

# CONCEPT - The European Social Inclusion Process, Civil Society and the Caritas Contribution

*Written by the Von Hügel Institute, St Edmund's College, Cambridge*



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**Brussels, February 2008**





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Brussels, February 2008

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# Preface

## ■ Working for a Value Driven Europe

Values are the most powerful drivers and carriers of social cohesion and community life. Given this intuition and faith based conviction, *Caritas Europa* is engaged in grass roots social projects in all the 27 countries of the European Union as well as in political awareness building within the civil society and towards local, national and European politicians and institutions.

Building a humane space for all people living within the territory of the European Union requires political determination and a well functioning market, taking into account the economic evolution and a comprehensive vision of well being of individual persons and the different communities. In this regard, social action can no longer be perceived as a tool to repair what went wrong in society. Social action has to become a major and an integral part of the labour market itself and of the different communities. It has to become a matter of concern for politicians and an instrument for responsible management of the society.

Social action as a pure and simple mechanic 'social engineering instrument' would be not only a threat for the consumers (to use the European wording) and for those delivering it, but ultimately also for society as a whole. Technically speaking, people expressing social needs are not asking for 'quick fixes'. They are asking to be accompanied by individual persons and by society as a whole. They need to be reassured that they are a full and valid member of society, rather than a problem. This is exactly where the values that are driving social action are making the difference. It is also in this context that *Caritas Europa* and its member organisations, within the framework of the European Union's social inclusion strategies, have been looking 'behind the scenes' in order to understand, to monitor and to contribute to the process of creation of so called National Strategy Reports for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NSR/spsi).

*Caritas Europa* hopes to make another specific contribution with this report on our assessment of a social Europe, seen within the context of the Open Method of Coordination of the European Union on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. The effort made by *Caritas* members in more than 20 EU Member States in civil dialogue with their governments and at the level of the European Secretariat in partnership with the EU institutions was indeed a valuable investment. The CONCEPT programme has facilitated a stronger direct



*Caritas* contribution to European and national strategies and policies with regard to social inclusion. There is a wealth of expertise and practical experience in dealing with poverty in the European *Caritas* network, based on *Caritas* values and on *Caritas* work, and through the CONCEPT programme this is now better linked to the appropriate policy processes at European and national levels

Values are indeed like stars. They are attracting the attention of people, they are providing orientation for all. The Lisbon Treaty which for the time being is under ratification describes some key values which should indeed nourish a common and shared vision of a new Europe, promoting economic and sustainable development in the same way and with the same commitment in order to promote the integral development of the human person and his/her communities.

We are not looking for social engineering and we are not looking for political wordsmith. We are looking for a humane society in which nobody will be excluded or may be at risk to be excluded one day. We need a welcoming Europe, a home for all men and women, children and elderly, refugees and migrants, workers and those who lost their work.

This report shows the ways in which *Caritas Europa* has been able to contribute at different levels to the Community Action Program of the European Union. May this report become not only a source of information about what we have achieved together but may it also become an instrument launching reflection and meaningful thinking about a good future for Europe.

**Erny Gillen**

*President of Caritas Europa*



# Executive Summary

## ■ 1. The Report

This report is a second output of the CONCEPT Programme, following on from the interim *Report on the Analysis of the Quality, Coherence and Potential Effectiveness of the National Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008*, published in February 2007. Largely based on the insights drawn by CONCEPT participants from their involvement in the process, it aims to provide an overall assessment of the NSR/spsi, their design and the first stages of implementation.

## ■ 2. The Research Focus

We have assessed the NSRs against '**European Public Value**' (EPV) and the **four axes** framework.

Building on social approach to 'public value' we asked :

- To what extent has the NSR/spsi process empowered civil society and built its capacity ?
- To what extent has the NSR/spsi process led to new governance coalitions being formed ?
- To what extent has the NSR/spsi process led to innovation, or the potential for public policy and/or civil society innovation ?

To test the NSR process against *Caritas Europa's* powerful social vision we have further developed these three questions alongside the *Caritas Europa Basic Principles for a Sustainable Social System*. We call this joint approach '**European Public Value**', applying to the social dimension of Europe a fresh model for assessing the EU policy process.

Moreover, *Caritas Europa* was keen from the outset to test this framework along **four complementary axes** which could contribute to the Open Method of Coordination in the area of social inclusion in particular.

## ■ 3. Methodology

Our assessment of NSR/spsi content, design and implementation processes is based on the insights of individual CONCEPT participants, expressed especially during the first year of the

CONCEPT Programme, as well as on the ideas and insights of the Geographical Groups and Thematic Groups which have been regularly meeting during the second year of the Programme. To get access to both individual and group insights, we have used two questionnaires and structured interviews with CONCEPT participants.

## ■ 4. Key Findings

### 4.1. The NSR/spsi Monitoring

The type and depth of civil society involvement in monitoring the implementation has varied and continues to vary across Member States. Most CONCEPT participants and civil society organisations are involved in monitoring their own governments' national social policies although they may or may not be involved specifically with the monitoring of the NSR/spsi. Where monitoring did take place it has usually taken three distinct forms :

- Specific monitoring events and projects;
- Partnership arrangements;
- Broad coalitions of NGOs.

It must be noted however that this report can only be a first stage of implementation monitoring which started in late spring 2007. A full implementation report would only be possible in 2008, after closing of the NSRs' implementation period 2006–2008.

### 4.2. Common Policy Problems

#### • Measurement of Progress

For many CONCEPT participants it was difficult to assess the impact of strategies and policies because of the lack of specific targets, timeframes and budgets. NSRs often use different time frames and definitions than the existing or new government plans and this adds to confusion and a reduction in transparency. In addition, most CONCEPT participants feel that while measures seem adequate it is too early to assess their effectiveness.

#### • Articulation with Wider Social Policy

Most CONCEPT participants note that the development of social policy in Member States is given more importance than the preparation of the NSR/spsi. The latter should be a source of policy innovation because of the civil society engagement they ought rightly to encourage, therefore there needs to be an integration of this social innovation and wider policy plans.

### 4.3. The Question of Political Commitment

#### • Support from Parliament and Politicians

Most CONCEPT participants reported that their MPs and Parliaments were not closely involved with the NSR/spsi. Given the varying structures of European state administrations it



was felt that the European political parties and the **Members of the European Parliament could be viewed as potential allies in the NSR/spsi process.**

- **Engagement of Federal, Regional and Local Governments**

CONCEPT participants thought there should be greater collaboration between central government and municipalities in the design of the NSR/spsi and the subsequent monitoring of implementation. A joined up strategy would integrate a federal, regional and local level strategy into the NSR/spsi process.

- **Other Reservations**

There were a number of areas where immense frustration had set in or where a not fully planned attempt to partner with civil society had actually had the reverse effect. Most commonly, 'excessive speed' of 'consultation' was stated, along with a major mismatch between the e-capability of government and civil society bodies. Quite often CONCEPT participants lamented the mismatch between the experiences of poverty articulated by them in the NSR/spsi design process and their absence from the final Reports.

#### **4.4. European Public Value and the Four Axes – The Positive Effects of Participation**

Overall it could be noted that, in the countries where (a) there was good up-linkage to the European level and/or (b) the process was relatively more grounded in information sharing and genuine dialogue, the positive impacts increased significantly.

In these countries in particular key positive outcomes included :

- Engagement in the European level learning and sharing process which helped to increase impact at the national level because of a wider familiarity with the European Social Inclusion process and Lisbon strategy;
- More wide ranging, deeper and – likely – longer lasting relationships were made across government and between civil society and government;
- Civil society's knowledge, capacity and competence was enhanced because of an encounter with political pressures and priority setting;
- Policy-makers' learning and capacity was enhanced because, in some instances, civil servants had their first sustained encounters with the third sector.

In this sense we judge the process to have made significant contributions to enhancing 'European Public Value' and to meeting the specific hopes of *Caritas Europa* as expressed in the four axes.







# *Section One :*

## *Europe and Social Inclusion :*

### *Towards a Pan European Idea of Social Inclusion and Innovation ?*

#### ■ 1. Introduction

It is a truism to suggest that a political and economic project such as the European Union provokes much practical and theoretical debate both at the international level and at the national and regional levels : on the one hand there is the practical question of the integration of national and European policy processes into one another. This in turn is linked to 'competence'. On the other hand there are the profound theoretical challenges that arise from European political development. This is no less the case with regard to the social dimension of Lisbon on the one hand and the Commission's fresh engagement with civil society networks on the other. In this sense CONCEPT raises profound questions of theory as well as hard policy practice and civil society capacity.

European policy making sits at the interface between 'the national', 'the regional' and 'the international'. It also rests at the nexus of the 'private', 'public' and 'third' sectors. For this reason many writers have attempted to delineate 'Europe' specific frameworks for understanding the way in which policies are made, and the 'sovereignty' of individual nations is to a lesser or greater extent 'pooled' together. This has been linked to the question of the extent to which, in form and manner, policies crowd each other out and/or add value across the EU. Others have criticised such positions preferring to reach for national level analyses or to apply frameworks of political economy originally designed for national level analysis (Cooper 2000).

In relation to social inclusion the mobilisation of traditional theories is an arguable point. The European Commission does not have extensive 'competence' with regard to social policy and yet its Social Inclusion Process requires Member States to submit national social inclusion strategies and to participate in national peer review processes. Meanwhile, at the level of officials there is inter-governmental exchange of insights, and a sharing of best practice as well as aspects of intended and unintended policy outcomes.

Moreover, the Commission, by choosing to strategically fund a number of civil society networks, in one sense takes responsibility for the facilitation of the development of social impacts at the national level, raises the profile of the NSR/spsi (from now on referred to as NSR) and the wider inclusion process, and involves itself, arguably, in blurring some lines with regard to its reach, impact and future contribution. *Caritas* member organisations have found



this support significant, meaningful and of benefit both to themselves and the development of a lasting European social dimension.

In reflecting on this significance, it is our contention that a number of patterns may be emerging that suggests the early stage development of a community of ideas and actions around which can be discerned the **embryo of a community of interest with regard to social exclusion** across the Member States. Without wishing to overstate the case we want to suggest that there are some parallels, both in terms of development and in terms of long term intent, with the suggested impact of values and ideas in the emergence of support for the original European Monetary Union idea. In that case a multifaceted coalition of ideas and political actions gradually came together to respond to economic demands and from there to develop coherent visions of the multi-dimensional challenges that the lack of a European Monetary Union suggested to them (Collignon 2003, Stone and Denham 2004). The coalition of ideas and agencies that then rose up to work for Monetary Union was successful. Together they have been called an 'epistemic community'.

Poverty of course is an even greater moral challenge than Monetary Union, and a cross-Europe consensus as to its scope, impact and eradication would – for *Caritas Europa* – be a key and greater step forward. In contributing to such a goal, CONCEPT is of merit in its own right. In deepening the commitment throughout the EU's largest civil society federation it has put down a marker for future pan European debates and innovation for the social inclusion agenda. The idea of an epistemic community also provides an entry point in pursuit of justice for the 'expressive power' of the Churches (Hanson 1989) in their collaboration with NGOs more broadly. By 'expressive power' we mean the ability of the Church in particular and NGOs in general to advocate and advance new culture shifts, fresh values, renewed vision.

This report draws heavily on two major research questionnaires distributed to each CONCEPT participant. It also draws on over twenty individual interviews with the same individuals and members of *Caritas* staff. As our findings suggest, a 'market' Europe alone will not suffice and the Church, her agencies and faith-based organisations have a unique contribution to make.





# Section Two :

## *Caritas, Europe and the Inclusion Process*

### ■ 2.1. Caritas Europa, Civil Society and Active Citizenship

#### 2.1.1. Global / Local Outreach

*Caritas Europa* is both like and unlike other civil society networks. It is like in so far as it is a mainstream third sector actor and voluntary sector organisation present, and most often at the centre, of the lives of both current Member States and all candidate, and likely 'future candidate', countries. This mainstream presence makes it a service provider of domiciliary care and hospitals, community development projects and credit unions, social enterprises and student volunteering, soup kitchens and homeless centres, refugee centres and older peoples' services, nursing homes and research institutes to name but a few. It is also involved in international relief and development work by which it gains huge insights and makes vital contributions. These two strands of its work inform its critical contribution to policy advocacy in the public sphere.

How does *Caritas Europa* do this ? On one hand the network harnesses – literally – millions of volunteers and paid staff. In this sense it is a major economic as well as social force. On the other hand it raises hundreds of millions of restricted and unrestricted income streams from voluntary donations and adds to these through its partnerships with national, regional and local governments. Moreover, in some parts of the EU it has social economy trading revenues.

*Caritas* takes its pan European role as a catalyst seriously too. For example, *Caritas Austria* and *Caritas Italy* are significant funders of new work in South East Europe while *Caritas Germany* supports social innovation in Poland and Ukraine. *Caritas Europa* also makes major contributions, through its capacity building programmes, to the new and emerging *Caritas* organisations.

A European debate without the Commission's engagement with this institutional reach from Brussels to thousands of 'capillary' local branches would be a half rendering of a full aspiration to social partnership. It would weaken the European Commission.

However, *Caritas Europa* is unlike other networks in that it also forms an integral part of the fibre of Europe's largest faith community, the Catholic Church. While this status could be downplayed as being of little interest in secular policy debates, such a perspective, arguably, would underestimate the current social contribution that arises from this interface.



### **2.1.2. Bridge to Social Capital of Faith Communities**

Firstly, *Caritas Europa* member organisations play a unique role in bridging the social capital of religious congregations to wider civic involvement through the *Caritas* network. This is good both in itself and because of its contribution to social cohesion in the EU at a time when religious communities can be at risk of becoming pools of 'bonded' social capital without wider civic relationships.

Inward looking religious communities can put social cohesion and inclusion at risk (Putnam 2000) However, *Caritas* is one of the key means by which the largest European faith community is constantly being refocused towards the wider civic contribution that it can make. It is a positive contribution without parallel while being an exemplar to other communities and networks.

### **2.1.3. Impact on Other Networks**

Secondly, because *Caritas Europa* is a broad general purpose civil society network, it also has the reach and ability to contribute to the capacity building and development of other networks with a more specialised mandate. *Caritas Italy*, for example, has made a major contribution to the work of FEANTSA, supporting FIO. psd, its Italian Member. At the same time, other *Caritas* organisations are in dialogue with the ongoing work of *Eurochild* and EAPN. As part of the CONCEPT process *Caritas Europa* has enjoyed collaboration and networking with both these bodies and *Eurodiaconia*, the federation of Reformed Churches.

### **2.1.4. Reaching to the New Europe**

Thirdly, *Caritas Europa* is unique among the major civil society networks in the European Union in that its full and equal membership network reaches not only across the EU but also into countries which are 'candidate' countries or which are likely to become candidate countries. These include Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo and Turkey. Furthermore *Caritas Europa's* membership also reaches to Russia, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova and a number of other states. All of these organisations are briefed on CONCEPT activity and share examples of good practice. In turn *Caritas Europa* feeds into the *Caritas Internationalis* confederation which itself constitutes a network with 162 national members across the globe. This extensive networking, institutional and promotional reach has major advantages both for the organisations concerned and for the wider dissemination of European Union good practice to candidate countries and further afield.

### **2.1.5. Unique Resource of Principle**

Fourthly, *Caritas Europa* member organisations are able to draw on a rich tradition of social thought which adds both a strong social dimension to its reflections and a considered ground upon which to root its participation in the movement towards an integrated European

social vision and inclusion process. To develop this dimension even further *Caritas Europa* has consciously elucidated its *Basic Principles for a Sustainable Social System* as a means by which to draw together its own practical experience in every EU Member and candidate state (and beyond) and its understanding of the Church's social teaching tradition. This combination of a social vision rooted in practice, and a tradition of social thought grounded in a faith community, gives *Caritas Europa* a unique resource of principle which it considers to be of major significance as Europe changes, expands and renews.

#### **2.1.6. A Unique Capacity for Social Innovation ?**

Lastly, in combination, *Caritas's* pan European and extra-European institutional reach, links to the faith communities, partnerships with wider civil society and powerful principle base also have a wider implication both for itself and for the most effective way for the Commission to 'cluster' funding for social innovation and inclusion in the future.

Most government 'innovation' investment in the OECD is concentrated on the development of technologies and products. According to leading European policy advisor a significant proportion of such strategic funds are focused on particular geographical areas in order to secure synergies of knowledge and step-change. However, by comparison with these investments, limited amounts are targeted at the development of new services and hardly any, proportionately speaking, at a formally structured social innovation process (Mulgan 2006).

This should be a major policy worry not only for DGs concerned with social issues, but also for those charged with keeping Europe at the forefront of innovative knowledge economies where the health and social services sectors and public sector procurement are increasing in volume and significance.

In this arena the *Caritas* family occupies a unique position in that it is more than a geographical clustering of potential social innovation

The Austrian NSR, for example, mentioned *Caritas Austria's* work in the area of migrants' health as an example of good practice. However, it could also have mentioned its pioneering work with *Erste Bank* to develop a social enterprise bank for the 'unbankable' – those who experience financial exclusion due to their lack of access to such facilities. Also in Austria one should note the national days in which *Caritas Austria* plays a key part and which enables thousands of young people to work and then gift back that day's salary to civic causes. It creates a sustainable model of civic action which is now being replicated in Kosovo.

Meanwhile, as a result of learning from the work of *Caritas's* US partner, *Catholic Charities USA*, the UK government has recently launched a new model of social enterprise schooling aimed at developing the entrepreneurial and learning habits of teenage boys and girls with very high levels of school truancy. This international knowledge transfer was facilitated directly by the UK CONCEPT partner (Davis 2007).

Across the *Caritas* network are innovative models, social capital and knowledge resources seeking to be unleashed for the benefit of social innovation in the policy, private and third sectors. CONCEPT has enhanced this potential.

## ■ 2.2. Caritas Social Principles and European Public Value

We have already mentioned *Caritas Europa's* unique principle base. In this section, we expand on these observations and set out the method by which we have gone about using them to assess the process and impact of CONCEPT.

We judged it important to seek to establish more objectively the criteria by which *Caritas Europa*, comprising its members in the EU and beyond, can assess Member States' NSRs and their implementation.

Upon reflection, and in the context of ongoing insights gained from *Caritas Europa's* involvement in the CONCEPT process, we have assessed the NSRs against what we have called '**European Public Value**' (EPV). We have also added to this a **four axis** assessment designed by the CONCEPT Steering Committee

EPV builds on the work of Professor Mark Moore at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard who has argued that **the social sector in general, and the voluntary sector in particular needs a new matrix, beyond profit, by which to mobilise and measure the 'public value added' of public policy.** This is contrasted with the narrow financial measures disseminated under the classical Anglo-Saxon model of 'shareholder value' (Moore 1995).

Moore's work focusing on the US context has been adapted by academics in the English regions and in the Nordic countries and by public and voluntary sector practitioners in the new accession countries among others (Davis 2006, Bennington 2006).

'Public Value' is doing more than simply 'what the public values'. A simple consumerism is inadequate for the social task. Building on the more social approach to 'public value' we have devised a framework which seeks to ask :

- To what extent has the NSR process empowered civil society and built its capacity ?
- To what extent has the NSR process led to new governance coalitions being formed ?
- To what extent has the NSR process led to innovation, or the potential for public policy and/or civil society innovation ?

Because we have also wanted to test the NSR process against *Caritas Europa's* powerful social vision we have further developed these three questions alongside the principles that *Caritas Europa's* members regard as key :

- A rights based welfare system;
- A welfare system that is sustainable and funded not only from income taxes but also by the reduction of tax evasion and an increase in corporate taxation;

- Free education, as of right, until the age of majority;
- Access to employment according to qualifications and personal and family situation;
- Health care system guaranteeing the universality, accessibility, affordability and the sustainability of health and long term care;
- Access to decent and affordable housing;
- High quality, needs-orientated system of social services aimed at empowerment;
- Access to social, political, cultural and economic participation and decision-making as a basic right as well as availability of information and resources to inform such participation in Member States;
- Dialogue between the public, private and voluntary sectors as a habit at the heart of society;
- Public policy and third sector priorities with a 'preferential option for the poor'.

We call this joint approach '**European Public Value**', applying to the social dimension of Europe a fresh model for assessing the EU policy process.

Moreover, *Caritas Europa* was keen from the outset to test this framework along four complementary axes which could contribute to the Open Method of Coordination in the area of social inclusion in particular. These axes were to :

- Encourage and enhance the participation of member organisations (MOs) in the NSR process (Axis 1).
- Foster and intensify trans-national partnerships, dialogue and exchange of best practices between *Caritas* MOs in order to improve their contribution to the NSR process (Axis 2).
- Ensure an effective two-sided (bottom-up and top-down) process of designing, implementing, steering and monitoring European social inclusion projects and programmes within the *Caritas Europa* network at the EU level (Axis 3).
- Contribute to the Open Method of Coordination in the area of Social Inclusion at the European level (Axis 4).

The CONCEPT activities were intended to contribute to the activation of these four axes.









# Section Three :

## Concept and its Contribution to NSR Process

### ■ 3.1. The CONCEPT Project : Scope and Method

One of the key aims of CONCEPT was to build a network of national *Caritas* experts on social inclusion, the Open Method of Coordination and the NSR/spsi process in 27 countries (EU 15 + EU 10 + Bulgaria + Romania). The list of participating countries is included in Appendix 1.

In the first year (1 December 2005 - 30 November 2006), the key goal of CONCEPT was to enable network participants to contribute to the process of developing the NSRs 2006-2008. In pursuit of this goal, *Caritas Europa* used **twinning arrangements** under which each of the 13 *Caritas* organisations taking part in CONCEPT encouraged and facilitated active involvement of one other European *Caritas* organisation in the NSR process. This led to the network expansion and the development of bilateral partnerships between *Caritas* organisations in the area of social inclusion.

To be able to effectively engage in the NSR process, CONCEPT participants familiarised themselves with the first and second waves of National Action Plans (2001-2003, 2003-2005), their country's chapter in the Joint Report on Social Inclusion and Social Protection and National Reform Programme and their assessments by the European Commission. They also made contacts with their national ministries in charge of the NSR design, national members of their Social Protection Committee and their designated lead civil servant for the process at the EU level. In most cases, this served as the beginning of a more or less effective dialogue with national governments which enabled CONCEPT participants to contribute to the design and monitoring of the NSRs 2006-2008.

In the second year (1 December 2006 - 30 November 2007), CONCEPT participants, aimed at monitoring the initial implementation of NSRs at national, regional and local level. To further build their capacity and facilitate mutual learning on a broader scale, *Caritas Europa* enhanced the 'twinning arrangement' idea by using **geographical** and **thematic groups**. A list of groups can be found in Appendix 2.

**Geographical groups** sought to bring together CONCEPT participants from countries with similarities in language, culture, state structure and social policy challenges. These groups agreed to focus on the governance processes, experiences and challenges in relation to NSR design and implementation.

By contrast, **thematic groups** sought to network on the grounds of expertise and organisational concern. It was intended that this would enable deeper reflection around the key social policy issues and enhance mutual learning between organisations coming from geographically different regions and hence very different political, social and cultural backgrounds.

Both 'geographical' and 'thematic' groups were a useful tool for sharing NSR-related insights, challenges and best practices between CONCEPT participants. The groups completed their work by elucidating joint policy recommendations at the EU, national and *Caritas* network level with regard to civil society participation in the NSR process and key social policy issues. The insights developed by the groups make a significant contribution to Sections Four and Five of this report.

One of the interim outcomes of CONCEPT I was a *Report on the Analysis of the Quality, Coherence and Potential Effectiveness of the National Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008*. It was largely based on the insights drawn by CONCEPT participants from their involvement in NSR design and early stages of implementation. This interim evaluation report served as an important stepping stone for the current Final Report and itself attracted significant media, policy and civil society interest. It has been distributed in two languages across civil society networks in the EU and has proved to be a useful information source for them too.

## ■ 3.2. The NSR Design Stage in More Detail – CONCEPT Year One

In our interim report we described in detail the range and impact of the varying strategies used by *Caritas* member organisations to influence the design and consideration of the NSRs 2006-2008. In this section, we do not intend to repeat our previous work. Nevertheless to capture the diversity of *Caritas's* policy, community and cross-sectoral access – reaching both 'up' and 'down' – we describe here a number of member organisation activities which arose in CONCEPT year one and which we judge to be emblematic of *Caritas's* current scope and potential in this field.

We especially note the diversity of advocacy actions and strategic impacts of *Caritas Europa* members at the national level. The risk of taking a wide European view is that this huge variety of contributions may be typified into a single response.

### **3.2.1. Ireland and Sweden : Social Partnership and Government Dialogue**

#### **IRELAND**

Ireland has a unique Social Partnership which pre-dates the NSR process. It consists of four pillars : employers, unions, farming organisations and the community and voluntary sector. In total, 17 third sector organisations were involved in the Social Partnership process. They

represented ten strands : older people, children and youth, labour market, housing, poverty, disability and caring, local and rural, housing, gender, social analysis and voluntary network. They played an active part in the preparation of the NSR. So too did a wide range of other third sector organisations, both national and local, who responded to the Government's open invitation to participate in preparatory seminars and to make written submissions. The NSR published in February 2007 forms an integral part of the National Agreement covering the period 2006-2015.

The *Caritas* partner in Ireland, CORI Justice Commission, was the only organisation representing the social analysis strand and was described to us as unique in the Irish context for both its formal role and the informal high regard it is held in by those of all parties. Both formal and informal routes to influence were used.

Indeed CORI Justice was a key participant and influencer in the NSR process and has been actively involved in the Social Partnership since 1996. CORI drew government's attention to the fact that Ireland is following a number of meta-strategies - NRP, Lisbon Strategy, National Development Plan, National Spatial Strategy, NSR - that are to some extent overlapping and therefore have to be properly integrated. CORI, as part of the Social Partnership Agreement, is now involved in monitoring the implementation of the NSR.

## **SWEDEN**

*Caritas Sweden* reports on positive developments in civil society engagement and the involvement of people with a direct experience of poverty. In Sweden, 'Network Against Exclusion' has long been established, and includes representatives from NGOs, the trade unions and faith organisations including *Caritas*. This network is the dialogue partner with the government.

In 2003 the Swedish Government decided to set up a Commission for service user influence on social development issues. It is located in the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and is chaired by the Minister for Public Health and Social Services. The Commission includes representatives from the Network Against Exclusion, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and the Regional and National Boards of Health and Welfare. The Commission's work is focused on particularly vulnerable service users and on monitoring the implementation of the NSR. It meets four times a year and between meetings acts as a network.

*Caritas Sweden together with other stakeholders is continuously involved in the consultation and monitoring of the implementation of the NSR. The Swedish Government attempts to mobilise all actors for tackling financial and social vulnerability by encouraging and supporting local processes aimed at social inclusion in partnership between municipalities, government agencies and NGOs [Caritas Sweden].*

There has been good collaboration across government departments and with civil society in the implementation of the Swedish NSR.

*A consistent theme as far as Sweden is concerned is the strengthened collaboration and partnership at all levels of society, as well as a clear users' perspective. In the continuing work there has been consultation, for instance, with the Network Against Social Exclusion, including Caritas [Caritas Sweden].*

Most of the proposals put forward by *Caritas* and other NGOs have been included in the NSR and because they were involved in CONCEPT *Caritas Sweden* were able to bring an EU dimension to discussions within the NGO network.

### **3.2.2. United Kingdom : Publications, Press and Politicians**

In the UK, *Caritas* was going through a process of re-organisation at the start of the CONCEPT process. This meant that while its Scottish wing was able to feed directly into the early parts of the project, its English and Welsh branch joined CONCEPT only half way into its first phase. Northern Ireland was looked after by the Irish CONCEPT partner as *Caritas* is organised as a single 'Island of Ireland' entity.

These factors did not prove a major obstacle from a *Caritas Europa* perspective - in the UK the government had already established its formal group of partners as part of the highly structured - and innovative - 'Getting Heard' process. Other civil society actors expressed some reservations as to the appropriateness of the local *Caritas* agency joining the formal grouping at this stage and so a successful plan was devised to formally involve *Caritas* at the civil society level at a subsequent stage.

In the meantime *Caritas* focused on a number of different strategies to put the NSR process and the social inclusion debate on the map in the UK. This strategy shows that even when a civil society network is not at a stage where it is formally partnered it can open up and influence the discussion.

In the UK the *Caritas* partner :

- Circulated background briefings to faith based community groups across the country and held local discussions, and not only in Church based groups.
- Held meetings with the leading back bench politicians and the Prime Minister's envoy on the faith communities.
- Distributed *Caritas* interim assessment of the NSRs to every Bishop in the country and to Chief Executives of regional voluntary organisations.
- Made over 20 speaking engagements and lectures across the country in which the NSR was referred to, discussed and where the NSR interim assessment was explained.
- Worked hard to gain the interim report a media profile. It was the subject of a major article in the national Church press and the subject of a leader column in *The Independent*, a major national newspaper. It was quoted by a Green MEP on the UK's leading TV current affairs debate programme.



### **3.2.3. France : Hearing the Cry of the Poor**

The French contribution to CONCEPT was slowed down by staff changes and issues of language but took a step forward when a former senior French civil servant agreed to be the CONCEPT link as a volunteer. Subsequently, he was replaced by a senior member of the *Secours Catholique* management team who has acted with speed to fully integrate the work located in France into the CONCEPT process.

It is of note that this fresh networking will draw a major *Secours Catholique* programme into the CONCEPT level both adding capacity to *Caritas Europa* and providing fresh evidence and insights at the European Commission level.

To summarise the programme briefly, it involves a nationwide action-research survey that will secure questionnaire responses from 4,000 people and children with direct experience of poverty. The insights gained will form the basis for the future mobilisation and advocacy with a particular emphasis on involving poor people themselves in speaking out. The final report will form a part of the advocacy platform for *Caritas Europa*.

Moreover, during the French presidency of the European Union (July to December 2008), *Secours Catholique* will work closely with *Caritas Europa* to put forward recommendations to tackle child and family poverty. The key strength of the programme is that it gives children living in poverty an opportunity to express their views on their lives, their hopes, aspirations and fears for the future.

From the *Caritas Europa* perspective, *Secours Catholique's* work is regarded as a strikingly innovative 'national pilot project' which could be replicated in other Member States in due course.

### **3.2.4. Greece and Malta : Volunteers and Social Impact**

#### ***Caritas Athens and Mobilising Volunteers***

In Greece, the CONCEPT partner is a division of *Caritas Athens*, with a total staff of five and seventy volunteers per week. Called the *Caritas Athens Refugee Programme*, it focuses on providing food and assistance to refugees and migrants (including social counselling, clothes distribution, a vaccination programme for children, Greek and English lessons).

Recently *Caritas Athens* was asked by the IMEPO, the Hellenic Migration Policy Institute, to help with data on new migrants arriving in Greece. Researchers from Athens University came to the *Caritas Athens Refugee Programme* and interviewed refugees. Also, through a number of informal meetings, Government officials working on migration issues learned about many particular problems faced by migrants, especially those who, after having been legally employed for a period of time, no longer have residence and work permits. Through a Programme with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, *Caritas Athens* helps long term unemployed migrants get professional training and find new work.

In the CONCEPT programme, *Caritas Athens* worked solely using (very able) volunteers, representing its ability through the link to the faith community to bring forward contributors across lines of class and geography.

### ***Malta – Social Impact***

*Caritas Malta* sees a substantial improvement in the way social NGOs have been consulted and have participated in the development of social policy. A major step forward has been the introduction in 2007 of the Voluntary Organisation Act, which gives legal recognition and values the work of a civil society organisation like *Caritas*.

*Caritas Malta* believes that greater efforts are needed to make the NSR not just a government report but also a nationwide document that promotes citizens' responsibility in the field of social inclusion. This is significant taking into account its own institutional capacity as again most services and advocacy are provided by hundreds of volunteers supported by only a small number of paid staff.

### **3.2.5. Romania : Taking the First Step**

This was not only the first time that *Caritas Romania* had become involved in NSR design but also the first time that civil society had engaged in such a fashion with government policy design. This was a risk for both *Caritas* and the government but one that thus far has begun to bear fruits as it enhanced *Caritas's* experience base and the principle of civil society involvement. As a result, *Caritas Romania* is now able to build on its first engagement.

## **■ 3.3 The NSR Monitoring Stage in More Detail – Concept Year 2**

As we mentioned, the second year of CONCEPT focused on monitoring the first steps towards implementation of the NSRs. This section describes in more detail some representative actions taken by CONCEPT participants.

At the outset it should be made clear that the type and depth of civil society involvement in monitoring the implementation has varied and continues to vary across Member States. Most CONCEPT participants and civil society organisations are involved in monitoring their own governments' national social policies although they may or may not be involved specifically with the monitoring of the NSRs. This is because most member organisations agreed it was more important to monitor NSRs in the context of government's national social policy in general rather than in isolation.

Having said this it should be noted that significant work has been completed and this has usually taken three distinct forms :

- Specific monitoring events and projects;
- Partnership arrangements;
- Broad coalitions of NGOs.

### **3.3.1. Specific Monitoring Events and Projects**

In the **UK** a conference was convened by the Department of Work and Pensions (leading department) with all the stakeholders. This included NGOs and people with direct experience of poverty. The conference was judged a great success by all participants and provided a form of qualitative feedback on what was happening on the ground. Projects have also been set up in three British cities to review and monitor which strategies work and do not work at a local level. These local test projects have been funded from the NAP (National Action Plan) Inclusion Awareness Programme.

Along with **Sweden** and **Belgium** the UK has provided examples of how people with experience of poverty can be involved in defining their problems and helping to devise policies that will address poverty even if further progress needs to be made.

In **Sweden** the NGO network, of which *Caritas Sweden* is a member, was one of the organisers of a large conference in 2007 for NGOs, politicians and official stakeholders. This enabled the NGOs in Sweden to be significant actors in the ongoing debates about poverty and social inclusion. Also, during 2007, regional networks of NGOs and government bodies attempted to implement Local Action Plans (LAPs) in four cities.

### **3.3.2. Participation in Monitoring Through Partnership**

There are a number of examples where *Caritas* organisations have been invited to be part of official bodies monitoring progress. In other cases NGOs, including *Caritas*, have come together to informally monitor progress. In countries where *Caritas* has a significant presence in delivering social services, there is often a strong bilateral relationship with the relevant ministry which allows for a closer monitoring of delivery. This is the case in **Germany**.

CORI Justice, the CONCEPT participant from **Ireland**, is a member of the Social Partnership process which is trying to ensure that monitoring of implementation will be done regularly and effectively. As we have noted earlier, CORI plays a key role on behalf of the wider third sector in this regard.

*Within the Social Partnership process there is a steering group, of which CORI Justice is a member, which meets quarterly to monitor progress. There is also a quarterly meeting of all social partners and government to assess progress [CORI Justice].*

In **Luxembourg**, the ministry in charge of NSR runs an official NSR Inclusion working group of which *Caritas* is a member. *It is an advisory organ, it has been functioning since 2001 but has no mandate regarding monitoring of the implementation process. Caritas Luxembourg has suggested that this working group could also be used for monitoring.*

### **3.3.3. Participation in Monitoring Through Broad Coalition Movements**

*Caritas Malta reports that no organisations other than the Government were invited to monitor the implementation process of the National Strategy. Consequently Caritas Malta and EAPN members are doing their own monitoring of the situation. Nevertheless Caritas Malta sees an overall improvement in civil society engagement : there is a substantial improvement in the way social NGOs have been consulted and participated in social policy making but more needs to be done.*

*Caritas's partner organisations in the **Netherlands** are also part of a Social Coalition, a thematic network of about 40 national and local organisations : This coalition has a voluntary secretariat that organises bi-annual meetings with the Ministry of Social Affairs. In these meetings the NSR has been discussed but not in the context of wider EU policies or the Lisbon strategy. The focus is predominantly national and directed at the national government policies.*

Even when there are no formal monitoring procedures, national NGO umbrella organisations such as Caritas and EAPN do perform an important role in following what is happening with regard to the implementation of the NSR. This is the case in **Italy** :

*There is no formal involvement of civil society and local government in monitoring the implementation of the NSR. But an informal round table with the Social Security Ministry was used by the Minister as an informal and cheap advisory body for many social issues. In fact Caritas Italy would like there to be established an integrated working group for each of the Priority Policy Objectives [Caritas Italy].*

#### ***Croatia : Taking the First Step***

Although Croatia is still a candidate member of the EU, *Caritas Croatia* has been a participant in part of the CONCEPT process. Through its network of 1500 local groups it has been learning to harness local poverty insights and translate them into policy proposals. It has already carried out a national survey of poverty which contributes to new and innovative ideas for projects.

In March 2007, The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of the Republic of Croatia and the European Commissioner for Employment and Social Policies signed a Joint Memorandum of Social Inclusion (JIM) identifying the main challenges and measures that will assist Croatia in the battle against poverty and social exclusion. The document serves as a framework for the process of programming future pre-accession funds within the country (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance.)

JIM was prepared with the participation of representatives of government bodies, scholars, civil sector, social welfare institutions, social partners, local and regional government. It will be discussed in a seminar with all stakeholders and the European Commission in spring 2008. *Caritas Croatia* was part of this new civil society engagement in Croatia, taking its first steps in a new direction.



The CONCEPT programme has enabled *Caritas Croatia* to bring its wealth of experience into the policy making process, by ensuring that its relations with people at the grassroots level, and its participation at a European level is then fed back into advocacy work at the national level. There is a hope to extend this collaboration further.

### ***A Postscript on Process***

This report can only be a first stage of implementation monitoring which started in late spring 2007. A full implementation report would only be possible in 2008, after closing of the NSRs' implementation period 2006-2008.

The real potential of the NSR process will be felt when voluntary agencies are geared up to monitor policy implementation and to challenge governments for failing to improve conditions and services for the most vulnerable and excluded in our societies. As mentioned earlier in this section, participation in developing policy has had a profound impact on key aspects of policy design.







# Section Four : Geographical Learning



As well as contributing at the national level in the ways outlined above, CONCEPT participants were asked to assist in working towards a common European understanding and a wider vision by collaborating in loose geographical groups. This section describes the work and debates of these groups.

## ■ 4.1. Mediterranean Group : Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta

In this region, even in countries like Cyprus and Greece where Catholics are a minority, *Caritas* has played a key role in the NSR design and implementation processes. This has led many to network with other civil society networks for the first time and to enhance their collaboration between themselves inside the EU and beyond. In turn this has generated hopes that a 'common social vision' might emerge to address the particular needs arising from regional social realities.

For example, Southern Mediterranean countries have been known for the importance of family in social life, especially when it comes to care for the elderly and sick people. However, this common social reality is disappearing due to the Europe-wide crisis of the traditional family. This is creating new pressures on the social system, not least as declining birth rates are reducing the ability of the state to match tax income to social spending.

Another common reality of this part of Europe is that it acts as a 'gateway to the continent'. Unsurprisingly then one of the striking common themes featuring in the NSRs of the region is **migration**, with a big emphasis being placed on coping with irregular migration and providing access to welfare system for migrants. Despite this common struggle group members noted the lack of a strategic approach on the part of their governments even if they were seeking to follow an 'integration model'. This in turn was leading to a lack of clear priorities in funding. Thus, according to the group, *our societies need migrants, but the state does not recognise them; rather, the mechanism of the labour market exploits them. This is the paradox of our region.*

One more common issue in the region seems to be the importance of the social sector and a growing social market, even if still low according to the official analysis and figures. *Caritas* organisations in these countries are actively involved in promoting these mechanisms, especially by doing educational work at the grassroots level to share with the local communities the



importance of volunteering and social concern. This involvement is also a form of activation promoting participation in public life. In this sense, the group believes that active inclusion in society is not only a matter of employment – it should be aimed at all, including the 'officially unemployable', disabled or the elderly. For the countries of the region this form of involvement can often replace the traditional participation through political parties.

In other respects Mediterranean group members considered themselves to share experiences with other European regions. Among these were lack of policy co-ordination, under-development of policy to tackle child poverty, poverty risk reduction, inequalities in access to services, problems of labour market and education, and need of investment into social economy.

### ***The 'Regional' Governance Processes***

Countries in this region had mostly been involved in NSR design and implementation monitoring in a 'consultative' role but regretted that this had typically been limited to a narrow range of policy fields. At the same time, one of the group members noted : *the 'little governance' we experimented with shows that it may work when political system takes it seriously* [Caritas Italy].

However in all of the countries there was no attempt to ensure delivery of the NSRs by delineating 'local area action plans'. According to Caritas Italy, in their country this is still an 'elite' process without contact with the grass root level.

As in many countries NSRs are being regarded as a formal exercise, implementation monitoring becomes even more difficult :

*States have established NSR as a little more than a paper exercise so that everything may look good on paper. There is no transparent implementation review, and it is significant that out of the four countries only in one (Italy) Caritas has been officially invited to participate in the monitoring process* [Caritas Malta].

## **■ 4.2. Atlantic Group :**

### **France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom**

This group worked well but was influenced by the fact that in its midst were many volunteers. This is because in some countries, for example the Netherlands, the *Caritas* equivalent agency in the domestic sphere is highly decentralised with a very slim or dispersed central secretariat.

Perhaps for this reason, but also learning from the experience of Ireland and Spain, this group was interested in cross European issues of civil society capacity and how its contribution to the EU social inclusion process can be sustained in a more coherent and enduring manner. Even in well staffed organisations, matching the right skills to the right extent in the right geography can be a huge challenge.



Social partnership councils were a new – and exciting – model for some members of the group while Ireland's path – breaking interactions with the policy community – set a standard of pan European standing.

On the negative side, group members regretted the extent to which some governments in their 'region' had indulged in policy recycling when it came to the NSR. They had missed opportunities to be innovative. The group suspected that this had been compounded by the 'streamlined method' which had inadvertently narrowed priorities for inclusion in the NSRs.

More positively, a number of bi-lateral ongoing relationships have emerged from the group which, for example, will lead to a pan European conference for younger social sector leaders involving the Netherlands, Sweden, UK, Hungarian MEPs and the *Caritas Europa* Secretariat. The UK CONCEPT partner recently spoke at a major conference in Ireland on needs arising from labour mobility and migration at which the Irish Minister for Integration also spoke alongside Cardinal Sean Brady.

#### ■ 4.3. Central European Group : Austria, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg

Comparing itself with other regions the Central European group reflected that their relatively highly developed social protection systems forced them always to consider the NSR in the context of the wider social inclusion strategies of their governments. It was a concern to the group that in this setting the NSRs risked not being as innovative as they ought to be.

On the other hand the CONCEPT project had added to the policy capacity of member organisations and in turn enabled them to make a wider civic contribution. For example, it had raised concern about 'non-traditional' *Caritas* issues such as education (in relation to early school leavers). In other words, it offered participating Caritas organisations a **broader approach to social policy** and forced them to monitor the NSR process on periodical basis. It also freed the group to think about needs right across Europe.

One of the issues the group focused on was a poverty threshold, suggesting that it would be useful to introduce a **comparable European poverty threshold** based on a common basket of goods and to set a European **Guaranteed Minimum Income** with reference to matrix that captured financial as well as other multi-dimensional criteria. Furthermore, in order to guarantee more accurate and coherent figures on poverty, the most vulnerable groups like homeless, elderly people and children in orphanages should be introduced into the EU-SILC methodology.

Significantly, the working group decided to continue working on these issues even after the CONCEPT programme ends in order to increase shared learning and further advocacy towards policy improvements both at the regional and EU level.

#### ■ 4.4. Eastern European Group : Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia

This group struggled as it lacked participation from three countries that it had been hoped would contribute to its work. The Czech Republic, did not participate in the second year of the project and Poland and Hungary were hardly engaged at all. All the same it made progress both in terms of mutual learning and capacity building and in terms of beginning to reflect on wider regional and European realities.

It found particularly useful the way *Caritas Europa* was building CONCEPT participants' capacity for participation in the NSR process through the creation of **Social Inclusion Toolbox** and *Caritas Europa Basic Principles* as well as through networking within and across thematic/geographical groups. Given their own positive experience of the *Caritas* Toolbox, this group was very keen that it should be shared with other emerging civil society networks so as to accelerate their 'learning loop'.

Again there was an expressed need for the development of more widely held indicators of poverty across Europe in order to assist shared advocacy. The group felt that in the future cross-sectoral partnerships would be key to this.

Uniquely, group members had found that CONCEPT participants often were **the only people who had persistent interest in NSRs** in their home countries. This was a source of joy but also concern as without the CONCEPT process many civil society bodies at home would never have discovered the NSR process. **CONCEPT was instrumental in building this competence among Caritas organisations and wider civil society.**

In the group's view, if the European Commission is serious about NSRs, it should encourage national governments to adopt relevant legislation and establish new implementing institutions with a special emphasis on the local level. At the same time, the Commission should aim to engage in more open and effective **dialogue with all relevant partners** in the Member States, not limiting interaction to national governments and emphasising the possibilities that could arise from the proper use of its own guidelines.

#### ■ 4.5. Northern European Group : Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden

The specific feature of this geographical group is that its members came from two very different types of state and welfare structure – Sweden, with very advanced social protection system and civil society involvement practices, and the Baltic States which started to develop a 'mixed' welfare system only relatively recently.

Given the above circumstances, most of the group work was devoted to members sharing their very different experiences and trying not only to learn from good practices, but also to

discern which approaches worked best and why in the NGO-government dialogue in the NSR process. This helped mutual capacity building and also enhanced work at a country level.

Most noticeable was the entrepreneurial energy that *Caritas Lithuania* and *Caritas Estonia* had had to use to make a contribution. It was all about establishing a precedent. Once *Caritas* organisations managed to 'get their foot in the door' – by offering good practices from other countries rather than criticising the government – they were then recognised as possible partners and the dialogue began even if it was not as continuous and efficient as desirable :

*Progress has been made in terms of governance : some civil society organisations including Caritas are now part of an official [NSR] monitoring body, although the criteria for belonging to this body are unclear, as are its operating rules. Furthermore, it did not meet during the last year: all exchanges are happening through e-mail. There is also a lack of continuity in the processes... and lack of awareness about the value added by the European process [Caritas Lithuania].*

It must be noted that very soon after the CONCEPT closing conference, the Lithuanian NSR monitoring body had a meeting to which *Caritas Lithuania* was invited together with other NGOs and where it had an opportunity to **introduce CONCEPT in detail for the first time**.

Meanwhile Estonia is setting up a comprehensive 'e-governance-based' information system which, it is hoped, will address the lack of continuity and the *need for openness, transparency, flexibility, and 'informational literacy' (making information understandable)* [Caritas Estonia].

While *Caritas* and other NGOs of the Baltic States have expressed some disappointment about their suggestions having been ignored by governments, in Sweden civil society participation did have an **impact on the NSR improvement content-wise**. As the new government was redrafting the NSR using a proper consultation with NGOs, involvement of *Caritas* and other organisations representing homeless people and substance abusers is believed to have led to the improvement of the situation in these areas of concern. This gives Baltic States hope for the future.

Overall, the group agreed that the reporting mechanism and the requirements of the Lisbon strategy had helped to raise public awareness about the NSR process and its European dimension. In addition, the more civil society organisations were involved in the process, the better the initial policy priorities were monitored. However, similarly to other regions, bringing the NSR process closer to the grass root level is a real challenge.









# Section Five : Policy Issues

Alongside the 'geographical work' CONCEPT participants were asked to add further value by taking part in policy specialist (thematic) groups where they individually or their member organisation had particular expertise to offer. The intention here was not only to cross reference experience in further ways but also to build Caritas – and European – capacity along the four axes.

## ■ 5.1. Child Poverty

In March 2006, the European Council asked Member States 'to take necessary steps to rapidly and significantly reduce child poverty, giving all children equal opportunities, regardless of their social background'<sup>1)</sup>. Following this request, child poverty was chosen as an EU political priority for 'light' year 2007, and EU Member States were asked to complete a questionnaire on policies and measures aimed at combating it.

Most CONCEPT participants noted however that there was not enough profile for the 'light year' focus on child poverty and virtually no consultation or other visible actions such as seminars or participatory programmes around this issue, with a few exceptions<sup>2)</sup>. In Member States like Malta and Slovenia, where child poverty was not a PPO (Policy Priority Objective) in the NSR 2006–2008, there was little connection between the 'light year' priority and their national activities. Furthermore, most MOs did not get access to their governments' deliberations in response to the questionnaire on child poverty : *No access at all despite several formal and informal requests* [Caritas Luxembourg]; *We are unaware of any Irish Government response to this questionnaire* [CORI Ireland]; *No access at all* [Caritas Italy]; *Access to information was insufficient* [Caritas Estonia]; *There was no access for NGOs; after a personal request we got access to some parts of the questionnaire* [Caritas Slovenia].

As child poverty was still constructed as family economic poverty with the solution to this being adult employment, it was common for NSRs to focus on two rather narrow groups of measures addressing child poverty : **providing better income to families and developing and improving child care facilities.**

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1) Brussels European Council – Presidency Conclusions – 23/24 March 2006 – (7775/1/06; REV 1).

2) The conference in Brussels (2007) discussed the 'Study on Poverty and Social Exclusion among Lone – Parent Households', undertaken by Professor Rossana Trifiletti and a team from the Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini on behalf of the European Commission-Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Child Poverty was also a concern at the 6th European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion in 2007.

While appreciating the importance of these measures, *Caritas* members believe that a more integrated approach linking child poverty to other social policy areas should be applied, reflecting *Caritas Europa Basic Principles*.

### ***Principles for Dealing with Child Poverty : Holistic Approach***

When addressing child poverty, the EU and its Member States should take into account the fact that in most cases it occurs in the context of the family. *Caritas Europa* believes a political terminology whereby 'family poverty' is considered together with 'child poverty' should be adopted. **Focus on family, however, should not be limited to guaranteeing minimum income for families**, which is the case in many NSRs. Neither should focus on one-parent families distract from the poverty suffered by children in other types of households.

In this context, governments should aim at applying holistic approaches which develop strategies and measures that address child poverty in conjunction with other PPOs. These would include work-life balance as well as effective guarantee of children's rights, housing and access to education. It could also include the creation of ministerial cross-cutting posts. For example, one of the specific outcomes from Ireland's PPO on child poverty has been the establishment by the government of an Office of the Minister for Children which is working on promoting innovation and integrated services delivery. *It has the right to engage with all other government departments and it has made progress in tackling issues related to children in an integrated manner* [CORI Ireland].

In addition, the group emphasised the following areas of importance :

### ***Child Care Facilities***

It is *Caritas's* belief that the social system should protect people from falling into the poverty trap as a result of having dependent children. Therefore all families should have a **choice** between raising their children at home and having recourse to accessible affordable, high quality and flexible child care facilities which would allow both parents to stay employed should they choose to do so. Meanwhile child care and educational facilities in some Member States are still not adequate to enable women to enter the labour market (Spain) and in others there is concern about the long term sustainability of some childcare provision (UK).

In this context, an important initiative has been started by *Caritas Luxembourg* which set up a partnership bringing together the national ministries, municipalities, care providers and educational institutions. The goal of this partnership was to improve both the quantity and quality of childcare services in the country, at the same time giving a 'second chance' to unemployed or inactive people who wished to return to the labour market, thus using an integrated approach to tackle two social problems.

Many MOs reported progress in childcare provision as a tool for tackling child poverty. In **Germany**, there is an initiative of federal government and Lander to provide finance for 230,000 extra children. Since 2006 free kindergarten provision in the last year of the kindergarten has been introduced in five Lander regions. In **France**, it was reported that 95 percent of children aged three and above can access nursery places where often additional support is provided. One of the main specific outcomes of the NSR in **Greece** has been 'an increased effort to open more children's day care centres to which regular migrants also have access'.

In **Slovenia**, child-care services are funded by municipalities. The funding is sufficient to ensure good quality services, but there is a need for **accessible** and **affordable** childcare: facilities closer to workplaces and to the family (for example, in the countryside, close to farmers' families). *Caritas Slovenia* sees enhanced public-private partnership as one of the ways to achieving this goal.

### ***Minimum Income***

While access to employment for parents is an important route out of child poverty, *Caritas* recognises that a certain group of people will never be able to join the labour market and also that the '**working poor**' can be especially vulnerable. Indeed, there is an increase in the number of households with two adults in full time employment who are still in poverty. Therefore the **basic right to a minimum income**, regardless of the employment status, must be recognised in law and in practice.

*Caritas* understands the importance of trying to continue influencing government policies in this area, including the preparation of NSRs 2008-2011, although, this is not always easy as demonstrated by the example below. It however reinforces the importance of the continuing EU-level focus on child poverty.

### ***Caritas Germany : Attempts to Put Child Poverty on a Political Agenda***

Although Germany is an economically developed country, in recent years it has become obvious that child poverty is becoming one of the major social issues.

German *Caritas* organisations operating at local level observe that :

- an increasing number of children do not have access to free school lunch;
- due to financial reasons some children are not able to join school trips;
- some families cannot afford to buy textbooks at the beginning of the school term;
- an increasing number of families are resorting to *Caritas* asking for free food and money for their children.



Faced with this direct evidence of the worsening situation, *Caritas Germany* has recommended to national and regional governments specific policy measures to address child poverty. However, the German National Strategic Report failed to take into account some important recommendations.

Therefore, according to *Caritas Germany*, it is very important that the European Union continue to focus on child poverty, so that *Caritas* can continue attempts to keep this issue at the centre of the political agenda in Germany.

### ***Financial Support for Families***

In **Estonia**, various actions to combat child poverty are financed from European Union Structural Funds and EQUAL. In 2004, the Estonian government adopted the Child Welfare Strategy which sets out principles for providing assistance to children and families. In this strategy there are measures for financial support for families with children and non-financial measures for disabled children and children in need. A specific outcome of the strategy has been the transfer of child welfare functions to the municipal government level.

## **■ 5.2. Migrants' Integration, Social Inclusion and Participation in Public Life**

Migration – officially known both as 'labour mobility' and 'migration' – is now a core experience of the European social reality. At the heart of *Caritas Europa's* social vision is a preferential option for the poor, and it is among migrant communities that these poorest of European citizens and visitors can be found today. *'The needs of migrants in and around Europe are the great moral challenge for us all'*, said *Caritas* representative from Sweden, *'and yet it is a scandal that the NSR process and the related Lisbon strategies do not seem to register the human misery at the heart of many migrant lives... which currently constitute the dark side of the European economic project'*.

One judgement as to how a preferential option for the poor can be tested is the manner in which it gives access to basic social welfare rights and decision-making to the weakest. The Papal letter *Erga Migrantes* notes this further and calls for a pastoral and policy approach of 'welcome' in the EU and wider afield to those who are migrants or itinerant.

Regretfully, drawing on the experiences of the national *Caritas* organisations, it can be concluded that the topic of migration is the big but **inadequately addressed policy issue** in today's Europe. Only eight countries chose migration as one of the priorities for their NSRs, while some others only mentioned migrants in passing along with other groups in chapters on employment, housing, health, education (mostly reduced to concerns regarding migrant

children) and participation in public life. In *Caritas's* view, this is not an adequate approach as migrants' social needs are aggravated by them having very limited access to the host country's social protection system. Meeting these needs therefore requires specific integrated policies and measures.

It should also be noted that NSRs of some Member States are in fact **addressing the needs of the established ethnic minorities** which is sometimes misinterpreted as attention to migrants' needs : *Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers should be explicitly mentioned in the NSR. Their problems and issues are not properly addressed when they are implicitly included with Black and Minority Ethnic groups, who are usually national citizens. Tackling discrimination as a PPO may overlap with the needs of migrants but it is not the same* (CONCEPT participant from the UK).

Overall, migrants' rights in relation to housing, regular work, health services and education etc. vary largely across the EU. One of the main issues affecting migrants is their **access to work** – while some of them have access to employment that pays the official minimum wage, others are not permitted to work in the formal legal sector which results in grave exploitation both through irregular employment and being forced to live in substandard accommodation supplied by the employer.

*Caritas Europa* believes that the definition of migrants should be broad enough to include asylum seekers, persons seeking other forms of protection and migrants in an irregular situation. However, CONCEPT participants noted huge divergence between social reality and the policy in the case of **irregular migrants** – rejected asylum seekers, exploited workers, etc. Unfortunately they **are invisible in social policies of governments, and even their basic human rights are being ignored which are** often not known by migrants themselves, as they do not have any supported access to information. In the view of *Caritas*, irregular migrants should be included into the category of 'vulnerable groups', giving them support that goes beyond humanitarian help as well as access to information and social services. *Caritas* also believes that all people, including irregular migrants, have the right to medical assistance not limited to urgent/emergency medical care as it is currently the case in many Member States. As the CONCEPT participant from Belgium lamented, *a number of Belgian organisations, amongst them Caritas, plead for the improvement of access to healthcare for people without residence permit. Time has come for the NSR to give some attention to the situation of people having no legal residence and to consider them as full citizens, especially for access to healthcare.*

The asylum seekers' situation is especially dire as in most states they do not have the right to work while their claims are being processed, which sometimes leads to long-term destitution and exploitation without almost any access to welfare benefit support and housing. Responding to these needs, some *Caritas* organisations are offering support directed specifically at asylum seekers and other socially excluded migrants (see below good practice examples from Belgium and Austria).

Governments too often approach migration from the viewpoint of national sovereignty and security. As a result, in most Member States the majority of migrants do not have the right to **vote**, which decelerates progress of their inclusion and participation in public life, one of the *Caritas Europa Basic Principles*. Migrant Integration Policy Index 2007 could be a useful tool for advocacy on national level on the issue of migrants' inclusion.

Unfortunately, most governments did not dedicate enough time to the **consultation** with civil society on the issues of migration when developing NSRs, **not to mention involving migrant communities themselves in the consultation process**. Doing this, in *Caritas's* view, is a crucial step towards giving the voice to these excluded communities and beginning to fight the powerful racism that can be experienced by migrants and other itinerant or national minorities such as the Roma. Regretfully, even where migrant organisations and groups were involved in the process, e.g. in the UK through 'Get Heard' initiative, their suggestions were not included in the NSR.

*Caritas* notes lack of a **common platform for statistics and data** on migration and the situation of migrants in Europe and recommends the establishment of such a platform as soon as possible. This would be one way to ensure that recent data are used in NSRs to make them more responsive to the social reality. Some *Caritas* organisations are playing an important role in monitoring the situation in their country (see *Caritas Italy* case below).

To conclude on a more optimistic note, some Member States did address the social needs of migrants in a responsive way. For example, Portuguese government has developed a 'Plan for Immigrant Integration' (2007). *Caritas Portugal* regards this as *an important programme to achieve the (NSR) goals*. The plan outlines a set of 122 measures with the goal to bring complete integration of immigrants into Portuguese society. Important measures include the setting up of National Immigrant Support Centres in Lisbon and Porto to develop new services which meet the needs of immigrants from the perspective of integration and cooperation with public services.

### ***Asylum Seekers in Belgium – Caritas Belgium Action***

The housing department of *Caritas* offers, using its 200 houses, shelter to about 600 asylum seekers. *Caritas's* approach is to respect the unity, privacy and dynamics within the family, believing that this approach will contribute to better integration.

Initially, asylum seekers stay a few days in the transit house, located next to *Caritas* social service, until an appropriate home to be rented by *Caritas* is found. At this stage, people who often had traumatic experiences and exhausting journeys are assisted by social workers, who explain all the administrative steps they will have to take and listen to them.



After asylum seekers move to more permanent accommodation, *Caritas* can organise access to social guidance locally.

*Caritas* is working towards developing a system which will take into account the broader needs of the asylum seekers based on the assumption that they will be staying in Belgium, rather than those only related to the phase of the asylum procedure.

Housing department is continuously looking for houses with a reasonable rent. To guarantee an effective guidance the department collaborates with about 20 other social services who assure social guidance locally. Social services help asylum seekers with the asylum procedure and with daily life - registration with schools and council.

### ***Caritas Mobile Refugee Care – Lower Austria and Vienna Caritas***

The mobile Refugee Care is a joint project between Lower Austria and Vienna *Caritas* to care for asylum seekers in Lower Austria. The project provides advice and support to asylum seekers and legal information to help the authorities. *Caritas* believe that an early intervention to get asylum seekers legally recognised helps with their social integration as well as initiating communication between asylum seekers and government authorities.

*Caritas* project encourages its supporters and donors to provide phone cards, transport (car rides) and volunteer time to teach German and organise recreational and sporting activities.

### ***Caritas Italy – Annual Statistical Publication***

*Caritas* Italy publishes annual information on immigration in the form of the 'Statistical Dossier on Immigration', which was first published in 1991. It was the first statistical publication to appear in Italy on the subject and it is still the most widely distributed. The Dossier is a national initiative that involves *Caritas Italy* and the Migrants Foundation (the immigration office of the Italian Bishops), various international organisations – UNHCR, ILO, IOM – several ministries, public bodies, local authorities and regional offices of *Caritas* which are responsible for producing local reports and promoting the Dossier throughout the country. *Caritas* works in close collaboration with data banks as well as several research centres and universities.

### ■ 5.3. Health and Health Related Social Services

Ironically, while from a wider anti-poverty view NSRs are becoming increasingly coherent, this is much less so in the area of health. NSR sections dealing with health have tended to remain a summary of already outlined measures and laws, which often still lack specific budgets and avoid adequate indicators for assessing progress. Moreover, because 'health' is a relatively new topic in the NSRs when compared to broader social inclusion, their health-related sections often remain rather descriptive.

Two issues of major concern regarding national level social policies in the area of health are : (i) sustainability of the health care system guaranteeing equal access to all; (ii) the need and potential of domiciliary care.

#### ***Sustainability of Health Care System***

CONCEPT participants recognise that current demographic changes are putting significant pressure on the health care systems of Member States. Nevertheless, in *Caritas's* view, **health care systems should still aim to guarantee the universality, accessibility, affordability and the sustainability of health and long term care** with recourse to total marketisation of services. In other words, the health system needs to tread a balance between being financially viable while not accelerating health inequalities (*Caritas Europa Basic Principles*). At the same time, it should be remembered that the sustainability of health care system sits in direct relation to the sustainability of social (security) system as a whole. This approach may be self evident in parts of the EU but is not necessarily the norm across all Member States.

In this context, the major issue for *Caritas* members is adequate funding to guarantee accessibility of health care to all and especially to vulnerable groups. *Caritas* member organisations and the wider NGO network in Europe are concerned that changes to health insurance could lead to a two tier access due to user charges and enhanced premiums. They are worried that this might lead to further **health inequalities** creating additional difficulties for Europe's poorest. CONCEPT participants from Belgium and Germany are already concerned with user charges and the impact they have on the budgets of poor households. Migrants are especially adversely affected by a two tier health system. '*After all, increasing health inequality will undermine most forms of progress in other policy areas*' (UK).

## ***Health Inequalities***

Health inequalities are a continuing concern for some MOs. For example in the UK, although additional resources have gone into the health sector, some indicators referring to health inequalities have not been changing in the right direction. Though infant mortality rates have fallen in all social groups, there has been a widening gap in mortality rates between manual worker groups and the overall population. The mortality rates among babies of teenage mothers were around 60 percent higher than among babies of older mothers. Absolute improvements to health have been achieved but health inequalities still exist.

In some Member States health is being outsourced into markets or quasi-markets. In many cases though this is not being done on a level playing field and so some NGOs who would be well placed to make an excellent contribution are formally excluded from the process. This both reduces the potential to reach out in innovative ways to the most vulnerable groups and risks a lower social and economic return on resources invested in health. When quality of health provision is such an issue, in some Member States this use of scarce resources is arguably unwise.

## ***Domiciliary Care***

Domiciliary care is one of the key areas of *Caritas's* competence as many MOs are involved in its delivery right across the continent. A key advantage of domiciliary care is that it helps excluded people who cannot access residential care while giving others the opportunity to stay in their dwelling of choice longer than might otherwise be possible.

CONCEPT participants however noted unequal level of development of domiciliary care services across Europe. To a great extent this is due to differences in health care systems and historical circumstances (e.g. Soviet/Yugoslav communism). In some Member States, the challenge has been compounded by a lack of integration between health and social services. Such a lack of co-ordination typically increases costs for the relevant ministries.

*Caritas* believes that **an integrated approach to medical care services and household social services is the ideal model of action** in this area and commends it to all Member States.

## ***Domiciliary Care in the Italian NSR***

Domiciliary care is a controversial issue in Italy : in theory, everybody has the right for home and long term care but in reality public funds are not sufficient to guarantee this right. For this reason, domiciliary care is only to a small extent provided as a part of services of general interest, with the 'lion share' going to the informal economy.



Domiciliary care services are currently offered by four types of providers : public or private caregivers funded by the state; private official caregivers who are members of the family or funded by the family; private unofficial caregivers funded by the family (mostly irregular migrants); and caregivers funded by the welfare benefit named 'accompany allowance' (on average EUR 5,000 per year per person) for those living in a severe state of non self-sufficiency. According to some studies, in 2006 Italian families spent more than EUR 4 billion on domiciliary care services which is more than twice than state funding for the whole social service system (that, in add to the Central State contribution, is funded also by the regions, the local authorities and the contribution of beneficiaries when they can afford it). In other words, in the majority of cases domiciliary care is available only to individuals who have means to afford it. In case of those living in poverty, the typical public intervention, when possible and allowed, is the hospitalisation/ institutionalisation.

Taking into account demographic changes, the role of migrant workers in this sector, and the big expenditure that is necessary to face the challenge, domiciliary care is finally finding its way to the political agenda, especially at the regional and local levels to which public responsibility for service provision are delegated by the Italian Constitution.

The Italian NSR 2006-2008 did not define domiciliary care as a PPO, but it did outline some measures in the National Action Plan in this area. Below is an example of one measure.

The NSR outlines the creation, within the basic social assistance framework, of a special State fund with EUR 100 million allocated for 2007 and EUR 300 million for 2008 and 2009. It will fund provision of domiciliary care services for non self-sufficient individuals and the integration between domiciliary care and health care services. However, the allocated funds are insufficient since, according to the government assessment, meeting the needs of all non self-sufficient individuals would require at least EUR 2 billion a year. The fund should be used as a starting point, to promote and share good practices, to support the system of guaranteed rights that the State has to provide to non self-sufficient citizens, to encourage better integration between different services and providers, and to create a new balance between economic and non-economic benefits.

Within the competence of the Regions and Local Authorities, the NSR outlines the implementation of a system enabling family assistants (private caregivers, in Italy known as 'badanti') to exit irregularity and exploitation, providing them with training and adequate skills, regulating demand and supply at the local level, and offering to the families facilities and partial fiscal exemption if they declare and regulate the employment status of their family assistant. Sanctions for those employing caregivers irregularly have also been made more severe.

### ***Evaluation by Caritas Italy***

The implementation of the NSR is still ongoing. The Domiciliary Care Services Fund has been set up but not yet functioning. Although in the 2008 budget proposal the level of funding is increased, it is not yet certain that this government proposal will be approved. A huge gap remains between Northern and Southern regions of the country : in some areas of the latter domiciliary care is simply non-existent. Some regions (for example Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia) have started programmes for empowerment of family assistants and many others are following. However the funds are not sufficient and the sanctions/incentives for families to employ family assistants officially are not as effective as expected.

## **■ 5.4. A Learning and Working Europe**

For the *Caritas Europa Basic Principles*, access to employment and education, including lifelong learning are 'basic human rights.' *Caritas's* commitment to protecting these basic rights is manifested in its daily work with people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, as well as in its key documents and publications.

All EU Member States mentioned employment as a major challenge in their NSRs. However, as in other policy areas, the approach is often not broad enough, and even a narrow priority – access to employment – can often be described so abstractly that no concrete measures and measurable targets are put in place to ground it. Furthermore, some governments in the view of CONCEPT participants, devote insufficient attention to ensuring access to employment to the most vulnerable / most excluded or to those furthest from the labour market. In this context, the *Learning and Working Europe* group identified two key EU strategies – **Flexicurity** and **Active Inclusion** – as potentially the most effective contributions to an area where an integrated approach to combining employment, education, income support and social services could make a real difference.

Both approaches are part of the European Employment and Inclusion Strategies within the renewed *Lisbon Strategy of Growth and Jobs*. They are aimed at making the labour market more accessible and are being used to redefine and strengthen the European Social Model.

Drawing on the common position developed during working sessions and online discussions and on *Caritas Europa Basic Principles*, the *Learning and Working Europe* group developed a document which can be used in future debates, and in the work of *Caritas Europa*. The key points of the document, in particular relating to the two strategies, are summarised below.

### 5.4.1. Flexicurity

**Flexicurity** is a strategy that promotes a combination of *flexible* labour markets with a high level of employment and income *security* for workers. In this context, *flexibility* means successful transition from school to employment, from employment to employment, from unemployment to employment and from employment to retirement. It is also about lifelong skills development, flexible work arrangements facilitating work-life balance, and making employment regulations more flexible in terms of recruitment and dismissal. *Security* may be achieved through lifelong skills development, access to training opportunities, helping people to find employment, and providing unemployment benefits to facilitate transitions between jobs. To achieve maximum effectiveness, the **flexicurity** strategy must be supplemented by other social policies targeting vulnerable and socially excluded people.

In this context, it is worth mentioning Luxembourg where *Caritas* initiated a project '*Maison Relais*' which sought to simultaneously address two social problems – the provision of child care services while also helping people to rejoin the labour market (see box below).

CONCEPT participants believe that for national governments to successfully implement **flexicurity** measures covering the socially excluded and those furthest from the labour market, **social dialogue should be transformed into civil dialogue and include social NGOs** who have the expertise in the integration of people experiencing poverty and exclusion.

However, there is a major threat that *Caritas* sees with regard to the attempts to apply **flexicurity** : Some Member States – especially those in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe – have underdeveloped security systems when it comes to social protection, unemployment benefits, training schemes etc. while their labour markets are already very flexible. In these cases placing too much emphasis on one pillar of the strategy – flexibility – can endanger the '**European Social Model**'. Therefore *Caritas* feels that the European Commission may want to closely monitor and evaluate the implementation of the **flexicurity** strategy, sending clear messages of concern to those States where the background indicators suggest lowering of social standards.

#### ***New Models of Child Care in Luxembourg***

Led by *Caritas* Luxembourg a partnership was set up – FOGAfex Development Partnership (DP) – that brought together the National Ministries, municipalities, care providers and educational institutions. The goal of this coalition was to improve both the quantity and quality of childcare services in the country.

FOGAfex developed a training model that enabled people with low formal qualifications to work as auxiliary educators and childminders of children who are 4 years of age or younger. The training was designed as a 'second chance' for unemployed or inactive



people who wished to return to the labour market. The approach was geared to the needs of these returnees who had no formal training but had relevant life-experience. The theoretical training covered teaching and learning methods, child psychology, nutrition, hygiene and legal issues. For practical training purposes the trainees were employed in two new kindergartens and were supported by the project team in their daily work.

This development partnership was able to set up two new childcare centres in districts where flexible services were badly needed. These centres also introduced a new system of childcare in terms of staff and flexible opening hours. The FOGAfex centres open earlier in the morning and close later in the evening than most other childcare facilities in Luxembourg and are also open on Saturdays. If children are ill, home-based care can be provided. Part of the staff team comes from the FOGAfex target group. But unlike the private sector childcare institutions in which most staff members are not qualified, they have participated in the FOGAfex training. To achieve the best quality childcare, the tasks are shared amongst two groups of personnel : pedagogical activities are mainly led by 'educators' (graduate childcare workers), whilst other activities are mainly carried out by the new staff.

The ambition of the project was to run a successful pilot programme in the childcare sector and to mainstream this example of good practice into other care sectors. The first step towards sustainability and transfer was an agreement between the Ministry of Education and the DP, which officially recognised the FOGAfex training. The DP also found that valuing the talents and skills of 'undeclared' childcare workers and providing them with a recognised certificate increased their interest in becoming part of the regular childcare system which guarantees state supervision and social security coverage. The approach also helped the government to respond to parents' growing demands for quality control and more flexible services.

At the end of the project, 29 people had participated in the training and two of the FOGAfex beneficiaries are now doing the national diploma of 'educator'. Another ten have successfully completed the family helper training. At the end of the project, the Ministry of Family Affairs and Integration took on the responsibility of funding the two new childcare centres that are called Maisons Relais. In the future, the municipalities will decide when the childcare centres in their local areas should open. The FOGAfex partners are promoting this new model and many more Maisons Relais have been established and others are planned for the coming years.

### 5.4.2. Active Inclusion

While *flexicurity* is a highly useful strategy, the needs of the most vulnerable people, the poorest of the poor, who are furthest from the labour market, call for a more active and comprehensive approach. This is because while the 'working poor' may move in and out of poverty across a lifetime, those who are 'chronically poor' need special support and encouragement.

In *Caritas's* view, such an approach should be considered an *Active Inclusion Strategy*.

*Active Inclusion* is a European strategy targeted at the most vulnerable people furthest from the labour market. It combines three main pillars :

1. Access to the labour market through job opportunities or vocational training;
2. Income support (minimum income) at the level that is sufficient for people to have a dignified life;
3. Improved access to quality services (training, health, housing, transport, counselling, child-care, etc.) that may help some individuals and their families to rejoin the mainstream society.

A fourth pillar, '**respecting Human Rights**', should be added to the strategy because in some cases vulnerable people are not treated correctly by the administration.

In other words, active inclusion encompasses a coordinated policy mix of normally separate policies with the objective of achieving social inclusion and employment.

Through its member organisations, *Caritas Europa* is already making a significant contribution to the European Active Inclusion Strategy, represented by the outer circle in Figure 1. The inner circle represents *Caritas's* approach to active inclusion : for people suffering social exclusion who are furthest from the labour market *Caritas* not only provides services, but also offers a strong continuous relationship – a complete integration pathway to employment through training, guidance, matching people's abilities with the labour market and so on. For *Caritas*, the 'minimum income' should not be limited to financial support, even if this has to be a basic and necessary provision for all, but be an **holistic concept** which covers such aspects as living conditions and individual's integration into community. In other words, *Caritas's* active inclusion approach is **built around each individual person and his/her specific needs and takes the European strategy further than currently expressed**.

For example, *Caritas Spain* offers 'Individual Integration Pathways to Employment' (guidance, training, employment measures) along with childcare facilities and financial support (for housing, living expenses, health etc.). This approach is based on understanding that attempts to solve the unemployment problem should be combined with meeting an individual's other social needs.

On the other hand, *Caritas* understands that certain groups of people will never be able to rejoin the labour market. For these people, promotion of participation in the labour market could cause even greater social exclusion and stigmatisation. Also, a significant number of

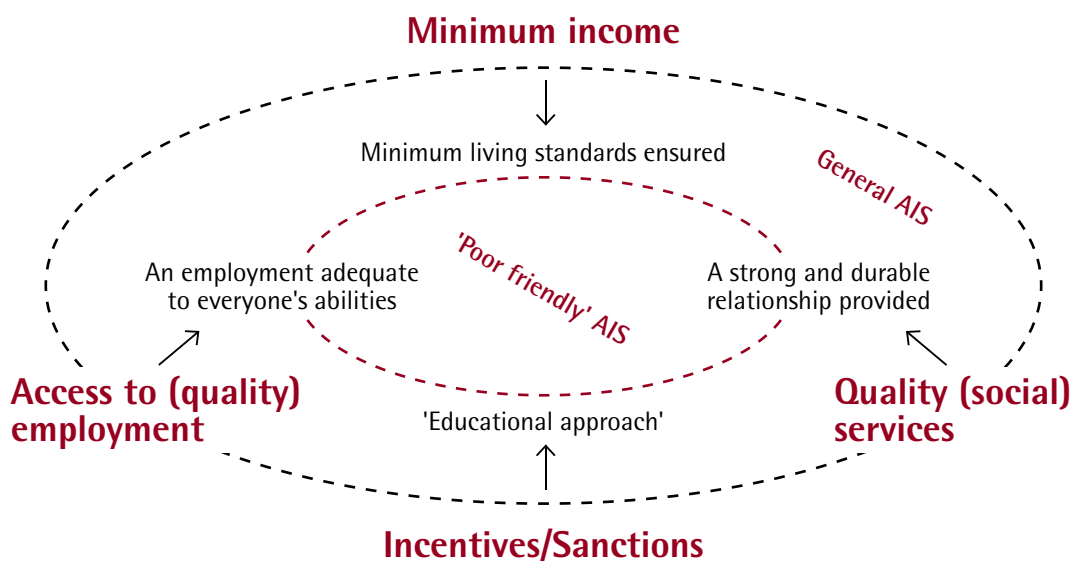


Figure 1. Active Inclusion Strategy and Caritas's contribution

people in some Member States are employed in very low income jobs or are not working as full timers. For these two reasons, the importance of **Minimum Income schemes** cannot be overestimated. This issue has been strongly emphasised by the CONCEPT participant from Ireland :

*There is a fundamental problem with this (NSR) process as it is developed at the EU level. The result is that the strategies developed by the Irish Government could, legitimately (as far as this EU process is concerned) ignore more than 80 percent of the households at risk of poverty in Ireland, where the two largest at risk groups are :*

- *Those who live in households headed by a person outside the labour force like people who are elderly, ill or with long term disabilities, or are in a caring role – none of these people are available to work. These households contain 50 percent of those at risk of poverty in Ireland.*
- *Those who live in households headed by a person who has a low-income job – the 'working poor'. These households contain more than 30 percent of those at risk of poverty in Ireland [CORI Justice].*

CONCEPT participants believe that **a guaranteed minimum income should be sought at a European level** with the amount being calculated with reference to the poverty risk threshold of the respective country and human capability factors.

*Fiscal measures are not the best way to fight against poverty such as cutting taxes to low-income households. What is needed (perhaps across Europe) is a minimum guaranteed income and quality social services [Caritas Italy].*



Through its contribution, *Caritas* can help the European Commission 'to land' the Active Inclusion Strategy in practice. On the other hand, this Strategy is judged to be an opportunity for *Caritas* to advocate its approach to the national governments by establishing links between the EU and the national policies and by influencing and leading discussions at national and local level.

In *Caritas's* view, **Active Inclusion Strategy should be integrated into the European Employment Strategy at the same level as Flexicurity**, not only as part of the SPSI-process. The reason for this is that both approaches applied together can reinforce the employment as well as the social cohesion goals of Lisbon.

Further, *Caritas* believes that it is very important HOW active inclusion is achieved. *Caritas Europa Basic Principles* provide a complete framework for pursuing this goal with the individual and its basic rights being at the core of this approach.

Finally, considering the active inclusion within a wider vision of social Europe in the 21st century, *Caritas* think that this holistic approach could help the Commission and the Member States to promote a more comprehensive use of the terms 'activation' and 'inclusion'. *Caritas* believes that the common European goal in the area of social cohesion should be participation in society of all its members, based on every person's capabilities, not only of the 'employable' individuals. Participation is not a derivative function of the employment but a human right, because it follows directly from the recognition of every individual's human dignity. In *Caritas's* view, the Active Inclusion approach offers a great opportunity for improving and enlarging this vision towards a more 'active and learning Europe'.

## ■ 5.5. NSRs – Common Policy Problems

Whether from their interactions at the national level or discussions within the groups, it became clear to CONCEPT participants that a number of additional policy problems were being faced. We record these here, both to register their impact and as a sign of the growing insights emerging from the *Caritas* network as its capacity is being strengthened.

### 5.5.1. Measurement of Progress

For many CONCEPT participants it was difficult to assess the impact of strategies and policies because of the lack of specific targets, timeframes and budgets. NSRs often use different time frames and definitions than the existing or new government plans and this adds to confusion and a reduction in transparency. The problem is summed up by *Caritas Malta* :

*The NSR is very clear in terms of the overall policy objectives... but the policy measures proposed to address theses overarching policies are not very clear... There are no clear and concrete set of measures, target dates and allocated resources. Therefore it is difficult to assess the implementation process due to vague and unclear targets.*

Some participants like *Caritas Italy* felt that a weakness of the OMC was that indicators were set but no tangible targets were established :

*The lack of measurable targets is one of the weak points of the Italian NSR... Measurable targets are set only for fiscal measures (tax cuts for all citizens with an income lower than 40,000 Euros per year)... The only measures implemented are the fiscal ones because those measures operate automatically.*

Many participants pointed out that in a two year cycle it is difficult to establish or measure if a target has been reached. In some cases specific studies need to be commissioned to assess whether both qualitative and quantitative targets have been met.

Generally speaking, earmarked resources/budgets were allocated for PPOs either directly or indirectly through other government social programmes. Although, in some cases like the UK, NGOs and think tanks reckon that more money will be needed to meet some targets like halving child poverty by 2010. As the government's own independent policy adviser on child poverty – Lisa Harker<sup>3)</sup> – put it, 'we have the right medicine but wrong dosage'. This seems to apply to many countries. *Caritas Italy* states :

*As anticipated, resources allocated are indicated in the NSR but are not sufficient....those funds are enough only to start the process, not to cope with all the needs, neither to pay fully the minimum levels of assistance they want to ensure.*

Implementation of PPOs had started in most Member States before the preparation of the NSRs, for example such policy measures as keeping people in employment, day-care facilities, increased benefits and pension guarantees. Often this implementation is part of an on going government policy. Most CONCEPT participants feel that measures seem adequate but it is too early to assess their effectiveness.

### **5.5.2. Articulation with Wider Social Policy**

A general point made by most CONCEPT participants was that the development of social policy in Member States is given more importance than the preparation of the NSRs. This is what any observer would expect as national policies relate to a range of social and community issues and are wider than the NSRs. This means that if the NSR is read in isolation it could be misleading.

NSRs should be a source of policy innovation because of the civil society engagement they ought rightly to encourage. Then there needs to be an integration of this social innovation and wider policy plans.

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3) Lisa Harker is a policy consultant and co-director of the Institute of Public Policy Research.

For example, there is no mention of access to affordable housing in the UK's NSR, which given current concern appears to be a huge omission, however the UK government is committed to a strategy to provide 3 million new homes by 2020, many for low-income families.

Different reporting times are used and sometimes different methods of collecting data. Some CONCEPT participants felt that the NSR was for European users only and could not be used to influence national policy makers. What many MOs noted was that a greater degree of articulation and coordination was desirable between the content and cycle of the NSRs and other aspects of social policy formulation and implementation.

*The problem is that the OMC and the NSR timing is not in line with decision times of Italian policies.... No specific outcomes or good practices come out from the NSR; because of timing and the nature of this political process it is impossible that this happens. OMC is not a leading process in Italy and it is more dedicated to policy analysis and reporting at a European level than to drive social changes [Caritas Italy].*

*The Government's social policy is much more important than the NSRs that in some countries do not even cover the most important social issues. Less is more but on the other hand the danger is to omit [from the NSR] certain crucial and sensitive areas like migration and homeless issues [Caritas Luxembourg].*

*It seems that most NSRs are drawn up according to an already existing government programme. Most measures have started being implemented [Central European Geographical Group].*

*The Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion does not have a high profile in Ireland because Ireland has a much broader plan in this area, covering a different timeframe and we also have a national social partnership agreement that covers these issues and many more [CORI Ireland].*

A related issue is that in many Member States the monitoring of the NSR measures is carried out through existing monitoring procedures for other social policies and strategies.

*There is no official report on the implementation of the NSR in many Member States, as – from the point of view of the government – every new NSR in a way contains monitoring of the previous report [Caritas Germany].*

*Most of the measures are linked or refer to the specific national programmes or strategies which are aimed at meeting specific groups' needs [Caritas Lithuania].*





# Section Six : A Europe of Partnership ?

There has been an increasing recognition on the part of *CONCEPT participants* that the development of a more thorough '**networked governance**' model would enhance civil society's impact, state policy processes and the quality of resulting policies, not to mention provide a means by which poorer citizens could be more actively included. By 'networked governance' *Caritas* members mean a **tri-partite and interactive relationship** between national level governments at both political and civil service levels, the European Commission and civil society.

In this section, we will set out the significant number of positive effects of the *CONCEPT* process with regard to this 'governance' aspect. In passing though it is important to note a series of areas where *CONCEPT* participants have reservations and consequently where there is room for improvement.

## ■ 6.1. The Question of Political Commitment

### 6.1.1. Support from Parliament and Politicians

Most *CONCEPT* participants reported that their MPs and Parliaments were not closely involved with the NSRs – in fact many MPs were not aware of this process at all and did not grasp it even when briefed. The following comments are representative of the experience in most countries :

*Most MPs are not even aware of the fact of the NSR process, as the Parliament is not involved, unlike in case of the NRP process which is presented to the Parliament [Caritas Luxembourg].*

*The Italian Parliament was not involved at all in the approval of the NSR or in the monitoring and implementation process. We strongly recommend that in the next round the European Commission ask all Member States to submit their NSRs with the signature of the head of state or senior minister after some formal parliamentary act of awareness [Caritas Italy].*

Given the varying structures of European state administrations it was also felt that the European political parties and the **Members of the European Parliament could be viewed as potential allies in the NSR process**. By this it was meant that MEPs could be supported to gather directly elected Mayors and others in order for civil society bodies to brief them on the design and content of the NSR. This integration of the parliamentary-policy-and civil society cycles would have a positive effect.

### **6.1.2. Engagement of Federal, Regional and Local Governments**

Given the importance of sub-national levels of government in the design and implementation of so many social policy areas many CONCEPT participants thought there should be greater collaboration between central government and municipalities in the design of the NSR and the subsequent monitoring of implementation. If the social inclusion is to be sustainable it needs a full range of social and civic allies and not least among these are regional and local governments. Again a joined up strategy would integrate a federal, regional and local level strategy into the NSR process.

### **6.1.3. Further Reservations**

There were a number of areas where immense frustration had set in or where a not fully planned attempt to partner with civil society had actually had the reverse effect. Most commonly, 'excessive speed' of 'consultation' was stated, along with a major mismatch between the e-capability of government and civil society bodies. Quite often CONCEPT participants lamented the mismatch between the experiences of poverty articulated by them in the NSR design process and their absence from the final Reports.

## **■ 6.2. Contributing to the European Policy Process**

### **6.2.1. Impact and Future Potential of Caritas Involvement in the NSR process**

However, in general it must be stressed that the NSR process has had an overall positive impact on civil society engagement, has provided a template for new forms of governance networks and the potential for public policy innovation. These general impacts, of course, vary in degree from state to state across Europe. It can also be argued that the process has, in many instances, created greater transparency in national government actions and has to some extent contributed to a form of democratic renewal, in that some groups have become engaged with government for the first time or in a new way. This has been novel for both the state and the civil society networks.

Involvement in the CONCEPT project has had other interesting 'public value' adding impacts.

### **6.2.2. Gaining Capacity and Demonstrating Capacity – Success in Axis 1**

The CONCEPT project allowed *Caritas* organisations from different parts of Europe to focus on a range of social issues, and combine expertise in current areas of speciality with the first steps in engaging with a broader policy field.

*The EU dimension made us aware of national policies, of NGOs and organisations we barely knew about in Greece. It made us contact ministries and other NGOs, and that has been good for us, for Greece and for Caritas [Caritas Athens].*

Meanwhile, some members became actively engaged with other civil society networks for the first time. *Caritas Estonia*, for example, gained enough confidence from CONCEPT training to partner directly with a range of other networks. *Caritas Romania* played a key role in establishing EAPN in the country, whereas in many other countries *Caritas* is already a member of EAPN. The fruits of these collaborations are only just beginning to be felt.

From the other end of the telescope it also made government bodies aware of the work and potential of their national Caritas organisations. *Caritas Italy* stated – *we had the possibility to improve our skills and to show the Ministries our capacities*. Resulting from the process, *Caritas Italy* is now one of the most recognised social actors in Italy with regard to the Social Security Ministry, and has gained more power in terms of advocacy impact. This will improve Italian policy making and its engagement with EU agendas in the coming period.

### **6.2.3. Knowledge, Learning and Partnerships – Success in Axis 2**

Symbolically, *Caritas Germany* was specific about the extent to which it had gained and learned from the project :

*We have undoubtedly benefited from the knowledge we have gained in the CONCEPT project. In an intensive exchange on child poverty we learnt much about other approaches to the problem. Regarding engagement of poor children in education, we learnt from Luxembourg that amongst other things, double child allowance at the beginning of the school term could help families to afford school books and so reduce the likelihood of children not actively engaging with academic learning within their schools. Such information is a useful tool in spreading good practice within our states.*

The importance of CONCEPT in terms of building partnerships with other MOs was reiterated by *Caritas Italy* :

*Partnership with other Caritas MOs in this field is also very important, not only to share knowledge and practices, but also to become more aware of our pastoral specificities and our solidarity duty towards other nations both in cooperation and in capacity building. Of particular importance for our vision for the future is the partnership with other Mediterranean and Adriatic Caritas organisations... and thinking through the potential for pastoral animation locally.*

### **6.2.4. The Partnership with Caritas Europa Secretariat – Success in Axis 3**

There was overwhelming agreement that the partnership with *Caritas Europa* during the course of the CONCEPT project had been excellent. Participants believed that the project had been very worthwhile and that the close involvement with *Caritas Europa* should continue beyond the period of CONCEPT. The future potential of the partnership was summed up by the Irish participant :

*It [the partnership with Caritas Europa] could produce very important and worthwhile impacts across the EU, strengthening the way that we may feed up to the European level, engage at the national level, and reach across our country to more regional and local networks [CORI Ireland].*

*Caritas Italy* emphasised the way *Caritas Europa* provided value added to the policy work carried out by the member organisations :

*The partnership with Caritas Europa is fundamental for us because we see how much value CE adds to our policy work at a national level by providing information, opportunities of involvement at European level and access to networks.*



### ■ 6.3. European Public Value and the Four Axes – The Positive Effects of Participation

Overall it could be noted that, in the countries where (a) there was good up-linkage to the European level and/or (b) the process was relatively more grounded in information sharing and genuine dialogue, the positive impacts increased significantly.

In these countries in particular key positive outcomes included :

- Engagement in the European level learning and sharing process which helped to increase impact at the national level because of a wider familiarity with the European Social Inclusion process and Lisbon strategy;
- More wide ranging, deeper and – likely – longer lasting relationships were made across government and between civil society and government;
- Civil society's knowledge, capacity and competence was enhanced because of an encounter with political pressures and priority setting;
- Policy-makers' learning and capacity was enhanced because, in some instances, civil servants had their first sustained encounters with the third sector.

In this sense we judge the process to have made significant contributions to enhancing 'European Public Value' and to meeting the specific hopes of *Caritas Europa* as expressed in the four axes.

However, the jury is still out on the extent to which the NSR process has encouraged policy innovation. We will return to this challenge in the recommendations.

#### ***Participation in Action – The Belgian Case***

Belgium is often quoted for its institutional setting whereby associations 'where people living in poverty can express themselves' are given the floor in policy debates.

The process started with the publication in 1994 of a 'General Report on Poverty' which relied heavily on the work done by such associations, the main one being 'ATD Fourth World', an association founded in France many years ago by Fr. Joseph Wresinski.

This report, which officially acknowledged the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and mapped the situation in various areas such as education, housing and health, was followed by important institutional reforms resulting in the creation of a National Service for Fighting Poverty, Precariness and Social Exclusion.

This Service is closely linked with the non-discrimination administration and every two years issues follow-up reports to the 1994 General Report. It is also closely involved in the preparation of the NSR.

Another feature of the Belgian system is the important role played by social partners (employers and trade unions) in all social policy processes, including the NSR process. Thanks to its involvement in representative structures of non-profit enterprises, *Caritas Belgium* also has the possibility to take part in this 'upper' part of the participation process, albeit not in its own capacity.

# Section Seven : Recommendations

## ■ 7.1. At the EU Level

### POLICY

- The EU's social policies should continue focussing on child poverty for several years. It is recommended that the European Commission issue a Communication on child poverty implying an official consultation process.
- Migration and the need for 'labour mobility' should be a required field in future NSRs.
- A common platform for statistics and data on migration and the situation of migrants in Europe should be developed.

### GOVERNANCE

- In order to ensure a continuity of civil society engagement and the avoidance of a loss of accumulated knowledge in key areas, the European Commission should look to four year funding cycles for civil society umbrella bodies. This will ensure engagement in 'light' as well as 'heavy' years and sustain and develop a deeper pool of informed experts.
- The European Commission should provide additional ring fenced funds to MEPs to enable them to stage regional meetings of directly elected Mayors and other senior regional and local government officials jointly with one of the official civil society networks specifically to discuss NSR design and arising topics.

### INNOVATION

- We repeat our call for a more sophisticated matrix to measure poverty in order that a pan European anti-poverty attack can be sustained. This matrix should be capable of adapting to relative local human capability, purchasing power parity and inequality and in all cases should embrace a focus on the poorest.
- When drawing up monitoring and evaluation reports on their respective countries, the independent social inclusion experts should involve civil society organisations. As part of this they should as a first step to the point directly above also consider extra-NSR measures to capture a richer sense of the social reality.

## ■ 7.2. At the National Level

### POLICY

- That domiciliary care be put as the first choice for care and treatment and that access to domiciliary care as part of the right to health (care) be guaranteed. That an integrated approach between medical domiciliary care services and household social services be applied.
- Member States should consider an **open system** for special categories of regular migrants in Europe (i.e. those working in agriculture, service industry, domiciliary care, etc.). This includes the establishment of a legal framework for **circular/seasonal migration** which is not given enough attention in NSRs.

### GOVERNANCE

- Governments should focus on developing a culture of 'participatory decentralisation' with active and conscious involvement of civil society in policy design and implementation. This should include national level funding to build capacity.
- Governments should involve more civil society organisations as asked in the guidelines, but even if not especially asked for : they should consider it as helpful and not as a duty.

### INNOVATION

- Binding targets should be set with commonly agreed indicators on social inclusion and human capability and these should be described at the beginning of each National Strategy Report.
- Existing commonly agreed indicators should also be applied in developing, implementing and monitoring policies and strategies at the regional and local levels.

## ■ 7.3. Caritas Europa's Ongoing Plans for Development of its Social Inclusion Work

### POLICY

*Caritas Europa* will enhance its EU social policy focused work in the following ways :

- *Caritas Europa* will strongly support at EU and national level the initiative of the European Commission to designate the year 2010 as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.
- *Caritas Europa* will select and develop a limited number of key themes and messages to be at the heart of Caritas advocacy and campaigning during this European Year.

- *Caritas Europa* will animate and encourage its member organisations to engage their national networks and other stakeholders in consistent and coherent advocacy and/or campaigning activities on these key themes and messages during the European Year.
- *Caritas Europa* will study the European Social Model and make recommendations for the Future of the European Model of Social Protection.
- *Caritas's* insights from this work and ongoing reflection will also be brought together in a new poverty report to be published on the eve of the European Year.

## **GOVERNANCE**

- *Caritas* will continue to build on its unique position as a large general service provider and as a key part of the life of the European Catholic Church. *Caritas* will build on this identity as strength in its advocacy activities.
- *Caritas Europa* will consistently and systematically build capacities of its member organisations in order to effectively engage at all levels in social advocacy.

## **INNOVATION**

- In close consultation and cooperation with its member organisations, *Caritas Europa* will develop and implement a **strategic approach towards innovation of social services and social advocacy**, through systematically collecting, analysing and sharing **knowledge and learning** about new and successful practices developed at different levels within its member organisations that may provide new insights for successfully combating poverty and social exclusion and for effectively assisting people experiencing these phenomena.
- *Caritas Europa* will consistently validate against realities and where necessary adapt or further develop its internal social policy framework document *Caritas Europa Basic Principles for a Sustainable Social System* involving consultation with all its member organisations to ensure integration of policy developments at national level of each European country.
- *Caritas Europa* will organise at national level in the Member States round tables on social inclusion similar to the one organised every year on the European level. Where appropriate and relevant, *Caritas Europa* will explore the possibilities of jointly organising these round tables together with other key EU networks.



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# Appendixes

## ■ Appendix 1

### CONCEPT participant countries :

- Austria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Estonia
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Ireland
- Italy
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Malta
- The Netherlands
- Portugal
- Romania
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- United Kingdom

### Observers :

- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Croatia

## ■ Appendix 2

### CONCEPT Year I – Twinning arrangements :

EU Member States where there is a member organisation that is a partner of Caritas Europa under this proposal :	'Twins' with member organisation(s) in the following EU Member States :
Belgium	Netherlands
Czech Republic	Poland
Estonia	Finland
France	United Kingdom
Greece	Cyprus
Lithuania	Latvia
Luxemburg	Germany
Slovakia	Hungary
Slovenia	Austria
Spain	Portugal
Bulgaria	Malta

## CONCEPT Year II – Geographical groups :

### Group 1 :

*Slovakia (convenor)*, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia.

### Group 2 :

*Sweden (convenor)*, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania.

### Group 3 :

*Italy (convenor)*, Cyprus, Greece, Malta (also invited Albania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

### Group 4 :

*Luxembourg (convenor)*, Austria, Belgium, Germany.

### Group 5 :

*United Kingdom (convenor)*, Ireland, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain.

## CONCEPT Year II – Thematic groups :

Thematic Group 1 (Austria (convenor), Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Sweden, UK) :

***Integration, social inclusion and participation in public life of migrants and migrant communities*** (including 2nd and 3rd generation migrants, migrants from within the Union as well as 'third country' migrants) and of ***especially excluded (ethnic) minorities***, such as Roma.

Thematic Group 2 (Belgium (convenor), Austria, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta) :

***Health, health related social services (access to health care*** for the most excluded citizens, ***long term health care objectives, home care initiatives*** as an effective alternative to long term health care and social services, the social exclusion and poverty dimensions of ***HIV/AIDS*** in European countries, including many EU Member States).

Thematic Group 3 (Romania (convenor), Spain (co-convenor), France, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovakia) :

***A learning and working Europe (vocational training*** for the most excluded citizens, ***access to employment*** for the most excluded citizens, ***flexicurity, life long learning*** through work and learning programs, a better 'work-life' balance).

Thematic Group 4 (Germany (convenor), Estonia, Slovenia, UK) :

***Child poverty*** (poverty and social exclusion experienced by children, in particular in the context of ***family poverty***, the ***need for family-oriented policies, children's rights***).





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