

## The NAPInclusion Social Inclusion Forum

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The Social Inclusion Forum seems to be a well-developed form and process for consultation with civil society (including people experiencing poverty) used during the elaboration and implementation of strategies against social exclusion in Ireland. Although we think some features of it could be improved, it is a 'good example' for countries where consultation processes are weak.

### 1. Similarities/differences of the Social Inclusion Forum to the Hungarian experiences

#### Differences

In Hungary the concept of fighting against social exclusion became known as the effect of the EU Open Method of Coordination, earlier there was not such a wide-range strategy against poverty. The NAP/incl is still a document to produce for the EU and not a strategy on its own right, although the most comprehensive in the social policy field. The governmental structure set up to coordinate the elaboration and monitoring of the plan (see in section 1.3.) hasn't become the main coordination structure in the field of social policy. As a result the Hungarian NAP/incl and the National Strategy Report were drafted in a very different way from the Irish example. First these documents only were synthesises of the existing strategies, actions etc. of other ministries and departments (which formulated during their own public consultation process and were accepted programme by that time). Secondly the drafting process of the NAPs was quite closed, so NGOs could hardly take part in it.

#### Similarities

There were some attempts from the government to feed-in the opinion of the civil society into the NAP/incl process. Even the process was very different with narrow involvement of civil actors there are some similar experiences to the SIF. On this basis and analysing the experiences of the two national meetings of people experiencing poverty we can state, that:

- People experiencing poverty are very keen to participate and if they are aware of the framework, the aims and their role are able to participate constructively;
- Participants are interested in the dialogue with decision makers but not in listening to speeches from them;

- Feed-back from the side of decision makers is crucial, people experiencing poverty and their organisations may lose trust and motivation in participation if they are not informed about policy improvements.
- Forums like the SIF with broad participation of decision makers, NGOs and people experiencing poverty can strengthen publicity of social inclusion issues.

## 2. Potential transferability of the SIF

We would find it highly relevant to set up a forum like the SIF in the Hungarian coordination and policy making structure. It would be relevant as a preparatory event of the NAPs, to identify the main challenges and aims. It could have a role of giving direct feed-back to the decision makers about the needs of people experiencing poverty. We will examine whether such an event can be organised during the elaboration of the 2008-2011 NSR.

However, in order to be successful and become an integral part of the coordination structure and not only a single event, important conditions should be changed.

The first and most important condition is that social policies, social inclusion should gain a higher priority within politics. In line with it another question is whether we can make some relevant politicians and decision makers support explicitly the idea of involvement of people experiencing poverty into policy making through an open consultation process. Our opinion is that some motivation and support from the European Commission – even as the follow-up of this Peer review – or the establishment of an informal exchange process for countries interested in adopting a SIF would be helpful and welcome.

The other main conditions are:

- Strengthening the role of the NAP/incl process by strengthening human resources and making necessary financial resources available – funding for the operation of the coordinating system, for media work, for the organisation of preparatory meetings and the SIF and for the capacity building of all actors etc.
- Coordination of the process by a body positioned on high-level in the administration
- Necessary political commitment behind the process – the Prime Minister or the Minister of Social Affairs is responsible for the SIF.
- Visibility of the whole process – including the EU Open Method of Coordination, the content of the former National Action Plan on Social Inclusion and the National Strategy Report and all the information on the SIF (methods, way of participation, aims etc.).
- Connection to other planning and monitoring processes in or related to the field of fight against poverty - inputs are channelled into them etc. – e.g. the National Development Plan or the implementation of the National Strategy to Combat Child Poverty.
- Preparation and coordination of the SIF process is implemented with the involvement of representatives of NGOs from the field of fight against poverty. (e.g. SIF could be

organised jointly by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the Hungarian Anti-poverty Network)

- Intense and broad information “campaign” is carried out in order to reach as many NGOs as possible.
- Capacity building and support for those NGOs working on the involvement and supporting people experiencing poverty in order to make them capable for real participation.

The possible improvements of the SIF could be:

- Regular evaluation
- Providing regular and detailed feed back to the participants on policy improvements
- Organisation of interim meetings (regional or thematic) between two SIF in order to keep those informed who are interested in participating.

### 3. Questions debated in Hungary

#### 3.1 Representation of civil society

There are some discussions and debate around the representation of civil society in HU nowadays. Although the added value and importance of the involvement of civil society actors are not obvious for all of the decision makers, some kind of processes or/and bodies for consultation are established in most of the government fields (social, environmental etc.). As the dominant government approach is to keep dialogue within formal bounds – with the establishment of councils, committees etc. – with the involvement of certain number of representatives of civil society, it is a key issue for the government to find the appropriate and empowered civil representatives.

#### 3.2 Transparency, public debate

The publicity of governance and decision making has been an issue since the transition. Although according to the explanation of the Constitutional Court the drafts of legislative provisions are public data, ministries ensure the publicity of only a limited scope of drafts and often for shorter time than they should do. Ministries are regularly criticized by NGOs for their closed decision making processes.

## 4. Key issues and questions proposed for debate

The main question for HU: How can we ensure that government shares its power with civil society and to what extent?

Other questions:

- What are the possible ways and methods for evaluation of the SIF.
- Possible improvement of the programme of the SIF in terms of reflecting more on the requests of participants.
- What are the appropriate means for capacity building of participants – both on the side of people experiencing poverty and of the administration.
- How can we ensure the appropriate number and representation (on different social groups and social problems) of people experiencing poverty on the SIF?
- How SIF could be linked to local or regional consultation forums? Is it possible or necessary to build two lower levels “under” the SIF providing possibility for local and regional dialogue between policy makers and people experiencing poverty?
- Is there any possibility for collecting and comparing the practices for involvement of people experiencing poverty in different EU countries?

## 5. Questions to the host country

According to the experiences available, what is the composition of participants? What is the proportion of people experiencing poverty among the participants? How can you ensure their participation? Through civil organisations? Or do you accept individual applications as well?

In what proportion do representatives of local authorities participate? Are there any principles behind the composition of local authorities representing themselves in the Forum?

Concerning the workshops, we would like to know whether the collection of problems and demands is the main aim or to get feed-back on the effects of operating policies? How can you ensure constructive and effective dialogue during the workshops? In Hungary such workshops often result in complaining about the tight budgetary resources.

How do the conclusions of the SIF feed into the NAP/incl? Can you give concrete examples of making use of the recommendations of the SIF in policy formulation?

### Concerning the coordination structure:

We know that OSI is the ministerial unit which is responsible for the elaboration of NAPs. According to the discussion paper, the SIF is convened by NESF (National Economic and Social Forum), which is part of the National Economic and Social Development Office (NESDO). Where NESDO is taking place in the governmental structure? What is its composition? And what is the composition of NESF? What is the administrative relation between these bodies and the OSI?

As most of social inclusion policies are decentralised in Hungary and the country consists of 3200 local self-governments, providing them information and including them into the NAP process is a very big challenge for us. Thus we would find particularly interesting to hear how the Local Government Social Inclusion Steering Group and the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network are operating.

## 6. Questions for peer countries

In chapter 3.3 of the discussion paper some questions were put to peer countries.

Yes, we agree that the four elements are good practice value of the SIF. With some comments:

- Attention should be paid to the potential barriers caused by the large number of participants. "Quantity or quality?"
- Visibility should be strengthened by broad media coverage – we couldn't read about the work with media in any of the documents
- Concrete and practical support to grass-root organisations is essential and has to be improved constantly

The second was about evaluation methods of the SIF. In Hungary we do not have much experience on the evaluation of such consultation mechanisms. We think that some kind of external, expert evaluation would be useful, which monitors the utilisation and implementation of the conclusions of the Forum. Such an evaluation could cover the examination of strategic documents, policy regulations and interviews with experts.

We suggest the clarification of the objectives of the SIF. According to our opinion it should serve as an important element of a structure for participation of people experiencing poverty. Information must be available in advance for all those interested in taking part in the process.

Concerning the complicated coordination structure, we do not see possibilities of simplification according to the Hungarian experiences. Indeed, such complex institutional arrangement are operating, mainly because social inclusion is a very comprehensive concept, and in line with the concept of mainstreaming, all sectors and administrative levels have to deal with the aspects of social inclusion. In countries where the NAPs/inclusion haven't become the main strategies on their own right, but are produced as an EU-requirement, coordination is even more difficult and sometimes it takes place parallel with other coordination processes of national social protection and social services issues.

Another aspect which makes the coordination difficult is the unequal power relations between the social inclusion sector and other governmental fields. We can reach that employment policy, education and social policy take into consideration social inclusion, but reaching the same in economic and fiscal policies is more difficult.

## Annex:

# The possible relevance of the Irish Social Inclusion Forum to Hungary – the policy and legislative background

## 1.1 General background of civil society in Hungary

In Hungary the institutionalized cooperation between the governmental and the non-governmental sectors do not have a long tradition, the civil sector developed and consolidated during the last 18 years. Many NGOs act in the field of social services and more broadly in the field of social inclusion, as they can provide public services based on contracts with local governments (when local authorities are the sustainers of services). On one hand they fill the gaps in public service provision and on the other hand they very much contribute to the innovative potential of the social sector. In parallel with the rethinking of tasks and duties of the state taking place currently, the role of NGOs becomes more important than before.

As a result of democracy development processes in the early '90s some advocacy and interest-representing organisations were established in the social field mainly with the support of European or American programmes and funds. The role of the European Union and NGOs working at European level which have worked very intensively on setting-up their "branches" in the post-socialist countries in importing partnership approach can not be overestimated.

Although after a very strong expansion of NGO sector there are around 50 000 organisations registered, only a few of them carry out advocacy work and interest-defence as the main element of their mission, but mainly as a complementary activity beside providing services.

The situation in Hungary can be characterized with the weak and not stable civil society – due to the shortages of adequate resources – and with the use of closed decision making methods on the side of government while there are some initiatives for the introduction and development of partnership approach, but (at least until now) without resulting an open consultation process and what is more a participatory process in the field of social inclusion.

The examples of the EU-wide public consultation processes help us a lot and give us good examples in this mutual learning process.

In the following we briefly introduce the relevant bodies, structures and legislative framework in Hungary:

## 1.2 Bodies for information and consultation on social inclusion

First we have to clarify that there is no such an existing body for information and/or consultation in Hungary as the Irish Social Inclusion Forum (SIF). Taking into account its features like openness for NGOs and people experiencing poverty, visibility, being coordinated by a high-level body and being quite well prepared via regular regional and thematic workshops and seminars.

While there is a lack of a forum for broad consultation, there are some bodies established by the government with the mandate to advise and consult on social policy issues.

The most important one is the Social Policy Council which consists of the seven regional social policy councils and the national social policy council. The Social Policy Council was established by a government decree in 2005 to be the most important consultative body of the Minister of Social Affairs. (Its predecessor the Social Council was operating between 1991-2005.) While the regional councils are “tripartite” bodies with the representatives of those sustaining social services (mainly local or county governments and some churches and NGOs), those providing social services (including NGOs) and those *using social services*, the National Social Policy Council (NSPC) has 13 members chosen or delegated on different basis, but including 2 representatives of organisations of users of social services. The National Social Policy Council have discussed and commented all important laws and policy strategies in the field of social inclusion policies, social benefits and services, incl. the JIM, the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion 2004-2006 and the National Strategy Report 2006-2008.

Beside the Social Policy Councils there are four thematic consultation fora on issues connected to elderly and disabled people, health and gender quality.

Regarding the local level bodies we have to mention the round tables on social policy which are consultative bodies of the local governments (mandatory in settlements above the population of 2,000) involving the representatives of social service providers (possibly NGOs) but not of necessity and nor often in practice the organisations of users.

### 1.3 Consultation process of the NAP/incl

In parallel with the elaboration of the Joint Inclusion Memorandum (JIM) the Hungarian Government set up the Committee Against Social Exclusion (TKEB), which consists of the representatives of the ministries and the Alliance of Social Professional, the largest NGO in the field of social issues. Both the elaboration of the 2004-2006 NAP and the 2006-2008 National Strategy Report was coordinated by this committee. The chair of the TKEB is the secretary of state of the ministry of social affairs. It is the role of the delegates of the ministries to look after the implementation of the measures within the plan and to provide for monitoring data and information. The ministry of social affairs consulted the draft of the NAP/incl with the social NGOs and social service providers via the Internet and within the circle of a conference. Moreover the Social Council and the Social Committee of the National Interest Reconciliation Commission also negotiated the draft.

During the elaboration of the 2006-2008 National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NSR), public consultation was more limited, although the Social Policy Council and the Social Committee of the National Interest Reconciliation Commission commented the draft. However, the consultation process with NGOs was limited, because the NRP was elaborated immediately after the general elections and the setting up of the new government. The government launched important reforms, the details of which were still not known in the period of the consultation process of the NSR. Thus the civil partners couldn't give an opinion on the possible effects of the plan.

## 1.4 Other examples and experiences

Discussing on broader policy or strategy making the preparation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Development Plan can be mentioned as a promising example. The Institution of Social Policy and Labour (the background institution of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour) which provided expert documents during the drafting period organised some local seminars for people experiencing poverty in order to inform them about the EU Structural Funds and the aims of the national planning and to get to know and collect their views and suggestions. As an innovative feature the Institution hired a person experiencing poverty more or less familiar with the topic to support the seminars through “mediation” between the participants and the experts. As the evaluation hasn't been carried out we do not know what happened to these suggestions later, whether any of them was reflected in the final documents or not.

As an initiative of the Hungarian Anti Poverty Network and with the support of the Ministry of Social Affairs national meetings of people experiencing poverty were organised in 2005 and 2006. The national meetings followed the methodology of the European meetings of people experiencing poverty, as they provided opportunity for direct dialogue between decision makers and people experiencing poverty on issues like housing, child poverty, rural disadvantages etc. Although the meetings were very important with regard to the possible establishment of open consultation on social inclusion issues, they didn't have any formal link to the NAP/inc process and the participation of politicians and representatives of the administration was very weak.

Not as an example for participation but as an initiative for trying to feed-in the experiences and opinions of people in poverty into the decision-making process we have to mention the pilot-project of the Department of Planning and Development of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The Department, dealing with the ESF and ERDF supported operational programmes concerning the social field, – very much inspired by the Belgian example with “lay-experts” – hired a person experiencing poverty to make comments on the draft documents prepared by the Department. However, the cooperation remain unsuccessful due to complex reasons: the high complexity of documents and the very short time schedules the department working with, the lack of preparation for the cooperation and the lack of capacity building of the actors. These factors made the inclusion of the lay-expert difficult, which might have been more successful on a less complex policy field (e.g. individual projects).

## 1.5 Legislative system

The legislative framework for involvement of NGOs or/and citizens is provided in the law on the juridical process (nr. 1987/11) which explicitly states that citizens should contribute to the preparation of legislative provisions which may affect their lives. On the other hand the law says that NGOs have to be involved in the preparation of every legislative provision which may affect the living conditions of people whom they represent. The law doesn't contain any concrete form or process for participation, but it states that codifiers have to ensure enough time for NGOs to make comments.

Some initiatives started some years ago in order to provide clearer legislative framework for the participation of civil society. As a result a government resolution was approved on the development of the relationship between government and civil society including that all the ministries have to create their own action plans on the development of their relationships with civil society.

We have to note that all the legislative provisions identify NGOs as civil society and have no reference on the informal or other initiatives of citizens e.g. movements of people experiencing poverty.