

Where to find out more

The study on *Stakeholders' involvement in the implementation of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in social protection and social inclusion* was compiled from a set of 27 country reports which were prepared on the basis of documentation and interviews with the key people involved. These were used to prepare an overall assessment of stakeholder participation in the social OMC, as well as a set of case studies of interesting practices.

The study's conclusions were validated at a European workshop held in February 2010, which was attended by the main people involved in preparing the National action Plans for Social Inclusion in the Member States and at European level.

All the outputs of the study – the country reports, the case studies and the final report – can be found on the study website.

The study was carried out by INBAS GmbH and Engender asbl on behalf of the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. It was funded by Progress, the European Union's programme for Employment and Social Solidarity 2007-2013.

Complete documentation on the project can be found at:

www.stakeholders-socialinclusion.eu



Some good practices

- **Group Decision Room, Netherlands:**
This is a tool to accelerate discussion and decision-making. It enables wide stakeholder input via laptop computers: everything that is typed in can be immediately read on a central screen and used as inspiration by others. Inputs can also be made anonymously.
- **Another approach to poverty indicators:**
A dialogue between people living in poverty and other key stakeholders, **Belgium**. An action-research project carried out in 2002-3 involved 23 people, 12 of whom live in poverty. It involved poor people directly, so as to develop indicators of poverty that reflect reality as the poor experience it.
- **The Roma council in Spain:**
This advisory body ensures that the needs of the Roma population are taken into account across government. It involves almost all ministries as well as Roma NGOs.
- **Social Reporting NRW, Germany:**
Regional cooperation project with local municipalities: The biggest German Land, North Rhine-Westphalia, implemented a new concept of regional social reporting. This conceptually and methodologically links the local and regional levels of social (poverty) reporting.
- **Portugal's first homelessness strategy:**
In Portugal, the drafting of the first national homelessness strategy – publicly launched in March 2009 – was a good example of a collaborative policy making process, involving a wide range of stakeholders (public authorities from different areas, NGO federations, local authorities, research).

- **People's Health Development Plan, Estonia.**
A comprehensive participative process was undertaken to draft the Estonian People's Health Development Plan for 2009-2020. Stakeholder involvement was based on the Good Engagement Practice guidelines and a Participation Website was used for consultation.
- **Standards of Participation: Austria** has developed comprehensive standards, which lay down both general principles for public participation as well as step-by-step instructions for processes of three types: informational, comment-centred and decision-influencing. Their use is not laid down by law, but it is recommended at the federal level.

Who are the stakeholders?

The study classified the people affected by social policy into three categories, as follows:

- **Decision-makers** in charge of policy decisions. These include government (ministers and their advisers), parliament, administration (civil servants), and regional/local authorities with decision-making power.
- **Secondary stakeholders** who are intermediaries in the policy process, such as local and third sector organisations which provide services, advocacy and representative organisations of vulnerable groups, employers, trade unions, experts and the media.
- **Primary stakeholders** who are those ultimately affected by the policy, most importantly people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, but also the general public.

Breadth and depth of involvement

The study looked at how the different groups of stakeholders are involved in the different phases of the policy cycle: agenda-setting, decision making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It classified degrees of involvement using the International Association for Public Participation's five-level model: informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering.

Influencing social policy



A summary of the results of the study on stakeholders' involvement in the implementation of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in social protection and social inclusion

www.stakeholders-socialinclusion.eu

How do stakeholders influence social policy?

In Europe, governments do not make social policy in isolation, but through a process of involving the people it affects – the stakeholders. These include poor people and those associations and organisations fighting for their rights, companies and third sector organisations that deliver services to poor people, trade unions, employers, and local and regional authorities. Involving these stakeholders in the process of creating policy means that more is known of the real problems that people face, and gives decision-makers feedback on how well their policies are working. It therefore improves the quality of decision-making.

At European level, Member State governments prepare periodic National Action Plans for Social Inclusion. Through a process known as the 'open method of co-ordination' (OMC), they then examine the good and bad points of each other's policies, so that they can learn from each other and improve their performance.

This leaflet sets out the key results of a study launched by the European Commission in 2009 to look at the ways in which stakeholders are involved in the European process of making social policy.

The full report the study and all the supporting documents are available on the study website at

www.stakeholders-socialinclusion.eu

The state of play

- The greatest participation is in the preparation phase of the National Action Plan cycle, where a wide range of stakeholders, particularly advocacy NGOs, are involved in most countries.
- People experiencing poverty seem mainly to be informed of the process rather than actively engaged in it.
- Employers and trade unions, through widely invited to take part, rarely play an active role (though they are more involved in the employment strategy process).
- The involvement of parliament varies among countries, but is often limited to formally approving the National Action Plan.
- Two-way links between social inclusion policy and policy areas such as employment, healthcare and long-term care are not strong; coordination is mainly an administrative process which exists within the EU reporting requirements.
- The strongest effects on broader stakeholder involvement are found in those areas where the social OMC has thematic priorities and where EU key networks are active – such as child poverty and homelessness.
- Around one-third of Member States have a process in place for giving stakeholders feedback on how their contributions have been treated.
- The impact of stakeholders' involvement on policy processes or outcomes is not easy to show. However in most Member States, stakeholders point to improvements that result from their involvement.
- The way the open method of coordination works remains badly publicised and unclear to most stakeholders in the Member States.

What makes stakeholder participation work well?

Based on what works in practice, the study developed 23 key quality aspects, against which stakeholder involvement in the making of social policy may be gauged.

They are divided into three areas: the underlying principles, the methods used and the impact achieved.

Principles of stakeholder involvement

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| Political commitment | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Willingness and capacity of decision-makers to be open to stakeholder contributions• Integration of the OMC with existing territorial mechanisms• Ministers/State Secretaries attend OMC conferences |
| Clear rationale of the process | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The rationale for the involvement of stakeholders should be clear for stakeholders |
| Public visibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Easy access to documents of all stakeholders submitted as part of the OMC• Stakeholders are aware of the OMC: documents accessible in an easy/national language |
| Availability of resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adequate resources allocated for stakeholder involvement• Stakeholders are recompensed for the cost of their involvement• Ensure capacity building for stakeholder involvement |
| Time frame | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clearly defined and adequate time frame |
| Feedback mechanisms | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stakeholders get feedback on the way their contributions are treated |

Methods of stakeholder involvement

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| Identification of stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Existence of stakeholder mapping |
| Selection of stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transparent and formal selection of stakeholders• Gender and diversity requirements taken into account |
| Methods and tools to involve stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Availability of tools and instruments to facilitate stakeholder involvement• Appropriate methods/tools are used to involve all relevant actors in an inclusive way• Linking quality of mechanisms with degree of involvement expected |
| Policy coordination | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Existence of a multi-stakeholder body/forum/committee that prepares strategy documents and coordinates the whole policy process• Existence of an inter-ministerial body/mechanism• Existence of a vertical coordination mechanism |
| Monitoring and evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Existence of an ongoing evaluation/monitoring mechanism involving all stakeholders at appropriate level |

Impact of stakeholder involvement

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| Policy process | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impact of stakeholder involvement on the policy process: for instance, increased credibility or increased ownership |
| Policy substance | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impact of stakeholder involvement on policy substance: for instance new policy areas, new programmes, improved coordination and improvement of European issues |