

Executive summary



*Results of the study on
stakeholders' involvement in
the implementation of the
Open Method of
Coordination (OMC) in
social protection and
social inclusion*

Study objectives and scope of the study

The **overall objective** of the Study on Stakeholders' Involvement in the Implementation of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in Social Protection and Social Inclusion is to analyse the key challenges in relation to the governance dimension in the revised common objectives for the fight against poverty and social exclusion, in particular as concerns the involvement of stakeholders.

Specifically, the **main outcome** of the study is to provide the Commission with recommendations, benchmarks, examples of good practices and tools successfully applied by relevant stakeholders, regarding the quality and permanence of the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of the OMC.

The study focuses on stakeholders' involvement as far as it relates to policies against poverty and social exclusion (the first strand of the revised OMC), though it does not ignore the other two strands of the social OMC. The timeframe covers the social OMC since its beginning in 2000, but with a more particular focus on the most recent period (streamlining of the three strands since 2005).

The study focuses primarily on stakeholders' involvement in the OMC as a process, not on their involvement in social inclusion policies as such, even though the latter are one of the official objectives of the OMC, and the two issues cannot strictly be distinguished. The focus is on all phases of the OMC process: design and preparation, including agenda-setting; decision-making; implementation; monitoring and evaluation.

Outputs of the study

The study was carried out between January 2009 and June 2010 and resulted in a series of outputs:

- An executive summary presenting the main findings and recommendations available in English, French and German.
- A final report in English comprising:
 - **27 country reports**, giving an overview of the state of affairs regarding stakeholder involvement in the OMC in the social sphere in the different Member States;
 - A series of **interesting practices** and **case studies** of stakeholder involvement in the OMC in Member States;
 - **An analysis of the main characteristics and issues at stake** related to the stakeholders' role in the different process steps of the OMC, highlighting what has improved but also what remains to be done. The findings and comparative assessments of the report are based on the results of the national reports.
 - General recommendations and a discussion paper on how to improve the current situation. These present **recommendations on key quality aspects**/quality assessment criteria, to feed debate and help policy-makers and other stakeholders to adopt better practice in participation and governance-related issues in the context of the OMC, including **tools to reinforce** stakeholder involvement.
- A leaflet presenting the study, produced in English, French and German versions, and available in printed copies for wider dissemination.
- A public website (www.stakeholders-socialinclusion.eu) has been established for **visibility and dissemination** of the results and to provide information on stakeholder involvement in the policy process and on "good governance" more generally.

All outputs of the study are available on the website www.stakeholders-socialinclusion.eu which will be accessible until June 2012.

Definitions and concepts

Stakeholders are understood here to be those people and organisations that are affected by something – for instance a policy, programme, action or organisation – literally, those who have a stake in it. Within each policy level (European to local) different types of stakeholders are involved in social inclusion and social protection policies. In the study, a distinction is made between different categories of stakeholders (see table 2 below).

- Decision-makers in charge of policy decisions. This covers government (ministers and their advisers), parliament, administration (civil servants), and regional/local authorities with decision-making power.
- Secondary stakeholders who are intermediaries in the policy process, such as local and third sector organisations who provide services, advocacy and representative organisations of vulnerable groups, employers, trade unions, experts and the media.
- Primary stakeholders who are those ultimately affected by the policy, most importantly people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, but also the general public.

Within the study five main **degrees of involvement** (see table 3 below) have been used, ranging from the one-way provision of information, through a two-way process of communication and involvement, to full engagement of stakeholders as equal partners and decision-makers. The five levels, developed by the International Association for Public Participation¹, are:

- to inform: one-way dissemination of information to stakeholders on a specific issue;
- to consult: to inform and get feedback from stakeholders, a two-way information channel;
- to involve: gathering stakeholders' views and ensuring that their concerns and views are understood and considered;
- to collaborate: to work with stakeholders as partners throughout a process, including in analyses, development and decision-making;
- to empower: to place final decision-making in the hands of stakeholders.

What do we know about stakeholders' involvement?

In the majority of Member States the common objective of the social OMC of “good governance, transparency and the involvement of stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of policy” has contributed to a broader involvement of stakeholders in the National Action Plans process since 2000.

Three types of improvement have been observed: better policy coordination, more involvement of secondary stakeholders (NGOs, service providers etc.) and, less commonly, of primary stakeholders, i.e. people experiencing poverty.

However in some Member States the OMC remains more of a reporting than a strategic process.

¹ Based on IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, developed by the International Association for Public Participation

Actors involved – relevance of stakeholder involvement:

In more than half of countries, ministers (or secretaries of state) are actively involved in the NAP/NSRSPSI process, and in the other half they at least formally sign the NAP/NSRSPSI off.

Parliamentary involvement is low in many countries: in only one third of countries is the NAP/NSRSPSI debated or even given explicit formal approval.

Secondary stakeholders, specifically NGOs representing people experiencing poverty, are involved in the OMC process in all countries, at the very least in that they are invited to meetings.

Social partners (employers and trade unions) are involved in all countries. In two-thirds of countries they comment on the NAP/NSRSPSI, and in five countries they approve the NAP/NSRSPSI formally.

People experiencing poverty themselves are involved in only half of countries.

Stages and levels of the process – breadth of stakeholder involvement:

Policy cycle:

- Involvement of a broader range of stakeholders has been achieved specifically in the preparation and design phase of the NAP/NSRSPSI.
- At implementation stage, the administration in charge of social inclusion policies is the main actor;
- Explicit stakeholder involvement in monitoring and evaluation remains rare.

Policy coordination:

- Vertical policy coordination among levels of government exists in all countries except three – that is to say, local and/or regional authorities contribute at least once in each NAP/NSRSPSI cycle.
- Horizontal (interministerial) policy coordination: four countries have a permanent body, while in a further 14 countries ministries are consulted on an ad hoc basis.

A stronger impact on stakeholder involvement has been achieved in policy areas where the social OMC had thematic priorities and where European Key Networks are active, e.g. in child poverty and homelessness.

Degree or spectrum of involvement – depth of stakeholder involvement:

Member States use a wide range of methods and interesting practices, and there is no single recipe for all cases. However some approaches seem specifically to contribute to sustainable stakeholder involvement, such as:

- Any mechanisms of institutionalised dialogue (like permanent councils, committees or multi-stakeholder groups);
- Use of new technologies (like participation websites, group decision room method);
- The existence of a kind of fixed framework (code of practice, governance rules, law);
- The holding of regular events/conferences, e.g. specifically to involve people experiencing poverty.

Impact of stakeholder involvement in the OMC process:

There is evidence of a positive impact of stakeholders' involvement on policy process or outcomes in most Member States.

In terms of capacity-building, the lead given by the European Anti Poverty Network² has been instrumental in bringing together coalitions capable of effective dialogue with government in a number of Member States.

How could stakeholder involvement in the OMC be improved?

A number of practical recommendations emerge from the study on stakeholders' involvement in the social OMC. These include recommendations to the European Commission, EU Member States and all stakeholders involved in the process, and are linked to the key quality aspects presented below in table 1.

² Several other thematic EU key networks, like Caritas Europa, Eurochild, Eurodiaconia, FEANTSA, EFSC and MHE, are also members of the overarching network EAPN.

Recommendations to the European Commission

The European Commission should:

- Enhance the visibility of the OMC by assessing and disseminating positive impacts of the process in different national settings. Stronger visibility could also be given to the links between the best-known instrument of the OMC, the National Action Plans, and the other key elements of the OMC, e.g. Peer Reviews;
- Continue requiring Member States within its new “Europe 2020” strategy to submit information on the governance aspects through a regular reporting process;
- Spread good practice on stakeholder involvement and encourage Member States to conduct peer reviews on the issue;
- Encourage Member States to use the European Social Fund, as well as other relevant EU sources of financing – e.g. awareness-raising type of projects – to support the capacity-building and involvement of relevant stakeholders in the OMC process;
- Encourage common standards agreed by Member States regarding the involvement of stakeholders in the social OMC. Key quality aspects have emerged from this study and are presented in table 1 below;
- Play a coordination role to support networking among organisations and services with similar goals and target groups;
- Support capacity-building e.g. through financial support to relevant EU Key Networks.

Recommendations to the European Commission and Member States

The European Commission and Member States should:

- Increase awareness-raising on the OMC and organise easy access to information about the OMC. Public visibility of the European policy process and its implementation at national or any sub-territorial level is important. Within the study one key aspect mentioned was the necessity to integrate the OMC within existing territorial mechanisms (see table 1 below);
- Improve the timing within the OMC process to enable broad stakeholder involvement, e.g. create feedback loops that allow stakeholders sufficient time to react. The question of what is adequate timing has to be tackled and agreed with stakeholders;
- Pay more attention to the quality and continuity of stakeholder involvement in the OMC. This includes the requirement to build the capacity of stakeholders by supporting networking and developing specific national or EU co-financed programmes (e.g. national strategies, ESF funding);
- Address the low public and media visibility of the OMC for example by making documents produced within the social OMC process easily accessible (in national language, appropriate dissemination channels).

Recommendations to Member States

Member States should:

- Map which stakeholders should be involved in the OMC. Special attention should be paid to groups which are not so obvious at first sight, such as social enterprises and banks. The study provides a tool for stakeholder mapping (see table 2 below);
- Strengthen their efforts to stabilise the NGO sector, and specifically organisations representing vulnerable groups, through financial support and capacity-building. The availability of resources is one of the key principles of stakeholder involvement (see table 1 below);
- Ensure that local authorities are more involved in the OMC. It emerges clearly from the study that local authorities are, according to the policy cycle, among the decision-makers or the service providers;
- Demonstrate political commitment to social inclusion and the social OMC e.g. through high-level politicians taking part in OMC events. Political commitment is part of the principles for stakeholder involvement (see table 1);
- Give feedback on the effects of stakeholder engagement and inputs into the OMC process;
- Strengthen their efforts to involve primary stakeholders in the formulation of the national indicators. Some interesting practices are presented in the study;
- Support networking and policy coordination mechanisms bringing together stakeholders (e.g. decision-makers, service providers, advocacy groups, final beneficiaries) working on a specific issue.

Recommendations to all stakeholders

All stakeholders should:

- Reflect on when and how to involve primary stakeholders in the different elements of the OMC;
- Commit themselves to the process and take their engagement and tasks seriously.

Key quality aspects for stakeholders' involvement in the OMC

One of the outputs of the study is a set of key quality aspects for the involvement of stakeholders in the OMC. These key quality aspects were drafted on the basis of the study findings and were discussed and adapted during a working seminar in February 2010 with key actors in the social inclusion strand of the OMC at European and national levels.

These key quality aspects might form a first basis for "quality assessment criteria" or even for a set of indicators for stakeholder involvement in the OMC to be agreed upon by the European Commission and the Member States.

Table 1 shows the 23 key aspects by which the quality of stakeholder involvement in the making of social policy may be assessed. They are divided into three areas: the underlying principles, the methods used and the impact achieved.

Table 1: Key aspects of stakeholder involvement

Principles of stakeholder involvement	
Political commitment	Willingness and capacity of decision-makers to be open to stakeholder contributions
Clear rationale of the process	Integration of the OMC with existing territorial mechanisms Ministers/State Secretaries attend OMC conferences
Public visibility	The rationale for the involvement of stakeholders should be clear for stakeholders
Availability of resources	Easy access to documents of all stakeholders submitted as part of the OMC Stakeholders are aware of the OMC: documents accessible in an easy/national language
Time frame	Adequate resources allocated for stakeholder involvement Stakeholders are recompensed for the cost of their involvement Ensure capacity building for stakeholder involvement
Feedback mechanisms	Clearly defined and adequate time frame Stakeholders get feedback on the way their contributions are treated
Methods of stakeholder involvement	
Identification of stakeholders	Existence of stakeholder mapping
Selection of stakeholders	Transparent and formal selection of stakeholders Gender and diversity requirements taken into account
Methods and tools to involve stakeholders	Availability of tools and instruments to facilitate stakeholder involvement Appropriate methods/tools are used to involve all relevant actors in an inclusive way
Policy coordination	Linking quality of mechanisms with degree of involvement expected Existence of a multi-stakeholder body/forum/committee that prepares strategy documents and coordinates the whole policy process Existence of an inter-ministerial body/mechanism Existence of a vertical coordination mechanism
Monitoring and evaluation	Existence of an ongoing evaluation/monitoring mechanism involving all stakeholders at appropriate level
Impact of stakeholder involvement	
Policy process	Impact of stakeholder involvement on the policy process: for instance, increased credibility or increased ownership
Policy substance	Impact of stakeholder involvement on policy substance: for instance new policy areas, new programmes, improved coordination and improvement of European issues

Tools to improve stakeholders' involvement

Table 2 presents a grid developed within this study to identify relevant actors for a stakeholder mapping at different levels (EU, national, regional and local) in the field of social inclusion policies.

The study uses an existing classification of the possible degrees of stakeholders' involvement and related techniques. This tool is presented in table 3.

Finally, a tool to map the impact of citizen engagement is presented in table 4.

Table 2: Stakeholder mapping in the field of social inclusion

STAKEHOLDERS	EU level	National level	Regional level	Local level
Decision makers				
Government (ministers, advisers)				
Parliament				
Administration (civil servants)				
Secondary stakeholders				
Administration (civil servants)				
Social partners: employers and trade unions				
Representative organisations of service providers				
Representative organisations of vulnerable groups				
Experts				
Media				
Primary stakeholders				
People experiencing poverty and social exclusion				
Public at large				

Table 3: Degrees of stakeholder dialogue and engagement⁴

1. INFORM	2. CONSULT	3. INVOLVE	4. COLLABORATE	5. EMPOWER
Purpose:	Purpose:	Purpose:	Purpose:	Purpose:
To provide stakeholders with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the issues, opportunities and solutions.	To obtain feedback from stakeholders on the findings of analyses, options and/or decisions.	To work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that their concerns and views are consistently understood and considered	To collaborate with stakeholders as partners throughout the process, including in the analyses and development of solutions and in making decisions.	To place final decision-making in the hands of stakeholders.
Promise to stakeholders:	Promise to stakeholders:	Promise to stakeholders:	Promise to stakeholders:	Promise to stakeholders:
We will keep you informed (but we will not find out your views or take these into account in any decisions).	We will keep you informed, will listen to your views and will provide feedback when the decisions are made (but we do not guarantee that your views will influence the decision).	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and views are directly reflected in the analyses and in the solutions developed, and we will provide feedback on how your inputs influenced the final decision.	We will give an important place to your views and experiences during the process, and will seek your suggestions and advice on solutions. We will take your views into account in the final decision, to the maximum extent possible.	We will support you in reaching a consensus and will implement what you decide.
Examples of techniques:	Examples of techniques:	Examples of techniques:	Examples of techniques:	Examples of techniques:
Newsletters Websites Information days	Focus groups Surveys Stakeholder meetings	Workshops Deliberative polling	Stakeholder advisory committees Consensus-building Participatory decision-making	Stakeholder juries Ballots Delegated decisions

⁴ Based on IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, developed by the International Association for Public Participation

Table 4: Mapping four dimensions of the impact of citizen engagement⁵

	Objective	Subjective
Substantive	Useful input from participants	Satisfaction of politicians, policy workers and professionals in relation to substantive results
	Substantive enrichment of the proposed policy	Satisfaction of participants in relation to substantive results
Process-related	Involvement of stakeholders in the policy process	Satisfaction of politicians, policy workers and professionals in relation to the process
	Societal support	Satisfaction of participants in relation to the process
	Acceleration of the policy process	

Source: OECD, 2009

A distinction is made between substance and process impacts and objective and subjective impacts. A combination of these yields four types of impact:

a. Substantive-objective impact:

Citizen engagement yields useful input from participants. Useful means within the policy options, feasible and creative.

Useful input from participants is in practice noticeable in the qualitative improvement of vision, a white paper, a policy plan or a draft decision.

b. Substantive-subjective impact:

Politicians, policy makers and professionals are satisfied with the substantive results of the citizen engagement.

Participants are satisfied with the substantive results of the citizen engagement (they recognise the results).

c. Process-related-objective impact:

Citizen engagement reaches a large number of stakeholders. This group is representative of the entire population that has a real stake in the problem at hand.

There is support in society for the policy plan or draft decision at hand.

Reduction of the time the entire process will take and the total decision making costs, as a consequence of a reduction of formal participation and appeals.

d. Process-related-subjective impact:

Politicians, policy-makers and professionals are satisfied with the process of citizen engagement.

Participants are satisfied with the process of citizen engagement.

⁵ OECD, *Focus on Citizens: Public engagement for better policy and services*. Paris, 2009, p. 181.

The study was carried out by INBAS GmbH and Engender asbl on behalf of the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in 2009 and 2010.

It was funded by Progress, the European Union's programme for Employment and Social Solidarity 2007-2013.

Complete documentation on the project can be found at:

www.stakeholders-socialinclusion.eu

This document was published in 2010.

