



**MSI** Mainstreaming  
Social Inclusion

## Better Policies, Better Outcomes – Promoting Mainstreaming Social Inclusion



[www.europemsi.org](http://www.europemsi.org)



The MSI project explores how social inclusion might be brought into a central role in the formation of political and administrative policies in EU Member States. It derives its impetus from the growing priority given to tackling social exclusion and poverty in EU Member States by the European Council – particularly through the goals adopted for the Lisbon Strategy.

The main objective of this study is to add to the understanding of how social inclusion can be mainstreamed into policies at a number of different levels and how this can be assessed and evaluated.

In the context of drafting the National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPs/inclusion) and the implementation of policy commitments to eradicating poverty and promoting social inclusion, the research has developed a proposed framework for the evaluation of how Member States give a poverty perspective to this policy objective.

There are two products from this study - a book and a website. The book reviews the peer process adopted by the European Council, including the co-ordination of national social inclusion policies and the national action plans. In doing this, it explores two key factors that are central to mainstreaming social inclusion:

- ▶ The process of developing policy;
- ▶ The involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the formation of public policy.

The book also explores how the mainstreaming of social inclusion might be evaluated and proposes a framework for such evaluation, including possible indicators.

## Mainstreaming

In the first instance it was considered essential to understand what is meant by mainstreaming. From an analysis of the relevant literature it is clear that mainstreaming is now very much part of the European agenda for the eradication of poverty and social exclusion. It is gaining support among the Member States in the development of social inclusion policies.

Having examined the application of mainstreaming to other policy areas, for example gender, the following definition was adopted for the purpose of the MSI project:

**Mainstreaming social inclusion is the integration of poverty and social inclusion objectives, including an equality perspective, into all areas and levels of policy-making and that is promoted through the participation of public bodies, social partners, NGOs and other relevant actors.**

The use of mainstreaming, as a policy process, is dependent on a number of national factors, such as the involvement and participation of all relevant bodies and actors, the political and administrative structures within Member States and the resources allocated to ensure that social inclusion considerations inform national and local policies. These factors are inter-dependent and all are essential for the successful mainstreaming of social inclusion.



# Development of Public Policy

Mainstreaming is important in the policy cycle as it provides opportunities for the involvement of people, leading to better use of resources and services and the targeting of public funds. The policy cycle progresses from the conception of the idea through the design of a policy; its implementation; an evaluation of its impact and effectiveness; to the modification of the policy. How the public policy cycle functions is dependent on the structure of government and the allocation of resources at each step of the policy cycle.

In more centralised structures, such as those in Ireland, Portugal and Norway, policy design is mainly at the national level and implementation is devolved to the local administrations who deliver services within the overall national policy framework.

On the other hand, in more decentralised or federalist administrative arrangements, as in the Czech Republic, France and Northern Ireland (as a region of the UK), the power of policy-making (within a national framework) is transferred or devolved to the regional and local levels. Responsibility is found, at these levels, for policies on many of the key social policy areas, e.g. housing, health, education, social security, etc. Depending on the local situation and on the commitment of local communities, (as expressed through the political mandate), and of administrators, priority and resources allocated to dealing with social exclusion will vary between regions, local authorities and municipalities. Regional and local administrations guard their right to make policy decisions within their devolved or transferred areas of competence, regardless of the national policy, particularly where the implementation of the policy is funded out of locally generated revenues.

The allocation of resources, whether financial or personnel, with the relevant knowledge and skills, to the different stages of the policy cycle is important for the success of mainstreaming social inclusion. If little or inadequate resources are allocated to the implementation of the policy, it will not be effective. In more centralised administrative arrangements, funding is provided from the State budget, while personnel involved in the service delivery at the local level are usually found within the regional/local authority's own resources. In countries where autonomous responsibilities for policy making and the provision of services are transferred or devolved to the lower levels of administration, funding can be fully or partially provided from local taxation sources to finance projects and services, such as, for example, social housing. This results in a diversity of

approaches and in the targeting of resources to achieve social inclusion at the local level.

Within the context of these two systems of government, three common forms of policies relating to mainstreaming social inclusion can be found:

- Policies targeted at specific social problems;
- Broad social policies designed to promote social inclusion;
- Other public policies which are not directly related to social inclusion but can impact on people at risk of poverty.

This demonstrates how complex policy-making and the different governance systems and traditions in the Member States can be. However, regardless of the approach or the governmental structures, top-level political and administrative commitment is necessary for the successful implementation of a desired policy.

The mainstreaming of social inclusion into all national policy areas is crucial to the success of achieving the goal of eradication of poverty and social exclusion. The mainstreaming of social inclusion is a particularly challenging area of policy-making, requiring commitment across all the organs of State, as well as the involvement and co-operation of NGOs and representative organisations of vulnerable groups. The challenge for policy makers is to find ways of incorporating mainstreaming, as a policy process, into the existing political and administrative structures and to ensure the ongoing commitment to social inclusion at all levels of government.



## Participation of the relevant actors

An important development in governance and in the formulation of public policies in recent decades has been the trend towards a more consultative approach to policy-making. Increasing the level of involvement of citizens in the development of national and EU-level policies is one of the key social objectives of the European Union.

Involvement can take a number of forms - from the simple provision of information through consultation, to participation and joint decision-making/ co-determination. Each form builds on the previous one. There cannot be consultation without information. There cannot be participation without consultation and there cannot be joint decision-making without participation.

While there are a number of obstacles to using a participative approach to policy-making, there are also many benefits showing how involvement of all the stakeholders can enhance a policy. Benefits include: a wider pool of knowledge resulting from greater public participation and outcomes which are more appropriate to the needs of the community and greater social equality. Increased political involvement at the local level is also an important benefit from participative policy-making. This is seen in the emergence of local partnerships, providing mechanisms for the adaptation and implementation of national policies at the local level, in many Member States.

## MSI and the NAPs/ inclusion process

Consultation and participation of stakeholders has emerged as one of the four EU Common Objectives in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and as a preferred way of addressing social inclusion issues. This is demonstrated in the preparation of and agreement on the NAPs/inclusion. Participation is referred to in the NAPs/inclusion of all the EU Member States. Each country has established mechanisms to engage with relevant NGOs in the preparation of the action plans and there are indications that this participative approach increased when comparing the first round of NAPs/inclusion to the second round.

This trend in governance has also had an impact on how mainstreaming of social inclusion into public policy-making is undertaken. Involvement provides an opportunity to capture the views and priorities of excluded people and ensures that national policies meet their needs and do not just reflect political preferences. On the other hand, mechanisms for engaging directly with individuals experiencing poverty are less common.

There are also different approaches to the provision of resources to facilitate involvement mechanisms in the preparation of the NAPs/inclusion. There is a perception that the participation of all the key actors is not always realised through the existing structures nor are the resources available to ensure full participation in the preparation of the NAPs/inclusion and in public policy-making. However, the more involvement there is at the local, regional and national levels in the formulation of a NAPs/inclusion, the greater the aggregation of expertise, leading to a consensus on social policy and a common focus on combating poverty and social exclusion across the EU.



# Evaluating Mainstreaming

## Social Inclusion

A key part of the policy cycle is monitoring and evaluation. This part of the process is essential for establishing how effective policies have been. It is also crucial in identifying the need for changes to existing policies or the development of future policies. Undertaking an evaluation exercise provides governments with evidence on which they can base their priorities for the allocation of resources across the range of policy areas.

In order to undertake an effective evaluation it is necessary to have a number of targets and indicators incorporated at the design stage. These provide benchmarks or criteria for the measurement of policies and the level of their effectiveness at the end of the policy cycle.

Since the mainstreaming of social inclusion is a new concept there has been little experience in evaluation and a lack of instruments for measuring the impact of MSI on public policy-making. However, while there are a number of technical, logistical and design challenges to be overcome, the MSI study provides a framework (the MSI Scale) for evaluation.

## Conclusions

1. **Mainstreaming social inclusion** is a process which policy-makers at all levels of government and administration could incorporate into the design, implementation and evaluation of all public policies as agreed by the Member States in the Lisbon Strategy and reiterated by subsequent European Councils.
2. For **mainstreaming of social inclusion** to have an impact on public policy-making and for policies to achieve the goal of social inclusion, the following elements need to be in place:
  - Political commitment;
  - Social consensus;
  - Co-ordination of policy development;
  - Mechanisms for the involvement of all the relevant actors;
  - The allocation of adequate resources, both financial and skilled personnel.
3. How **mainstreaming of social inclusion** is undertaken within the Member States is dependent on the governmental/administrative structures in place. For the implementation of mainstreaming to be successful, a strong political and administrative commitment at all levels of government – national, regional and local – is essential.
4. **Mainstreaming** is important in focusing social inclusion within existing public policies, in developing new policies and in targeting policies to the eradication of poverty and social exclusion.
5. While **mainstreaming** is increasingly recognised and understood in theory, in practice, it is less well developed.
6. For the **mainstreaming of social inclusion** to become a permanent feature of public policy-making, an evaluation framework, which can provide agreed comparisons on reductions of poverty and social exclusion across the Member States, is vital to achieving the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy.



The Combat Poverty Agency, Ireland, along with eight other partner organisations from six European countries, undertook a three-year research project (2003-2005) to advance the understanding of mainstreaming as a policy tool in social inclusion. The project was funded by the European Commission, DG Employment and Social Affairs, through the Transnational Exchange Programme (TEP), 2002-2005.

The partner organisations were:



Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Czech Republic;



Directorate for Health and Social Affairs, Norway;



École Nationale de la Santé Publique, France;



Institute of Social Security, Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, Portugal;



National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), Ireland;



Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), Northern Ireland;



Office for Social Inclusion (OSI), Department of Social and Family Affairs, Ireland;



European Anti Poverty Network - Europe.



Combat Poverty Agency, Ireland;

## Website

The project partners have also developed a website ([www.europemsi.org](http://www.europemsi.org)) which complements the book. It is intended as a tool to assist those involved in public policy-making and to contribute to the formulation of policies. It provides theoretical and practical guidelines for the application of the various elements of mainstreaming social inclusion – the development of public policies; involvement of all the actors; policy evaluation; and cross-departmental working arrangements. The contents of the book and the website are based on the findings of this research project and the information gathered during a number of on-site study visits to the participating Member States and to Northern Ireland

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