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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Accompanying document to the

**Proposal for a
DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL
on the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010)**

Executive summary of the

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Proposal for a DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL on the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010)

1. CONTEXT AND CONSULTATION OF INTERESTED PARTIES

78 million people live at risk of poverty in the European Union. The fight against poverty and social exclusion is one of the central objectives of the EU and its Member States. At the launch of the Lisbon strategy in March 2000, Member States and the Commission were invited by the European Council to take steps to make “a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010”. Subsequent European Councils have reaffirmed this objective.

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) for Social Protection and Social Inclusion¹ — initiated by the same Lisbon Council — has been from the outset an important tool for supporting this political commitment and strengthening the EU’s capacity to support Member States in their drive for greater social cohesion in Europe.

Despite these achievements, significant parts of the population in all Member States are still suffering from deprivation and limited access to basic services or feel excluded from their societies.

This situation is clearly in conflict with the key shared values of the European Union. In its Social Agenda 2005-2010, the Commission therefore announced a proposal to designate 2010 as the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion.

Evaluations of previous European Years show that European Years:

Have proven to be an efficient instrument in putting European political issues at the top of the EU agenda. The broad level of participation within a limited timeframe has helped to harness political support and pave the way for broader political commitments;

Are designed to involve a range of stakeholders with a view to publicising, debating, exchanging views on a specific theme. They are therefore an effective tool in raising awareness;

Are efficient instruments for creating synergies between various areas of intervention and at different (EU, Member State and regional/local) levels;

Tend to have more added value compared to individual interventions by Member States. This has also been important in creating political momentum and contributing to policy change.

In the first semester of 2007, The Commission asked for the views of relevant stakeholders regarding the orientation and implementation of the European Year. 58 responses from the main actors involved at EU, national and regional level were received. The results provided

¹ Reference page on Europa website: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/index_en.html.

valuable indicators for the preparation of the assessment and for the draft Decision to be adopted.

2. PROBLEM DEFINITION

2.1 Problem analysis

Who is affected and to what extent

Poverty and social exclusion take complex and multi-dimensional forms. The income dimension of poverty is the most obvious aspect of what is commonly referred to as “poverty”. Geographical differences matter not only across but also within countries (the urban/rural divide and/or deprived/disadvantaged areas). In all Member States there remain disparities in health status and inequalities in access to care between socio-economic groups. Since employment remains the best safeguard against poverty and social exclusion, long-term unemployment is certainly one clearly associated with social distress.

Some groups are particularly vulnerable: migrants and ethnic minorities, women, elderly, children and youngsters, disabled.

The main challenges

In the recent 2007 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, breaking the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next by tackling child poverty and promoting active inclusion were identified as the key challenges to fighting poverty and exclusion.

Public concerns and expectations

According to two Eurobarometer surveys published in 2007², poverty and social exclusion are social realities faced by a considerable number of EU citizens. Europeans identify unemployment as the most important factor leading to poverty.

2.2 EU intervention

The role of the EU and the European Commission is not to replace national, regional and local governments in planning and implementing policies, but rather to catalyse efforts to arrive at a shared strategic approach to tackling poverty and exclusion.

Within the framework of the revised open method of coordination, Member States submitted in 2006 national reports setting out their strategy for translating the agreed common objectives into strategic programmes. Two-level common indicators have been established for measuring progress. The Member State reports were assessed jointly by the Commission and the Council in the 2007 Joint Social Inclusion and Social Protection Report. In 2008 Member States will submit full National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, whereas in 2009 and 2010 the focus will be, as in 2007, on specific themes.

² These Eurobarometers are available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_273_en.pdf and http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_279.pdf.

2.3 Need for improvement at EU level

Further efforts at EU and national level are required to make full use of the potential of the Open method of coordination. Coordination between national and sub-national policies thus often remains unclear. The participation of people suffering exclusion, both in implementing and monitoring the strategy and in steering future policy development, is vital to ensure genuine consultation and pertinent and effective measures. The OMC is too often seen as an EU-level exercise rather than as a genuine effort to mutually reinforce cooperation at all levels to make progress on the agreed common objectives.

The mainstreaming of social inclusion within other policy areas remains a challenge. While there is better coordination between the implementation of social inclusion and healthcare policies and the use of the Structural Funds, notably the European Social Fund, the latter's visibility in this area could be improved. In spite of some increase in the use of indicators and targets, the Commission and Member States have not yet agreed a systematic and transparent framework for reporting on the implementation and impact of the national action plans. Many Member States lack adequate mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the priorities defined in their plans.

These plans need to be more focused than in the past. This ideally involves defining a small number of key objectives based on a rigorous analysis of the poverty/social exclusion situation, setting clear and quantified results and outcome targets, and defining a precise set of actions to achieve those objectives.

2.4 How to sustain the effective implementation of EU action

In line with the analysis carried out and the priorities identified in the Joint Social Protection and Social Inclusion Report, the European Year should focus around the following themes: child poverty and the intergenerational transmission of poverty; an inclusive labour market; disadvantages in education and training; access to basic services, including decent accommodation; discrimination and promoting the integration of immigrants and the social and labour market inclusion of ethnic minorities; needs of disabled people and other vulnerable groups.

3. OBJECTIVES

3.1 General objectives

The proposal to designate 2010 as the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion is intended to reaffirm and strengthen the initial political commitment of the EU at the start of the Lisbon strategy to make “a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty” on the basis of evaluations and assessments of existing policies and actions to fight poverty and social exclusion. The European Year can show that poverty disrupts social and economic development with serious implications for individuals, society as a whole and the economy. This will help challenge the vision that the fight against poverty is no more than a cost to society and reaffirm the concept of collective responsibility, involving not only decision-makers, but also public and private actors and the citizens and residents of the EU.

Over a longer-term perspective, the Year will help the OMC to have more impact on the ground and promote a stronger attachment to the EU's social values.

3.2 Key messages and specific objectives

Specific objectives will be based around key messages. These key messages aim not only to raise awareness of the prevalence of poverty, but also to show that solutions do exist and to call for new steps to be taken:

Recognition — Recognising the right of people in a situation of poverty and social exclusion to live in dignity and to play a full part in society.

Ownership — Increasing public ownership of social inclusion policies and actions, emphasising everyone’s responsibility in tackling poverty and marginalisation. The European Year will foster awareness, participation and engagement, and create new opportunities for ordinary citizens to contribute.

Cohesion — Promoting a more cohesive society by raising public awareness of the benefits for all of a society where poverty is eradicated and no-one is condemned to live in the margins.

Commitment — Reiterating the strong political commitment of the EU to the fight against poverty and social exclusion and promoting this commitment at all levels of governance.

4. POLICY OPTIONS

Four options have been considered: No change scenario; a European Year coordinated and centralised by the Commission; a completely decentralised European Year; a European Year that is both coordinated and decentralised.

This latter option shall ensure a better impact in terms of political commitment at all levels and effective support for the OMC. This approach seems also to be the most efficient both in terms of reaching actors and policies “on the ground” and in ensuring a strong link between the different actions and the different levels of intervention.

Effective coordination of the different actions ensured by the Commission will have the most effective impact in terms of the visibility of the whole exercise and the opportunities to exploit synergies.

This will thus ensure effective action across all the priorities identified for the European Year, including: combating stereotypes and stigmatisation; debating the most appropriate models for the participation of people experiencing poverty in the policy-making process; and providing a framework for effective learning and training.

5. IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIONS UNDER THE CHOSEN OPTION

5.1 Coordination and management of activities

The role and functioning of the coordination structures will be a key factor for the success of the European Year.

At EU level, a **Committee** comprising Member State representatives will be appointed in order to assist the Commission in implementing the European Year activities. The Committee

will monitor the implementation of the activities on the basis of common guidelines developed by the Commission (**Strategic Framework Document**) to ensure consistency with the Joint Report on Social Inclusion. The SFD will act as a point of reference for Member States, and will establish the key priorities for the European Year, alongside the objectives defined for the Year.

At national level, each Member State will be responsible for coordinating and implementing activities at national, regional and local levels. Each Member State will submit to the Commission a **National Programme for implementing the European Year**. Each programme should be devised, adopted and implemented in strict cooperation with and under the supervision of the **National Implementing Bodies** designated by the countries participating in the European Year. In establishing and carrying out their national strategies, each body will consult and cooperate closely with a **National Advisory Group** composed of a broad range of stakeholders, including civil society organisations representing the interests of people in poverty, national parliament representatives, social partners, and regional and local authorities.

5.2 Complementarity and synergies

The Commission will ensure coherence between the European Year activities and other Community actions and initiatives, in particular with programmes in the following sectors: employment, social solidarity (including gender), disability and the fight against discrimination (the programme PROGRESS); the Structural Funds (including the European Social Fund); education and training; citizenship; youth; immigration; and research.

5.3 Actions on a Community scale

On a Community scale, planned actions include: organisation of various solidarity initiatives for poverty alleviation and social inclusion to give ordinary citizens the opportunity to contribute directly or through their organisations, even modestly and in whatever form; media campaigns, including as a support to fundraising operations; organisation of meetings and events at Community level to raise awareness of issues relating to the European Year and to poverty and social exclusion and to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas; the development of a logo and slogans for the European Year.

5.4 Co-financing of actions on a Community scale

Some events will be organised at Community level, including events to open and close the European Year.

5.5 Co-financing of actions at national level

These actions should take account of the need to provide funding opportunities that ensure access for organisations “on the ground” and projects involving the most marginalised groups. Actions at local, regional or national level may qualify for financing from the Community budget up to a maximum of 50% of the total eligible costs per participating country.

The actions co-financed may include meetings and events, mutual learning seminars at national, regional and local level; information, educational and promotional campaigns, surveys and studies, training opportunities, cooperation with the media; development of pilot regional and local action plans for social inclusion.

5.6 Cost implications of the action: 17 million euros

Million euros

Actions	Type of output	2009		2010		TOTAL
		No	Total cost	No	Total cost	Total cost
Community-scale (100%)	Meetings & events	1	0.400			0.400
	Technical assistance	1	0.600			0.600
	Information and promotional campaigns	1	6.150			6.150
	Evaluation activities	1	0.150			0.150
Co-financing of Community-scale actions (80%)	Emblematic actions on a European scale (opening/closing events)	1	0.350	1	0.350	0.700
Co-financing of actions at national level (50%)	Grants to National Implementing Bodies			30	9.000	9.000
TOTAL COST		5	7.650	31	9.350	17.000

6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

An external evaluation exercise will be launched in 2009 in order to gather baseline data to monitor the implementation of the European Year and provide interim results if needed. The final evaluation results should be available by mid-2011.