

Taking Forward the EU Social Inclusion Process

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Taking Forward the Process: Input from Fintan Farrell, Director EAPN

Overview

- Undoubtedly the revised Lisbon Strategy refocused on Growth and Jobs will not make it easier to ensure that the concerns in relation to poverty and social inclusion are prioritized in the EU agenda or mainstreamed into the key EU strategies and policies.
- However we still have an independent OMC on Social Protection and Social Inclusion and the promise that within this OMC there will still be a distinct and visible inclusion strategy. As people concerned with the fight against poverty and social exclusion we should continue to demand that the processes associated to this OMC are seen as an integral part of the revised Lisbon Strategy.
- In addition we have the possibility to 'feed in' from the social inclusion perspective to the National Reform Programmes and the reporting exercise associated to the revised strategy including the Commission's report to the Spring Council. Ironically this is more explicitly the case now than it was before the revised Lisbon Strategy.
- This reality gives us the opportunity to continue to make progress, and the report prepared for this conference gives many valuable recommendations about how to make such progress.

Next Steps

- This inclusion strategy must continue to be driven by the EU level and by the aim "to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty".
- The strategy must be based on a rights approach and not on a model of addressing poverty which is underpinned by a merit or deserving poor approach. The strategy must be for the whole of society and not just for the 68 million people facing poverty and exclusion. Through this strategy we must build public support for the idea that "what is good for people experiencing poverty is good for every one".
- To ensure that this strategy receives political visibility requires a target that is politically driven rather than technically driven. In regards to the question of targets I think the report prepared for this conference takes a too technical approach. In addition in order that the process carries more weight the recommendation in the report to introduce 'recommendations' into the process is strongly welcomed.
- The recommendations in the report in relation to indicators does not go far enough in relation to identifying indicators from the perspective of people experiencing poverty and exclusion and reflects the gap between academics working on indicators and organisations working with people experiencing poverty and exclusion. Narrowing this gap is a challenge that needs to be met.

- Mainstreaming Social Inclusion in all relevant policies is what this EU Inclusion Strategy can deliver. However to achieve this outcomes needs more understanding of the concept of mainstreaming as well as tools to ensure successful mainstreaming and measurement of the impact of mainstreaming. This mainstreaming is not only a challenge at Member State level but is also a challenge for the EU level. This outcomes also needs as is recommended in the report the embedding of this process in the relevant policy making processes at Member State level.

Ensuring the future survival of the Inclusion Process

- Participation of all the relevant actors is the primary way to ensure the survival of the inclusion process. In particular as EAPN would like to stress the need to ensure the participation of people experiencing poverty and the organisations in which they participate. Member States must respond to this challenge by ensuring that the resources, including financial resources, are available to make this participation real, meaningful and sustained.
- Moving into the second five year stage of this process requires that the process now begins to show concrete results. The National Action Plans need to be real Action Plans and the actions need to be implemented. Failure to see real implementation in this coming period will undermine the participation in the future of this process. This will not be just a failure for the process but will be seen as a failure of the EU to be able to contribute to a society where all people can have access to fundamental rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. Hence I think it is not too much of an exaggeration to say that this strategy is a testing ground for whether the EU can be a project closer to its citizens.