

Measuring the impact of active inclusion and other policies to combat poverty and social exclusion

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1. Governance of anti-poverty and social inclusion policies at national, regional and local level

How the process is steered?

The overall organization and coordination of the development and implementation of the anti-poverty and social inclusion policy is realized by the Minister of labour and social policy. The monitoring regarding the implementation of that policy is also in the authority of the Minister of labour and social policy. Within the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy as a part of the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Directorate was established Social Inclusion Unit which assists the minister in the execution of these responsibilities. There is broad spectrum of institutions engaged in implementing the policy at national and local level.

The state and the municipalities are obliged to create conditions for active participation of the civil organizations and the social partners. However, unlike the state authorities to what extent these organizations and partners will actively participate depends on them as well.

How the partnership is defined?

Partnership is defined as a process allowing all individual citizens and/or stakeholders actively to participate (directly or indirectly) in decision making process. In general, partnership should aim at empowering the different stakeholders, thus expanding the capabilities of represented by them groups to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.

Partnership seeks for the achievement of four broad goals: 1) access to information for stakeholders and ensuring that a regular feedback from stakeholders to the social inclusion policy management is in place; 2) inclusion and participation of stakeholders in decision making process; 3) political and administrative accountability and 4) improved governance of anti-poverty and social inclusion policy at national and local level. Those four goals are firmly embedded under in Bulgarian National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2008-2010 (NAP/incl) – one out of the four NAP/incl priorities is exactly the better governance of social inclusion policy.

Moreover, the ideas of participation, better governance of anti-poverty and social inclusion policy has been included in the new Government programme (2009-2013) of the newly elected Bulgarian government as a separate priority axis.

How the partnerships are created?

As a result of the undertaken actions for better governance in the frame of the plan for 2006-2008 was established permanent expert group which includes focal points for social inclusion issues in each of the involved institutions. One of the biggest advantages of the existence of that group, besides the expert and organization positive effects, is the creation of responsibility in each institution regarding the issues of social inclusion and the awareness on the need of joint work on these issues. The objective of the expert group is to improve the process of mainstreaming of the policy on social inclusion, as well as the opportunity for direct exchange of information and direct joint activity on social inclusion issues. Focal points for social inclusion issues at municipal and regional level were nominated as well. So far they participated only in the implementation and planning of certain aspects of that policy. Indisputably the municipal level represented by the National Association of the Municipalities of the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB) is always present in the preparation stages of the strategic planning, but nevertheless the direct and immediate participation of the municipalities showed hopeful results.

In what way the poverty indicators could serve as an efficient tool in building up partnerships?

Definitely, poverty indicators could serve as an efficient tool in building up partnerships. In brief, four important prerequisites should be in place:

- Politicians should be ready to use poverty indicators to measure the progress and impacts of public policies. If poverty indicators are not a part of political agendas, decision makers would be less eager to cooperate in building up partnerships around poverty and social exclusion issues. This would be so, because the information is not used by them to prove the success of their policies;
- Politicians should be ready to set empirically measurable and qualitative benchmarks and targets towards reducing poverty and social exclusion. If such benchmarks and targets are not in place, poverty indicators will be used more for scientific rather than for policy purposes;
- Poverty indicators should be defined jointly by policy experts and stakeholders. This is necessary because both policy expert and interested groups' representatives should have a common understanding what is measured, why it is measured and how the information is going to be used;
- Stakeholders groups should have enough: 1) information about poverty and social exclusion issues, i.e. to analyze developments in poverty and social exclusion; 2) capacity to measure the impact of public policies on poverty and social exclusion, i.e. to use the poverty indicators to prove that a concrete policy initiative will harm or enhance the chances of poor and vulnerable.

Proceeding from the abovementioned issues, it seems that the situation in France is favourable in terms of using poverty indicators as a tool in building partnerships. It could be concluded that the political leadership is in place and policy-makers rely on setting measurable quantitative targets to track the progress towards reducing poverty and social exclusion. Moreover, there are a wide range of stakeholders which participation in constructing the so-called scoreboard could be evaluated as significant. Compared to the French experience, in Bulgaria the use of poverty indicators in building up partnerships is not so well developed. The reasons are different: 1) the system of poverty indicators (for example SILC data) is under development; 2) public authorities

don't often organize and conduct special surveys to investigate the development of poverty and social exclusion issues; 3) independent sources of knowledge about development of poverty and social exclusion are not well established and 4) the persistence of poverty and social exclusion in Bulgaria is commonly accepted but those issues still remain more a part of political debates rather than to be used to design, plan, monitoring and evaluate specific policies.

These circumstances to some extent limit the opportunities to establish well functioning partnerships around particular problems concerning poverty and social exclusion.

2. Objectives, targets and indicators. Monitoring and evaluation.

What is in your country the role of indicators in the process of evaluation (at national and local levels)?

Being disputed at political level, poverty indicators are used for formulating the vision of particular policies, mainly those in social field (employment, social protection and social inclusion, education, health care, etc.) The so-called "non-social" policies such as budgetary policy, economic policy, transport policy, regional development, etc. do not often use poverty indicators to formulate the spheres in which improvements are necessary. At a policy level, poverty indicators are used for formulating and justifying concrete interventions very rarely. Therefore, their use in monitoring and evaluation remains insufficient as well.

There are three main reasons for that:

- The knowledge on different aspects of poverty and social exclusion is rather limited. The focus is on general poverty indicators such as poverty rate but initiatives (including initiatives by public authorities and independent bodies) aimed at better understanding of the causes of poverty and social exclusion, their driving forces and group-related outcomes are very rare;
- Social impact assessment still is not a regular practice. Social impacts, including poverty and social exclusion often are not taken into account and are underestimated at the account of financial impacts. Moreover, it has been also noted that the non-social policies often misjudge its social impacts;
- Trust in poverty indicators is low meaning that people and stakeholders tend to perceive the development of poverty and social exclusion worse than the official statistics do.

3. Role of users/ beneficiaries within the whole process.

What are the forms of users' participation in the social policy formulation and implementation in your country?

The consultation with the interested parties is defined as mandatory in the Bulgarian legislation. A number of consultative bodies are established for that purpose. Without their consulting it is impossible to adopt certain documents. The approach applied in Bulgaria allows the interested parties to participate not only during the consultation and the control of the implementation of the policies but during their formulation as well. All legislative and strategic documents in the field of social protection and social inclusion are developed according to that approach, including the National strategy report on social protection and social inclusion. At the two other levels of governance in Bulgaria – the local and the regional are established different consultative bodies resembling the national model.

In addition, social protection and social inclusion policies are part of the topics discussed by the social partners at the National Council for Tripartite Cooperation. According to Bulgarian Labour Code, social partners should be consulted about each piece of legislation and/or policy initiative in the field of social protection and social inclusion.

Recently Bulgaria established National council on social inclusion issues to the Council of Ministers. The council is presided by the minister of labour and social policy and includes deputy ministers from all involved ministries as well as the chairpersons of all involved institutions, representatives of NAMRB, representatives of the social partners, representatives of the organisations - members of the European networks, the chairpersons of NGOs with proven experience in the field of social inclusion and representative of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. The council is the body for coordination, cooperation and consultation in the development, implementation, monitoring and assessment of the state policy in the field of social inclusion.