

Active inclusion & social investment: issues for social services

ESN discussion note

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The European Social Network brings together people who design, manage and deliver social services in public authorities across Europe. We support the development of effective social policy and social care practice through the exchange of knowledge and experience.



Background

As part of the Social Investment Package (SIP), the [European Commission reviewed](#) how Member States implemented the [2008 Recommendation on Active Inclusion](#) of people the furthest from the labour market. In the Recommendation the Commission proposed an integrated approach based on three pillars:

1. adequate income support
2. inclusive labour markets
3. access to quality services

Nearly five years later, the 'staff working document' identifies the main challenges in delivering this approach and gives policy guidance based on the results of this analysis. The Commission sees **Active Inclusion** strategies as being in line with the **life-cycle approach** and the **investment in human capital** of the Social Investment Package and related to the targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Challenges

The 'staff working document' highlights the following developments in EU countries between 2008 and 2012:

- the risk of poverty rose amongst people of working age
- in-work poverty rose significantly in a third of EU countries
- the impact of social transfers has increased in nearly half of EU Member States.
- Member States have tightened eligibility conditions and linked the right to income support to the willingness to work and a minimum commitment to seeking a job.

The paper suggests that countries with better outcomes in this analysis have already addressed the three issues: they have a high coverage and medium to high income support, a low labour market segmentation, activation measures and a high use of childcare and education and training measures for those with a low level of education.

Responding to challenges

In terms of providing **minimum income support**, the paper identifies adequacy and coverage as challenges. As a result of the financial crisis, budgets were cut and eligibility criteria were restricted. In order to focus on the matter of adequacy, the Commission will develop, together with the Social Protection Committee, a methodology of reference budgets to see what expenses should be covered by a minimum income. Simpler procedures and information to reach the most disadvantaged are suggested to improve coverage and increase take-up. Incentives to take a job, for example by phrasing out social assistance, can be introduced to ensure a minimum income.

In order to tackle **in-work poverty**, *tax and benefit incentives should be primarily targeted towards low-income single-earner households, to encourage them to take full-time jobs and reduce child poverty.* To make labour markets more inclusive, active labour market policies should be set up on the demand and supply side. On the supply side, the paper underlines that training or employment support programmes have to be rightly targeted in a personalised approach.

The document recognises that **access to social services in education, health care, social housing childcare and elderly care** are crucial to reduce inequality and poverty. However, the country analyses shows that *access to childcare and participation in education and training* for those with a low level of education and *the potential of other services to lift people out of poverty* remains unexploited.

General recommendations

The European Commission urges Member States to implement integrated active inclusion strategies based on all three pillars. According to the analysis, only six countries have developed effective strategies for those who can work and three for those who cannot. Countries should ensure access to enabling services and a personalised approach to active labour market politics. They should also improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Member States' income support programmes, especially with regard to adequacy, coverage, take-up and incentives to work. The Commission strongly emphasises the concept of **one-stop-shops** as an approach to integrate the three pillars of active inclusion. It argues that they would increase take-up of benefits and services, ensure access to different services for a holistic and personalised approach and simplify coordination of local and national services and administration of benefits.

ESN Members' response to policy recommendations on active inclusion

The SIP paper was discussed at the recent meeting of ESN's working group on [Leadership, Performance and Innovation](#). Group member, Karine Lycops, head of social welfare at OCMW-Genk (Belgium), commented: "In Genk, the main goal of a one-stop-shop has to be that every person has to find a clear channel where s/he can be helped with their question, and can find someone who can lead them through a maze of services."

Members pointed out that **one-stop-shops** need not necessarily be a physical place, but could be based on different communication technologies – this is a growing trend. In the discussion it became clear that Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Spain and Slovenia all had some kind of one-stop-shops for social services (managed by municipalities), but that employment services were mostly in a different place (and managed by central government). Danish and French members pointed out that some one-stop-shops are for particular client groups – young people, families or older people with care needs.

Slovenia has implemented a major reform to make the Centre for Social Work (CSW) a one-stop-shop for all social rights that are financed by state or municipal budgets. Miran Kerin is president of the association of social directors. He noted: "CSW has access to information on all incomes of individuals or families. The main purpose of the reform was to make things more transparent for awarding various types of aid, in order to reduce abuse." However, job advice is not among the responsibilities of the CSW; this lies with the State employment service. There were some projects to link the two services: in Genk (Belgium) for example, social workers from the social welfare centre (OCMW) sit in the 'JobShop' whilst job advisors sit in the OCMW at certain times. This enables clients to get welfare and job advice in one place. Depending on each person's needs, either the social worker or the job advisor is appointed case-manager.

Group members noted that access to quality services appeared only to cover access to child care and training/education. Social services, including social work and welfare services, play

an important role in implementing personalised approaches and in preventing the most vulnerable groups from social exclusion. Social workers take into consideration the social and family situation of each individual who have multiple needs and problems, such as drug or alcohol addiction, mental health problems or health problems. ESN sees the involvement of specialist social work services as key to the social and labour market integration of those furthest from the labour market.

Marie-Paule Martin-Blachais is director of a child protection monitoring body in France. She said: “You cannot be waiting for people to come to your one-stop-shop; you have to go out and meet people where they are.” She mentioned the French practice of placing social workers in town and village halls. She also pointed out that in France, ‘revenu de solidarité active’ (unemployment benefit and advice) is run separately from social work/welfare: “there is no cooperation contract between the two.” Carlos Santos Guerrero is head of cooperation with municipalities at the Autonomous Region of Galicia; he also testified that the State-run employment service is an entirely different system to the welfare advice offered at municipal level.

It became clear from this discussion that ‘one-stop-shops’ were restricted either to employment benefits (central State) and advice or to social benefits and services (local level). An integrated three-pillar active inclusion approach run through one-stop-shops and led by a single case manager is still far from the reality, though there are local projects to link them. Members also noted the difficulty of getting users of social services (‘those furthest from the labour market’) into work when unemployment, especially among young people, is so high in some parts of Europe. Steinar Eggen Kristensen (social director in Randers, Denmark) said he looked at this from a different angle: “What you need is an assessment of a person’s needs: then you put a team of people from different public services together to help them to achieve social and, if possible, labour market integration.”

For those who are not able to work (whether in the short or long-term) due to disability or severe ill health, the group recognised the importance of alternatives to the primary labour market. Carlos Santos Guerrero noted that the Region of Galicia has assisted people with learning disabilities to get work by subsidising wages: “customers like to see people with disabilities in work – they are smiley and welcoming.” He also referred to some attempts to facilitate tele-working/working from home for people with (physical) disabilities but “people need to connect with other people”, so this had less success. Bruno Marcato (social director in Bolzano, Italy) said his agency wanted to develop better links between employment, social services, training centres and employers, both in the primary labour market and in social economy sector, which offers valuable jobs for many people with disabilities.

The European Commission will evaluate and monitor active inclusion strategies in the National Reform Programmes and make active inclusion one of the investment priorities of the European Social Fund, in accordance with poverty and social exclusion target of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

ESN resources on Active Inclusion

- [Active inclusion policy in Europe \(2008-2012\)](#)
- [Realising potential/Réaliser son potentiel](#)
- [Good practice library – a collection of practice examples from ESN's events and projects](#)
- [Karine Lycops, Head of Social Welfare at OCMW-Genk, Belgium, on active inclusion](#)