



**EFSC workshop:
“The National Action Plans for Social Inclusion:
Street children inclusive implementation methods for the period 2008 –
2010; lessons and advocacy strategies towards making them a key target
group in the period 2010- 2012”**

**EFSC Headquarters
Route d’Esch 15, 1470 Luxembourg**

12th November 2009

SUMMARY REPORT

EFSC is committed to further promoting its member organisations’ involvement in the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAPs), and invited them member organizations on the 12th November 2009 at its new headquarters in Luxembourg to participate in a workshop aimed at exchanging experiences to improve their involvement both in the elaboration and in the implementation phase, in view of the next round of NAPs.

EFSC Assessment Reports on the NAPs 2008-2010

Reinhold Müller introduced the workshop by inserting the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (2008-2010) (NAPs/incl) in the wider framework of the **“Open Method of Co-ordination”(OMC)**, a process of consultation among EU member states and of co-ordination on their policies in the social field. The OMC is a “soft law”, not legally binding but promoting through peer pressure among Member States the implementation of common principles, objectives and indicators in the national policies. This is linked with the lack of competences of the EU in the field of child protection, something which may change following the entry into force of the Lisbon treaty. Reinhold Müller still underlined the impact of the OMC at Member States level and the importance for national and regional NGOs to get actively involved in the process of the elaboration of the NAPs/incl. Although a comprehensive and wide-ranging consultation is strongly supported by the European Commission, in practical terms it is frequently observed that bigger organizations are more often consulted. The workshop aimed at promoting EFSC Member Organisations capacity of getting involved in the NAPs by exchanging experiences, good practices and suggestions to make the politically uncomfortable issue of street children a priority of the next rounds of NAPs.

The first session of the workshop was devoted to the discussion of the results of the EFSC report on the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion – about the extent of the consultation of EFSC Member Organisations and of the addressing of street children within the NAPs.

Mieke Schuurman, independent consultant on children's rights issues and author of the first part of **EFSC Assessment Report on the NAPs 2008-2010**, presented the results of her analysis of the 2008-2010 National Action Plans for Social Inclusions about the **extent by which street children are addressed therein**. Although street children *per se* are hardly mentioned in the NAPs, most Member States have measures addressing related categories, such as homelessness, education and school drop-out, violence, abuse and exploitation of children, the integration of Roma children and families, migrants and refugees, access to healthcare, child poverty and social exclusion are addressed. The need for measures addressing child beggars seems to be growing in most Member States, although only Romania and Finland have introduced it explicitly in the 2008-2010 round of NAPs.

More generally, preventive measures that may indirectly impact on the situation of street children include: social benefits, family policies and employment measures – but to measure the impact of these measures on children it would be necessary to improve the availability of data about the income distribution within families.

As recommendations for the next round of NAPs, she proposed EFSC Members to concentrate on lobbying towards further prioritizing the policy areas with a direct or indirect impact on the living situation of street children, but also to support the governments in the collection of data and the development of specific indicators, by supporting the governments and NAPs authorities in the selection of those indicators which would be needed to analyse the situation of street children. Reinhold Müller stressed the importance of such an exercise, while also recalling the difficulties entailed in collecting data on these children who are most often not registered in the administrations and are practically invisible to the governmental authorities – a 2005 UNICEF report suggested that 1.7 million Roma children are not registered in the administrations in Europe. Ms. Schuurman also suggested combining the data collection effort with a cooperation with the FRA, which already did a first study on child rights indicators, including on child poverty. Also the EC Social Protection Committee has developed indicators for child poverty, but more specific ones are needed. She highlighted that the European Year 2010 may be an opportunity to support EFSC Member Organisations actions in the field of poverty and social exclusion.

Reinhold Müller presented the second part of the **NAPs assessment report** which analyses **the extent to what EFSC member organisations have been consulted** by the national authorities in the development process of the NAPs (2008-10). Most member organisations maintain regular contacts with their national and local authorities and are regularly consulted in policy development in the child rights field (in particular Instituto de Apoio à Criança, Silesian Diakonie, Tallinn Centre for Children at Risk, Istituto Don Calabria, Ejjew Gandhi

Children's Homes). However, on the whole, a more comprehensive consultation by the NAPs-relevant authorities with EFSC member organisations can be expected and more advocacy work is required to achieve a full prioritisation of the street children issue. The limited consultation with smaller and locally active NGOs, as well as the late transmission of the Commission's financing, which has shortened the time available for the implementation of the NAPs-related activities at EFSC, are linked to a limited prioritisation of street children in the NAPs. Something which could facilitate our MO's involvement in the NAPs would be the fine-tuning of the NAPs at local level, or "LAPs", which would ease the involvement of often locally rather than nationally active MOs. In addition, Anna D'Ambrosio observed that the contacts officially provided by the Commission as contact points for the NAPs not always corresponded to the actual responsible.

The role of the Lisbon Treaty in improving the protection of children from violence, exploitation and trafficking, in particular through strengthening the social OMC was discussed, in light of its entry into force in December 2009.

Getting involved in the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAPs). The lessons from EAPN experience

Ms. **Karin Manderscheid** presented EAPN Luxembourg experience in trying to influence the NAPs and highlighted the importance of having a clear strategic focus and of bringing the authorities to a direct confrontation with the problems of concern to the NGOs, for example by bringing them directly into contact with people experiencing poverty. This way, EAPN Luxembourg managed in four years to bring the housing issue as a priority in the NAPs. She stressed the lack of reliable data and indicators.

She also highlighted the fundamental importance of networking among national NGOs and of having the backing of a strong European-level network such as EAPN, which both strengthened the profile of the organization towards the authorities and strongly contributed to disseminate information about the decisions at EU level within the network. She highlighted that EU-level information is often more efficiently transferred through the network than by the national authorities. Key outcomes of the discussion were the importance for Member States to developing more effective consultation mechanisms – listening to NGOs' requests does not mean involving them in the decision-making, and it is difficult for these NGOs to monitor the implementation phase; the NAPs authorities must not only be knowledgeable about EU terminology but also carry out a real consultation.

In addition, the importance was highlighted of integrating the NAPs in wider, longer-term strategies developed in a bottom-up fashion, starting from the local level, and to adequately fund them.

Round table discussion on MO's involvement in the NAPs.

The following session of the workshop was devoted to a round table discussion among EFSC member organizations about good practices in getting involved with the NAPs.

Marica Iorio, Maestri di Strada, Italy, stressed that a good practice in getting involved with the NAPs is EFSC network itself, as it gathers several professionals in the social work and a lot can be learned from each other experiences. Their major concern is at the moment the fact that they are not prepared to work with the Roma people and children of migrant families, who are a growing target group of their social inclusion activities. In addition, she stated in front of the war which is being fought by the organized crime in Naples, that there is a strong need for adequate training, funding and more generally for a professionalization of the social workers caring for the drop-outs.

Maggie Lazaridis, The Smile of the Child, Greece, agreed that mobility of separated children from Romania and Bulgaria to other Member States, as well as refugee children from Afghanistan are posing unprecedented challenges to NGOs and Governments alike, and that in spite of the efforts, they are not prepared to adequately tackle the issue; there is a strong need for a multidisciplinary approach and for the establishment of local networks.

Brian Delord, Pupil-Parent Partnership, UK, shared the successful experience of PPP who managed to enter within the 12 organisations across the country who are benefiting from funding from the NAPs. He agreed on the need for more professionalization and informed that PPP is involved in the launching of a Master's Degree on Social Inclusion, but also stated that the advocacy work for becoming beneficiaries of the funding has contributed to the professionalisation.

Mihai-Florin Rosca, Romanian Foundation for Children, Community and Family, Romania, informed that his organization is part of a coalition which is planning to prepare an alternative report, to denounce facts such as the legal ban for opening shelters and to draw attention on the urgency of such measures.

Michal Smigielski, Society of the Friends of Children (TPD), Poland, reported the many difficulties that a single organization, albeit very well connected and experienced, faces in trying to transmit its concerns at the level of the NAPs. In spite of many attempts, the impact is difficult to see.

Alexia Petrilli, Ejjew Gandhi Children's Homes, Malta, commented that one of the key priorities for her organization is to prepare a comprehensive strategy for child protection, which starts with preventive action with families where some members are using substances and drugs. She suggested the role of the mentor, a person responsible for following the family, who may also be useful in selecting developments against the right indicators.

The National Action Plans for Social Inclusion: the impact of the OMC on the social inclusion of the most excluded children

Ms. **Marie-Anne Paraskevas** described the key features of the social OMC and the progressive increase of the prioritization of child poverty in the process; she presented the evaluation of the OMC undertaken in 2008 and culminated in the Communication '*A renewed commitment to social Europe: Reinforcing the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion*', part of the Renewed Social Agenda. In the Renewed Social Agenda the Commission reaffirms that the Social OMC is one of the most important instruments in support of social development in the EU and in Member States.

Thanks to the Social OMC, child poverty has gained importance in national agendas and is now present in most national strategies, while in the past, for some countries, the issue as such had never been on the policy agenda. Common indicators have been made available and further work is being done to improve them (notably on material deprivation and on child well being). The target-setting approach has gained relevance; mutual learning through peer reviews has taken place (e.g.: in the areas of pre-school education) and there is broader understanding of the multidimensional nature of the issue. Finally, according to the evaluation, stakeholders' involvement in policy making has improved, although in uneven manner across Member States.

Still, key areas for improvement remain – and data about poverty among children have remained roughly unchanged during the last decade. There is a need for boosting analytical capacity, in particular in the field of vulnerable groups of children; reinforcing horizontal and vertical coordination in policy making, strengthening the mutual learning process, including through enhanced use of the main results of peer reviews; sustaining quality and continuous stakeholders' involvement; and using other relevant instruments, in particular the Structural Funds and community programmes.

The priorities for the post-2010 Lisbon strategy were discussed, considering the importance that social objectives acquire as much importance as growth and jobs, particularly considering the impact of the global economic crisis, and thus in the national action plans for social inclusion. The European Year 2010 was discussed in its role of promoting a new momentum in fighting poverty.

According to some Member Organisations' feedbacks, unfortunately, the funding at Member States level which was meant to be made available through the planned calls for proposals, was often delayed and in some cases devoted entirely to public institutions, with no funding for NGOs. The public sector destination of the funding was often in communication campaigns, which in some cases don't seem to be very incisive.

The participants discussed the role of the Lisbon treaty and the new competences of the EU in relation to the changes in the Social OMC; Ms. Paraskevas informed that the OMC will probably be strengthened; actions to be taken in the short term will be probably a Directive on Minimum Income to be inscribed in the Active Inclusion approach and possibly a Recommendation on Child Poverty. Still, the OMC will maintain its nature and be the essential context

whereby recommendations will be sent to Member States whenever key challenges are emerging.

Regarding the discussions on the future of the Lisbon Strategy, Ms. Paraskevas expressed her commitment towards a true mainstreaming of child poverty in the new strategy, which is at the moment centred around the issues of Green Economy and Research and Innovation, with less emphasis on Employment and Social Justice than expected following the first speech of President Barroso on the issue. EFSC MOs will try to be present on the issue.

She suggested that the Monitoring of the implementation of the upcoming EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child be linked, under the new competences, to the monitoring of the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Identification of strategic messages and key advocacy lessons to more successfully influence the NAPs in view of the 2010-2012 round

Reinhold Müller summarized the key outcomes of the discussion. A joint call could be identified about the importance that Member States to develop more effective consultation mechanisms, and NAPs that are coherent and integrated in wider, longer-term strategies, developed in a bottom-up fashion starting from the local level.

In our members' experience, projects are effective in indirectly raising awareness on some key issues and to thereby sustain their inclusion in the NAPs. The mobility of separated children from Romania and Bulgaria to other Member States, and the increased migration of refugees and asylum seekers are posing unprecedented challenges to our MOs and the need to be supported in facing these new challenges was one shared claim among them. In order to correctly approach the Roma issue, it was proposed that direct contacts be taken with expert organizations in the field, such as the European Roma Information Office.

Network building, especially at the local level, was identified as one of the key ways to gain more strength as NGOs and to better address the upcoming new challenges. Political will, not least at European level, and an appropriate communication strategy by the civil society towards policy-makers, are key elements to making the NAPs more effective for the social inclusion of the most vulnerable groups. It was discussed that a decentralized action of each member towards its own government with shared messages may be useful for mobilizing awareness at national level.

It was highlighted that the NGOs approach should always be a proactive one, and that in spite of an often lacking consultative approach of the Governments, NGOs should become themselves more "attractive" and support them with data collection and information. One of the ways of becoming more active is the inclusion in broader coalitions, or build networks with other actors at the local level. In our members' experience, projects are another effective way of

indirectly raising awareness on some key issues and to thereby sustain their inclusion in the NAPs. Many member organizations shared the call for the need of professional training for social workers and for preventive action involving families.



This workshop is supported by the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013) PROGRESS.

This programme is managed by the Directorate-General for Employment, social affairs and equal opportunities of the European Commission. It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment and social affairs area, as set out in the Social Agenda, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy goals in these fields.

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