



FEANTSA Reaction to the Draft Annual Work Plan 2005

FEANTSA received today (27 September 2004) a copy of the Draft Annual Work Plan 2005 of the Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion which will be examined tomorrow at the Programme Committee meeting in Brussels. We would like to express our support for this excellent work programme and would like to highlight certain elements which are of particular interest.

Peer Review Programme

The Commission proposes for the SEP activities in 2005 to consolidate the activities launched in the previous years, namely “continuing and reinforcing the Peer review programme”. FEANTSA agrees fully with the potential of the Peer review programme as an instrument for promoting transnational exchange and raising the visibility of the EU Social Inclusion Strategy.

OMC evaluation and the role of European networks

The Commission proposes to promote more and better evaluation of the EU Strategy at both micro-level and macro-level. FEANTSA supports the need for effective evaluation. Indeed, the OMC evaluation which will take place over 2005 will be a good opportunity to evaluate the roles of the different actors participating the process, namely the European networks. The Commission Proposal on PROGRESS (2007-2013) has clearly recognised the important role of European networks in the framework of the Community Programme and the need for these networks to continue to develop activities under the Programme. Indeed, European networks are crucial in the Open Method of Coordination for providing expertise in specific areas, for carrying out research, for representing national NGO networks, for promoting mutual learning, and other related actions.

Strengthening visibility

The work plan 2005 highlights the need to “strengthen the communication and information dimension of the Action Programme in order to make the EU social inclusion process and the Programme better known to the wider public and also among the stakeholders having participated more directly in the Programme.” However, FEANTSA is rather sceptical about this particular initiative. Awareness campaigns on the Strategy can indeed be useful to raise awareness on the EU process and the need to meet the common objectives of the EU Social Inclusion Strategy. But visibility can also be achieved in other ways. For example, investing more in transnational exchange between different actors is an extremely effective way of increasing the visibility of the EU Social Inclusion Strategy.

Strand 1 – two priority studies

FEANTSA welcomes the initiative to envisage a study on the development of Social Services of General Interest, as well as a study on the impact assessment of EU minimum standards on minimum income and other measures to promote the integration of persons excluded from the labour market. FEANTSA would be keen to participate in both these initiatives.

Regarding the proposals for thematic studies, FEANTSA is not entirely convinced of the relevance of some of the proposed themes. It would be useful to have a small clarification of how these different studies would contribute to strengthening the Strategy and the NAP process.

It may be interesting to include FEANTSA's research proposal for a study of the role of the voluntary sector in the collection of data on homelessness since this is directly relevant for the development of social inclusion statistics and indicators under Strand 1. Indeed, future Commissioner Spidla himself has also mentioned the urgent need to develop data collection in this area (see p. 13 written questionnaire for the European Parliament hearing on 27 September):

"I firmly believe that we can only formulate an effective policy if we have access to sound and pertinent data. Although significant progress has been made in accessing data on poverty and social exclusion, more particularly thanks to the new statistics on income and living conditions, very few data exist on the homeless in the EU, either nationally or transnationally. We must fill this gap, by dint of the work of the Eurostat working party on income, poverty and social exclusion."

Strand 2 – calls for proposals

FEANTSA fully supports the two calls for proposals mentioned under Strand 2 of the programme to improve "transnational exchanges involving the transfer of information and best practices and encouragement of peer reviews." The second of these calls (to be launched in early 2005) has particularly interesting elements such as "policy oriented research studies on topics of transnational relevance, one-off seminars and conferences". As stated previously, we believe this is one of the most cost-effective ways to increase the visibility of the Strategy and promote the participation of all relevant actors in the process.

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