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Active Inclusion: Inclusion through social and employment activation

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European Social Network

Social Services in Europe

ESN is the independent network for social services in Europe. Our mission is to help change the lives of the most vulnerable in our societies through the delivery of quality social services. With Members in local public social services across Europe, we bring together the people who are key to the design and delivery of vital care and support services to learn from each other and contribute their experience and expertise to building effective social policy at European and national level.



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Introduction

The European Commission is taking forward the active inclusion initiative in order to provide a set of common principles which would underpin national policy for social and labour market activation. Social services are at the intersection of social exclusion and activation often dealing with people facing exclusion but also with established links to the employment service and adult education.

Social services have had people who have been out of work for long periods among their clients for many years; local social workers are familiar with neighbourhoods and families with poor social and community networks and facing particular social problems, where the phenomenon of worklessness occurs sometimes generation after generation. From the first-hand experience of its members, ESN knows that often absence from the labour market is due to a range of factors including lack of relevant skills or aspiration, persistence of life crises, chaotic family relationships, drug and alcohol abuse problems, disability, mental illness or ethnic background, and is only compounded by institutional factors such as the absence of formal child care. Risk of deprivation and social exclusion is significant for these people, especially if they stay out of work for long time. Sadly, it also affects their children and partners.

At the same time, it is also vital to emphasise that there are people who actually cannot work in mainstream employment, e.g. as a result of a physical or learning disability or due to serious mental health problems. People can however be active in many legitimate different ways such as: community and voluntary work, subsidized sheltered employment, community groups. These measures, which can help people's sense of self-worth and connection to others and a wider community (social inclusion) should not necessarily be seen as only a "transitory path" to employment in the primary labour market, but also a valuable contribution to the community in their own right. Indeed, we have to be ambitious for people, thinking imaginatively about new forms of participation by looking at everyone's *abilities* and potential to make a contribution to society and the their local community.

The key question is how to help people to be socially as well as economically active and to provide specialised alternatives allowing people who cannot work full-time to be included in society in other ways. ESN therefore welcomes the Commission's initiative to take forward the active inclusion initiative by agreeing with Member States and stakeholders a set of common principles on which national governments could draw on to make effective policies in this area. The principles must have a basis in 'what works' and deal with the primary and underlying factors affecting economic and social inactivity and exclusion.

*We also include practical **key recommendations** made by ESN following a seminar on activation held in October 2006.*

Active Inclusion: a contemporary and growing trend

Active Inclusion – or, at least variations on the theme – are already being introduced in some countries (Netherlands, Norway, Germany and indeed the United States) or are soon to be introduced (UK, Sweden). Several EU countries already have advanced models of joint working among various actors and some have established joint offices where the complex situation of service users can be assessed in its totality. The Commission's initiative should thus be seen as part of a trend, which is driven by cost considerations as much if not more than by social conscience and values of participation.

In its social inclusion briefing *Social and Employment Activation*, ESN drew a number of conclusions from case studies of Norway, the Netherlands and Germany:

1. Activation takes place at the intersection of between employment policy and social protection
2. The main feature of labour market activation policies are encapsulated in a shift from entitlement to conditionality.
3. Activation therefore involves the integration or cooperation of employment and social services.
4. 'Core' welfare services can support activation by creating the conditions to favour individuals' activation.
5. Local and regional authorities are key actors in local development and can thus favour activation by encouraging job creation, e.g. support to SMEs, start-ups.

Sources for country case and local practice studies including peer reviews can be found at the end of this document. They reveal countries' interest in this area and in sharing experience. These could also be a useful source of learning for the active inclusion principles eventually proposed.

Active Inclusion as a concept

The active inclusion initiative is based on three pillars: income support, a link to the labour market and social services. Here, we explore and comment on these pillars as presented in the EC communication.

Social work experience shows that isolated interventions are not effective. As the consultation responses in 2006 stressed, "successful implementation ... depends on the synergies between its different components". This holistic approach is therefore most welcome. However we must recognise (and plan for) the difficulties of achieving synergies in practice due to the problems of bringing together professionals from different backgrounds and organisational cultures.

(i) income support

Nearly all Member States provide some sort of income support for vulnerable groups. The provision of the support schemes greatly varies in generosity, scope, eligibility and duration of the measure. Some countries have a long tradition of such arrangements while others only recently introduced specific policies. In some cases, income support is conceived as a general entitlement and can last for years; in others it is a means-tested personalised measure attributed for a period of time.

In some countries (Netherlands, Slovenia) social services are also responsible for assessing and distributing social benefits, which can provide a useful structural link between income support and the other strands of active inclusion.

ESN Key Recommendations (Social Activation and Employment Seminar, Metz, France, October 2006)

- ➔ Incentives and conditions should be in place to ensure that people are ultimately better off in employment than on any social benefit – this is central to the long-term success of activation policies.

(ii) link to the labour market

This strand is underdeveloped in the present communication and it would be important in any set of recommendations to make a clear division between labour market regulation on the one hand and activation (i.e. social and employment, also housing, health, further education) services on the other. Active inclusion takes place at the intersection of employment policy and social protection, and we can look to a number of countries mentioned above for examples of local or nation-wide examples of coordinated social and/or income services and employment services.

ESN Key Recommendations (Social Activation and Employment Seminar, Metz, France, October 2006)

- The involvement of service users should be a primary concern in all activation programmes: they should have the appropriate advice and support to enable them to participate fully in decisions which affect their lives.
- Programmes should take account of the needs of specific minority groups and consider targeted approaches to ensure that there is opportunity for all including young people, single parents and older people whatever their background, skills and ability.
- Careful attention should be paid to the sustainability of activation policies to ensure that people remain active beyond the duration of a particular programme to avert the risk of compounding marginalisation.
- Where participation in the primary labour market is limited or not possible, people should be given every chance to be active in the community and participate in civic, social and cultural life in alternative ways which fully utilise their skills and ability.

(iii) access to quality services

This section of the Communication presents a number of problems, the first terminological: the Commission refers to *social services of general interest*. We believe that this exact term, so closely associated with an ongoing debate over the application of competition and state aid rules, is unnecessary and liable to cause confusion. We propose the Commission refer only to social services; there is no need to attach a legal categorisation to these services in the context of active inclusion.

What is important is what the services do (as set out on page 8 of the Communication) not how they are categorised for the purposes of applying (or not) internal market rules. Whether services are delivered by an external organisation or by local/regional/national government, they have to be accessible and of the highest quality. The only reason in to bring in the SSGI definition would be specifically where there are concerns over the application of Community rules to services which have been contracted out to external providers.

The second concern we have is over the use of the concept, developed by ESN, of *access to quality services (AQS)*; this is principally about “adapting services to meet people’s changing needs” – it is about the relationship between the service provider and service user. As such, it can apply both to the link to the labour market (activation services) as to supporting social services strands of active inclusion. This is a broad

concept developed for the whole range of social services and would need adaptation to a specific issue such as this, where there are significant areas of cross-over with employment services, to which some principles of AQS may not be easily applicable.

Social services do play an important role in providing assistance in the ways set out on page 8 of the Communication, but these services should be provided in parallel or as part of an integrated pathway towards activation (be it social or into employment). Any future recommendations should take care not to set up a division between social services on the one hand and employment services on the other, even as strands of a single policy. We would certainly see social services as part of the link to the labour market besides as important independent actors.

ESN Key Recommendations (Social Activation and Employment Seminar, Metz, France, October 2006)

- Social services are key partners in supporting activation for those furthest from the labour market in cooperation with other local services: employment, education, adult learning. Given their primary duty of care and protection, they should ensure that active inclusion programmes take account of the full range of needs of vulnerable people and families.
- There should be a duty for social services to consider the service user's activation opportunities from the earliest stages of care needs assessment in consultation with other partners.
- An effective working relationship between social and employment services is pivotal to effective policy and practice for the active inclusion of vulnerable people.
- Training of frontline staff and managers to work across professional and organisational boundaries will enhance the effective delivery of these services.

(iv) economic development and planning

Local and regional authorities, rightly seen as important actors in the success of active inclusion, also have a role in economic and community development. Real synergies can be achieved by giving people on activation pathways jobs (sometimes as directly employees of the local authority) a role in economic and community projects, thus ensuring that they too benefit from inward local investment.

Two recent examples have come to our attention:

- Brighton and Hove City Council have placed service users with a hotel which has recently opened as part of a major area redevelopment – this was part of the agreement with the hotel when it approached the City Council.
- Amsterdam's employment and benefits service employed service users in the construction of a conference centre in its headquarters in the centre of the city.

In both cases, this was the result of cooperation not only between employment, income and social services but also with economic development partners.

The Commission should widen the active inclusion concept to reflect this important role in helping people into employment.

Next Steps

Strengthening mutual learning

The Commission proposes to issue a recommendation, leading to Council conclusions and a European Parliament resolution. None of these legal instruments is binding, though their adoption would add the political weight of three institutions to a set of common principles.

It seems legitimate to capture in the form of common principles policy and practice learning from peer reviews, NAPs/Inclusion and the thematic work of European networks such as ESN. At the same time, it is important to further develop the focussed exchange of good practice within the structure of the OMC on social protection and social inclusion.

We believe that more and better data provided by MS in consultation with all levels of government would only help to design successful policies and initiatives, improve mutual learning and the transfer of expertise, especially with a stronger involvement of local social and employment services who have current experience in delivering social activation models.

The role of local authorities and social services

“The success of the envisaged approach depends on the commitment and full involvement of national, regional and local actors.” The Commission proposes a Network of Local Observatories, for which funding has been allocated under the PROGRESS programme, which it has still to give some substance to. ESN is not convinced of the need to call into existence a new body bringing together such a potentially wide range of actors, even within the local government sector. It may be appropriate to have involve the intended actors in a small meeting in 2009 to share learning on active inclusion and discuss ways forward.

We share the Commission’s concern about the lack of involvement of local and regional authorities in the OMC in general. Our preferred approach would be to see the full participation of local government (including social services) in current activities (round tables, other conferences, NRSSPSI consultation process) which we feel would be more effective than creating a new single-issue Network. The analysis of the previous round of the NRSSPSI or the delegates list from the last round tables demonstrate how little attention is given to the local authorities. Their participation in consultations and conferences would improve their participation in the OMC within a stable, recognized framework.

The Commission refers again to access to quality services, which it believes could be developed, within the work of a Network of Local Observatories. Again, we wish to emphasise that *access to quality services* is a wider concept which deserves attention not only within active inclusion but across other areas including children’s services and long-term care.

We would propose a more modest starting point in which additional funding was provided in 2009 for an exploratory meeting with a range of local authority networks to to present their current work, share good practice and hear from other actors including service users. If successful and productive, such a project might go further and cover new thematic areas, but the format should be determined by local government

representative associations and there should be no supposition that this would lead to a formal structure suggested by the term *Network of Local Observatories*.

The Communication refers again to *access to quality services* as a key issue, yet this is a separate issue which we see as cutting across all aspects of the OMC. We see it as far more promising to ensure local government participation in current activities such as the round table on poverty and social exclusion and, through national government, in the preparation of the NRSSPSIs, things ESN has consistently pressed for.

Stakeholder engagement

The communication introduces an artificial divide (p.4) of relevant actors, citing (1) local and national government as those who design, fund and administer active inclusion policies, (2) services providers: private, public and mixed as key actors in implementation and (3) civil society organisations as representatives and assistants of beneficiaries of such measures. We would, however, wish to emphasise that local authorities can both design, fund and administer policies but also directly provide a service; as another example, an NGO can play both an advocacy role at local and national level and also provide be a service provider.

The nature of social activation as an issue makes it particular important to seek the full and equal participation of all stakeholders. The privileged position of the social partners in this communication seems unjustified in the context. After all, this is not an issue about the relationship between employers and employees where social partners would have a unique and privileged role; rather it concerns how to activate those furthest from the labour market, and should therefore involve all stakeholders equally.

ESN believes that all stakeholders can enrich the policy making process with their varied and first-hand experience. Particularly, local social services can endow the process with local, practice-led expertise and example of best practices.

We look forward to developing our work in this area and to working with other stakeholders in order to empower people furthest from the labour market towards social inclusion.

European Social Network 2008

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ESN Policy & Practice Group 2008: Inclusion and Employment

Active inclusion will be one of our main areas of work in 2008, within the context of the new three-year strategy agreed with the Commission. We would bring together representatives of local/regional social, employment and income services to review good practice, shape ESN's policy input to the Commission and to monitoring the impact of the active inclusion agenda. We have also put in place a research budget which would allow us to commission an external expert to look at some broader policy issues which would also be of use to the EC in following up the active inclusion agenda.

Sources and Further Reading

Social and Employment Activation

- Social and employment activation, a briefing paper by the European Social Network (2006), provides case studies including Germany and the Netherlands.
- Presentations to the ESN seminar Social and employment activation including policy and practice examples from Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Poland, Estonia.
- ESN key recommendations on social and employment activation (reproduced in part above).

All available for download from www.esn-eu.org/inclusion/activation.htm

A further presentation from the Netherlands (City of Rotterdam) was made to the ESN conference *Empowering People* on 30 November and is available at www.esn-eu.org/inclusion/empowering.htm

Access to Quality Services (AQS)

- ESN policy paper, Access to Quality Services, presents the AQS concept for changing the relationship between service users and providers (recently reprinted in a bilingual French/English edition)
- Presentations to the ESN seminar on AQS (Barcelona, April 2006) providing current examples of aspects of the concept
- ESN Key Recommendations on AQS, drawn from discussions at the seminar, further develop the concept and suggest how it could be applied in service delivery.

All available for download from www.esn-eu.org/inclusion/access.htm

Social inclusion peer reviews

- Netherlands (experiments in social activation, 2005)
- Austria (helping school-leavers with special needs into work, 2005)
- Sweden (integrated rehabilitation, 2006)

All accessible via <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/peer-reviews>

National policy documents

The National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (part II: NAPs/Inclusion) provide further examples of employment/social activation policies. Each of the twenty-seven EU Member (or accession) States submitted a Report in 2006 and these are available from the European Commission at: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/strategy_reports_en.htm.

A brief summary review of national activation policies presented in these reports was included in the ESN report 2006: *Social Services and Social Inclusion*. Download here: <http://www.esn-eu.org/policy.htm>