

## 'Statements and comments' paper Peer Review Social impact assessment

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### 1. Does your country have any experience with (social or any other) impact analysis as a standard procedure in the preparation of policy measures?

Yes. In Norway **Instructions for Official Studies and Reports** are laid down by Royal decree in 2000, and revised in 2005 (Norwegian Ministry of Government Administration and Reform, 2005). The instructions apply to all work on official studies, regulations, reforms and measures and to propositions and reports to the parliament (Stortinget). The instructions make it mandatory to study financial, administrative and other significant consequences.

Each matter shall include a 'consequence assessment' that shall consist of an analysis and valuation of presumed significant consequences of the proposed decision. Consequences shall as far as possible be quantified. The combined effect of all the measures and responsibilities, etc. on those who will be affected by the proposals shall be described. Uncertainty of future development and results in the area of the matter and the kind of consequences and their strength should be assessed. The need for future evaluation of the proposed measures should also be assessed, including allowed time span before doing it, and the kind of questions to be asked.

Alternative instruments shall be assessed, including instruments other than those of a regulatory nature, e.g. financial instruments. When laws and regulations are used as instruments, the need to prescribe certain duration, or a certain period before evaluation is done, should be appraised.

In the course of work on a matter which has financial, administrative or other significant consequences for the areas of other ministries, the matter shall be submitted to the ministries involved. The response period in both cases shall be at least two weeks unless a different deadline has been agreed upon by the ministries involved.

When the study of a matter has been completed, the ministry concerned or the subordinate agency shall circulate the matter for general review to all the public and private institutions and organisations affected. A matter shall also be sent to other ministries affected at the same time as it is circulated for review. The period for review shall normally be three months and no less than six weeks.

The ministry's draft reports and propositions to the Storting shall be submitted to the Ministry of Finance and other ministries concerned for consideration before being presented to the Government. The ministries decide whether the draft should be submitted to subordinate

agencies. Should the draft report or proposition to the Storting have consequences for the finances and administrations of counties and municipalities, or regional consequences, it shall be submitted to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development for consideration. The response period shall be at least three weeks unless a different deadline has been agreed upon by the ministries concerned.

Analysis and evaluation of the financial and administrative consequences shall always be included in the assessment. Financial consequences must be assessed with a view to the impact on the income and expenditure of the parties affected, including central government, county and municipal budgets as well as the business sector and individuals. Thorough and realistic socioeconomic analyses shall, to the extent necessary, form part of this assessment. Should there exist any appreciable uncertainty regarding any of the elements included in the calculation, estimates must be made for both maximum and minimum cost-benefit alternatives, and an assessment must be made of how the effects of the measure are thought to be dependent on the uncertain factors.

Administrative consequences must be assessed with a view to the impact on the central government's centralized, regional and local administrations, counties and municipalities as well as the impact of any changes on agency structure, new bodies, positions and other consequences that can result in significant changes with regard to responsibilities, administrative procedures or workload.

The consequences of a proposal shall be assessed in relation to all overriding or general considerations that may be of importance to the evaluation of whether the proposal shall be implemented. The consequence assessment shall include an evaluation of all considerations that are significant in the matter at hand. In addition to financial and administrative consequences, other significant consequences shall be assessed; the following ones are listed in the instructions paper as examples:

- environmental consequences,
- consequences for the business sector,
- regional consequences,
- consequences for the health of the population,
- consequences for gender equality,
- the relationship to human rights,
- consequences in relation to the objective of simpler regulations and a less complex administration.

The consequences that are to be assessed must be evaluated in each case.

**In practice, only the financial and administrative consequences are systematically evaluated.** The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion has developed a **guideline for consequences for the equality for persons with an immigrant background, the Sami people and national minorities**, in order to ensure that public administrations are able to evaluate the consequences for these groups (Arbeids-og Inkluderingsdepartementet, 2007).

**2. Which pending or forthcoming policy proposals (either in your country or at the EU level) do you think would benefit most from Social Impact Assessment – and poverty impact assessment in particular? Do you think that such assessments would be feasible? Please also consider issues relating to technical and administrative capacity, stakeholder involvement, policy evaluation culture, etc.**

The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion published recently a revised Action Plan against Poverty (Arbeids-og Inkluderingsdepartementet, 2008). The Plan was published as an appendix to the state budget for 2009 and contains the objectives and measures for the Government's overriding, long-term goal 'to eradicate poverty and reduce social and economic differences through universal welfare schemes, strong collective solutions and by providing individual with an opportunity to participate in employment' ([www.regjeringen.no/dep/aid/Topics/andre/poverty](http://www.regjeringen.no/dep/aid/Topics/andre/poverty)).

In relation to previous Action Plans against Poverty and as preparation for the revised Plan the Ministry has been in contact with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), social partners and research organisations. The latest public hearing took place in November 2007. For 2008 the Government approved additional funding for the collaboration among CSOs and had regular meetings with a committee, consisting of representatives from CSOs. A systematic 'consequence assessment' or social impact assessment of the revised Action Plan against Poverty using the 'Instructions for Official Studies and Reports' was not carried out.

Our impression is that not many public administrations in Norway have started to work with social impact assessment (see also answer to question 1.). It would be necessary to discuss this method with stakeholders, researchers and the different administrations and relate the discussions to the 'Instructions for Official Studies and Reports'. These public debates could benefit from the discussions on EU level, e.g. through presentations of the following documents and processes:

- the consultation on the draft Commission Impact Assessment Guidelines, 02/06/2008-25/07/2008;  
The Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage participated in this consultation and proposed that 'all impact assessments should address key questions concerning how an option affects cultural heritage, be it in a positive or negative way, directly or indirectly'. (Directorate for Cultural Heritage, 2008);
- the Impact Assessment, carried out by the EC, for the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010 (SEC (2007) 1661);
- the Commission Staff Working document on Impact Assessment (SEC (2008) 2170);
- the Toolkit to assess social impacts, prepared by DG EMPL;
- and the results from the forthcoming Peer Review Social impact assessment.

### 3. What are the key issues that should be discussed during the Peer Review?

We consider social impact assessment as a very useful tool to help improve the ways to design policies and would like to know more about 'good practice examples' like the 'Poverty Impact Assessment in Ireland', described by Ides Nicaise in his discussion paper for the Peer Review, and the experience with 'social impact of policies in the Slovak Republic'.

Key questions:

- How to make sure that it is done properly (the process and its monitoring)?
- Does it make a difference (results, changes)?  
Example: If a social impact assessment can show that a pending law would lead to enhanced exclusion of a specific target group – e.g. through ignoring its cultural traditions – would it be changed or stopped? Is there any experience of such cases?
- How much does it cost (time, money)?  
Ides Nicaise, discussion paper, page 4: 'It goes without saying that high-quality social impact assessment is a demanding, time-consuming and expensive process, where a balance needs to be struck between the investments required and the importance of the measures that are assessed.'

### Sources

Arbeids- og Inkluderingsdepartementet, Handlingsplan mot fattigdom – status 2008 og styrket innsats 2009, Oslo, October 2008. (Will be translated into English.)

Arbeids- og Inkluderingsdepartementet, Likestillingsmessige konsekvenser for personer med innvandrerbakgrunn, samer og nasjonale minoriteter, Oslo, April 2007.

Directorate for Cultural Heritage, Margrethe Tviberg, Contribution to the consultation on the draft Commission Impact Assessment Guidelines, Oslo, June/July 2008.

Norwegian Ministry of Government Administration and Reform, Instructions concerning consequence assessment, submissions and review procedures in connection with official studies, regulations, propositions and reports to the Storting, Oslo, June 2005.