the Office for Social Inclusion with input for the development of policies seems to be more reasonable than some other European countries;
- Since there is no independent evaluation, these observations remain impressions and should be further explored. On elements such as the transparency / visibility of the policy development procedures and the quality of the dialogue with policy makers there is no evidence so far.

3. Good practice value, issues for improvement and questions

3.1 Good practice value

The value of the Social Inclusion Forum (and its policy development context) as a good practice for possible transfer could be summarised in the following key-words:

- The inclusion, in a systematic way, of as many civil society actors as possible in the social inclusion policy development process.
- The visibility and openness of this process through a national conference, which brings poverty and social exclusion on the agenda for public debate.
- The concrete and practical support given to grassroots organisations for engaging in this consultation process.
- The high level profile of the bodies involved in the organisation of the Social Inclusion Forum, which is a means for linking up with the mainstreaming process.

Mary Daly, Ireland's member of the European Network of Independent Social Inclusion Experts, underlines the importance given to consultation in the preparation of the NAP Inclusion: "Given this, one can say that a broad range of stakeholders have participated thus far in the NRSSPSI preparation process and that this year a more intensive and broad-ranging consultation process than ever before was initiated. In this and other respects the Office for Social Inclusion has played a strong leadership role."²⁴

²⁴ Mary Daly (2006) *Ireland - Trends, Recent Developments, Active Inclusion and Minimum Resources - First Semester Report 2006*. Brussels: ÖSB, CEPS, IES, p. 12; <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/policy-assessment-activities/reports/first-semester-2006/first-semester-reports-2006/>

3.2 Issues raised by the host country:

Two evaluation issues are raised by the host country as issues for possible improvement:

- The lack of an independent evaluation of the Social Inclusion Forum, notably its impact on social inclusion policy developments;
- The evaluation of the programme and participation methods of the Social Inclusion Forum. The great number of participants and the combination of objectives (information and consultation) create difficulties for real and effective participation of all participants.

The first point is also stressed in a statement of Mary Daly. The 1st semester report 2006 for the European Commission reads: "The Social Inclusion Forum, held in February, reiterated and further substantiated many of these issues. A number of themes in my view deserve emphasis from the many emerging from the discussions, in what appears to have been a structured and focused meeting. These include local-national links (especially in the context of greater co-ordination in relation to policies and service provision in light of implementation gaps in service delivery and need identification), consultation with and engagement of people and a better understanding on the part of officials of the situation facing people affected by social exclusion and the NGOs that seek to represent them, the importance of acting on the consultations, the need for greater involvement of the local authorities in social inclusion, the need for streamlining of the NRSSPSI²⁵ with the national development plan and the social partnership agreement, people's right of appeal and redress in relation to decisions and services. Clearly, a very comprehensive public consultation process has been undertaken, a process very much in the spirit of the objective of 'mobilising all actors'. However, it is pertinent in this context to raise the issue of the status of the report and consultations. It is not clear how exactly they will feed into the NRSSPSI."²⁶

3.3 Questions for peer countries

- Do you agree on the aspects mentioned in 3.1 as good practice value of the Social Inclusion Forum? Would you complete or change these?
- Which suggestions could be given to the Irish Office for Social Inclusion about the evaluation, including the impact assessment of the Social Inclusion Forum? How could such an evaluation increase the accountability and responsiveness of government as it is experienced / seen by participating actors?
- Do you consider the combination of objectives (inform and consult) of the Social Inclusion Forum as a problem? If not, under what conditions could both, the information and the consultation aspects, be balanced. In other words: How to improve the possibilities and methods for active participation and input?
- The map of Institutional Structures concerning Social Inclusion policies in Ireland shows a complex framework. During the Peer Review in Paris in June 2006 remarks were made about the very complex structure for social inclusion policy development in France. Some

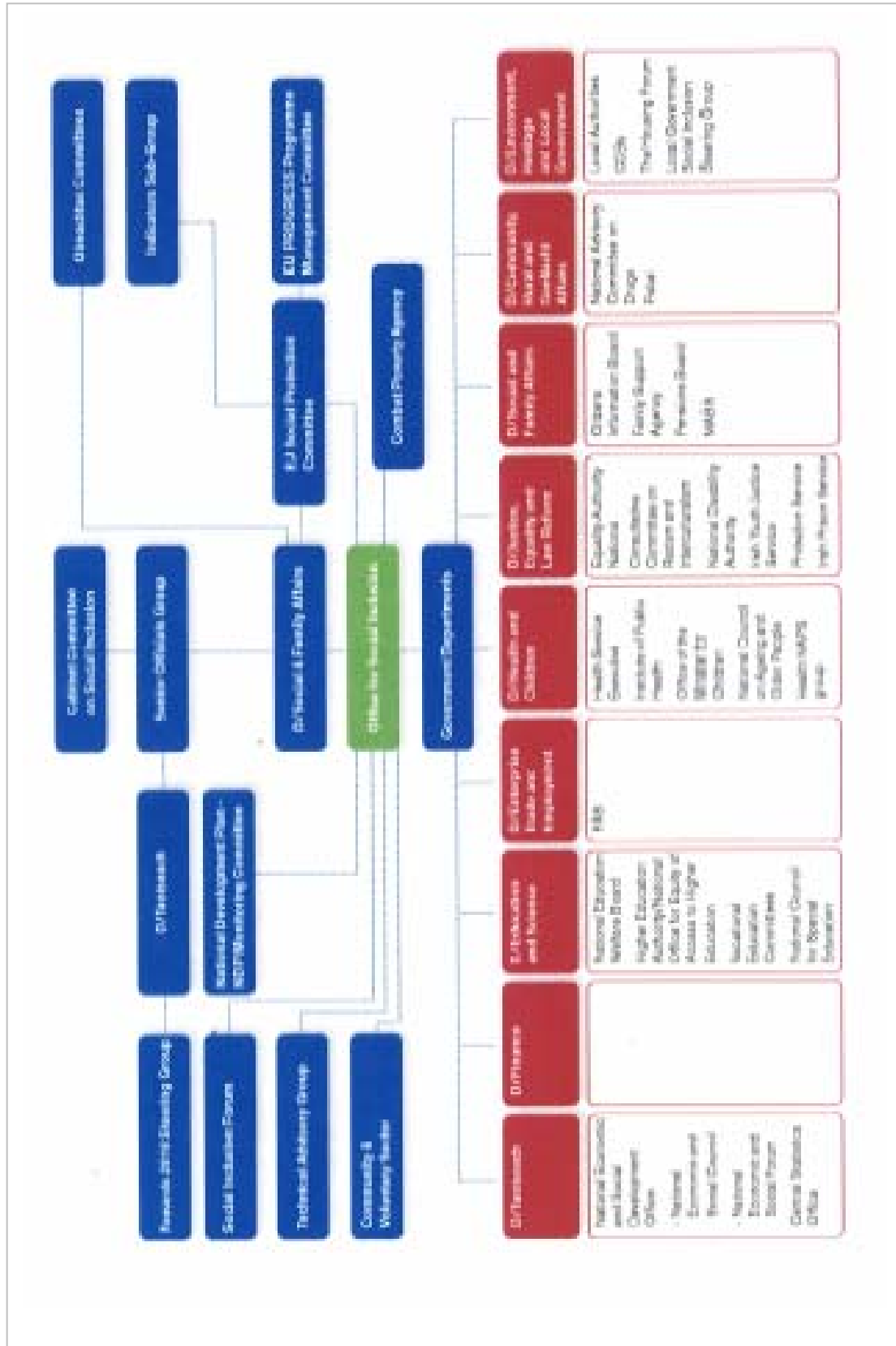
²⁵ NRSSPSI: National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion

²⁶ Id., Ibid., p. 14

peer countries had doubts about the efficiency and effectiveness of such complicated structures, more in particular when looking to smaller countries. When looking to the Irish structures, one could say that these are also – at least from an outsider's perspective – rather complex. Is this a necessity in order to assure co-ordination and mainstreaming of social inclusion policies? Are there means for simplification? How to improve the information and communication within the triangle: national government – civil society – local/regional government?

Annex 1: Institutional Structures, Key Institutions and their Roles

1. Map of Institutional Structures



2. Key Institutions and their Roles

Cabinet Committee on Social inclusion

This Committee, chaired by the Taoiseach²⁷ and composed of the relevant Ministers, gives overall strategic direction to the development of policies to combat poverty and social exclusion and ensures that their implementation is regularly monitored and promoted at the highest level. It is supported in this work by the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion.

Oireachtas²⁸ Committees

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs may be called to present progress reports on the implementation of the National Action Plan to the Joint Oireachtas Committees on Social and Family Affairs, and on European Affairs.

Senior Officials Group on Social inclusion

This Group is chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach. It maintains a broad overview of social inclusion issues and brings emerging topics to the attention of the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion. It also deals with policy developments relating to meeting the objectives of social inclusion strategies.

The *Towards 2016* Partnership Steering Group

This Steering Group representing Government and each of the Social Partner Pillars has overall responsibility for the management and review of progress on the implementation of the ten-year framework agreement as it applies to the wider non-pay issues.

Office for Social inclusion

The Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) is located in the Department of Social and Family Affairs and has overall responsibility for co-ordinating and monitoring the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The Office co-ordinates this process across Departments, Agencies, Regional and Local Government, and implements key support functions. The Technical Advisory Group assists the OSI in the development and implementation of an appropriate Data Strategy to underpin the NAPinclusion process.

National Economic and Social Development Office

The National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO) comprises the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCP). NESDO facilitates and promotes complementary programmes of research, analysis and discussion by its constituent bodies. NESC reports to government on issues concerning efficient economical development and the achievement of social justice. NESF advises government on policies to achieve greater equality and social inclusion and convenes the Social Inclusion Forum.

²⁷ Taoiseach – Irish Prime Minister

²⁸ Oireachtas – Irish national parliament

The NDP²⁹ Monitoring Committee

The Department of Finance has overall responsibility for monitoring NDP programmes. The OSI supports the monitoring of the social inclusion elements of the Plan.

Combat Poverty Agency

The Combat Poverty Agency is a statutory body working for the prevention and elimination of poverty and social exclusion through advice to Government, developing innovative anti-poverty measures, examining the nature, causes and extent of poverty in Ireland and promoting a greater public understanding of poverty and social exclusion.

The local Government Social Inclusion Steering Group

This group, chaired by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, consists of representatives from the Office for Social Inclusion, Combat Poverty Agency, Institute of Public Administration and Local Government Management Services Board and the County/City Managers Association and supports the development of a strong anti-poverty focus within local government including through the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network.

County/city Development Boards and other local structures

The County/City Development Board (CDB) structure co-ordinates integrated public service delivery, (including social inclusion activities) at local level. The CDBs are led by the local authorities and include the social partners, State Agencies, local, rural and community development organisations and community and voluntary representatives. The Social Inclusion Measures Group (SIMs) support this process, as do the Community Fora.

Social inclusion units in government departments and local authorities

Social Inclusion Units are established in key government departments and co-ordinate their Department's contribution to the process in liaison with the OSI. Social Inclusion Units also currently operate in eight local authorities and will be extended to half of local authorities by the end of 2008.

The Social Inclusion Forum

The Social Inclusion Forum is jointly organised by the NESF and OSI. It provides an opportunity to members of the public and representatives of the community and voluntary sector to inform and be informed about the NAPinclusion process.

Community and Voluntary Sector

The community and voluntary sector, consists of a broad range of organisations active in mutual support and self help, local development, resource and service provision, representation coordination, campaigning and advocacy.

²⁹ NDP – National Development Programme

Technical Advisory Group

This group assists the OSI in the development and implementation of a Data Strategy to underpin the NAPinclusion process. Membership includes representatives from key government departments, the Central Statistics Office, the Combat Poverty Agency, the Economic and Social Research Institute and the Equality Authority. In accordance with the terms of *Towards 2016*, the Group will be expanded to include technical experts from the social partner pillars.

Social Protection Committee

The EU Social Protection Committee (SPC) facilitates exchanges between the European Commission and the EU Member States in relation to social protection and social inclusion policy. The SPC developed the 'Open Method of Coordination' within which Member States' social protection and inclusion plans are formulated and implemented. The Department of Social and Family Affairs is represented on the SPC and the OSI is represented on the SPC Indicators Sub-Group which formulates indicators for monitoring poverty and social exclusion. The EU PROGRESS Programme provides funding for co-operative initiatives between Member States in relation to social inclusion policy.

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Relevant websites

National Economic and Social Forum Ireland: <http://www.nesf.ie>

Office for Social Inclusion Ireland: <http://www.socialinclusion.ie>

Combat Poverty Agency Ireland: <http://www.cpa.ie>

EAPN Ireland: <http://www.eapn.ie>

Mainstreaming Social Inclusion – project: <http://www.europemsi.org>

Social Inclusion at the European Commission:
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/

Peer Review and Assessment in Social Inclusion: <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/>

European Anti Poverty Network: <http://www.eapn.org/>

The participation assessment study (see footnote 8) can be found on <http://www.vhi.org.uk>