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“Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme”

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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INTRODUCTION: THE PEER REVIEW ASSESSEMENT

This Deliverable is part of a collaborative research project¹ carried out by the Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI) and the European Social Observatory (OSE). It deals with the Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. It deals with the Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. The study examines the role played by the PROGRESS Peer Review Programme in stimulating innovation in social inclusion and social protection policies across the EU, particularly through mutual learning.

The more specific **objectives** of the analysis are the following:

1. To provide an **overview and mapping of the Peer Reviews** that have been organized so far (Task 1). This deliverable was submitted by the PPMI to the European Commission in July 2011.
2. To examine **the contribution of the Peer Reviews to ‘consensus framing’** within the Social OMC through an in-depth analysis of the messages that have come out of the Peer Review process (Task 2). This deliverable was submitted by the PPMI in July 2011.
3. To follow-up on **a selection of ten Peer Reviews**, focusing on a particular policy or project in the *host country* and examine **factors determining their success or failure** (Task 3). This deliverable was submitted by the OSE in May 2012.
4. To examine to what **extent, under which circumstances, from whom and by whom learning has taken place** as a result of *peer countries’* participation in ten selected Peer Reviews, and in that process identify elements conducive to such mutual learning (Task 4). This deliverable was submitted by the OSE in May 2012.
5. To propose a set of **recommendations** that could help the European Commission and the Member States to further improve the Peer Review process (Task 5). This is the subject of the current deliverable.

This deliverable is structured as follows. *Section 1* suggests a number of improvements to the *preparation* of the PROGRESS Peer Reviews (‘before’). *Section 2* recommends some changes that apply to the organisation of the event itself (‘during’). *Section 3* deals with the most challenging feature of the Peer Reviews, namely their follow-up (‘after’). Importantly, we conceived of our proposals as ‘real world’ (practicable) recommendations, meaning that we provide suggestions within the context (and constraints) of the current PROGRESS Peer Reviews. In some instances, we recommend continuing with current ‘good practices’.

1. Service Order No. VC/2011/0108 “Analysis and follow-up of mutual learning in the context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme”, financed under the PROGRESS Programme.

1. BEFORE THE PEER REVIEW

1.1 Balancing Member States' 'ownership' and Commission activism

It seems essential that future Peer Reviews continue to strike a balance between:

- On the one hand, topics that are being proposed (**'bottom up'**) by the Member States and thereby create ownership of the process; and
- On the other hand, topics which the European Commission actively promotes (**'top down'**) with a view to supporting or launching an EU policy agenda or transnational cooperation.

1.2 Creating a shared understanding of the aims and content of the Peer Reviews

- Prior to each Peer Review, it would be advisable to **systematically organise a preparatory meeting** involving the Peer Review Manager, a representative from the host country, the European Commission, and the Thematic Expert. Such meetings help build a shared understanding about the *aims, ambitions, contents, and flow* of the Peer Review among the key actors involved.
- Ideally, such a preparatory meeting would benefit from (written) **input from the peer countries about their interest in, and main expectations about** the Peer Review.
- **Increasing the coordination between the Thematic Expert and the Peer Country participants** *immediately following the preparatory meeting* would considerably increase the quality of the Comment Papers. As a result, Peer Country participants would be better informed about what is expected of their written contribution, as well as their participation (see also 1.5).

1.3 Careful selection of participants: decision makers and stakeholders

- Peer Reviews would clearly benefit from a careful selection of Host and Peer Country official representatives among people with a *sufficient amount of experience and skills* related to the design and implementation of the policy or project under review, as well as *authority in the relevant decision-making circles*. To this end, **clearer guidelines should be set for the Peer Countries on the selection of representatives**.
- There is a case to be made for **systematically inviting a non-governmental national expert from the host country, and for giving this person a specific role**: they could act as rapporteur or respondent to the key papers and presentations (in coordination with the Thematic Expert).
- The involvement of stakeholders at both EU and national levels is essential. It is our finding that, when included, these actors make a valuable contribution to the Peer Review discussions, and are the most active in disseminating information about the meetings' outcomes. **Peer countries should therefore be warmly encouraged to systematically involve national stakeholder representatives**, either directly during the Peer Review or (where there is a need to restrict the number of participants) during a follow-up Peer Review with a smaller group of countries (see Recommendation 3.3).

1.4 Improving informal networking

Two small changes are recommended:

- Encourage participants to **upload a picture and a short CV or biography to a dedicated web workspace** (or section of Peer Review website only accessible with a password) prior to the meeting. This would allow participants to familiarise themselves with each-other's faces and make it easier to remember "who is who". Moreover, this workspace could be used for asking questions about the meeting and **clarifying possible doubts about the Comment Papers to be produced, while adding some pressure to deliver these Papers in a timely fashion** (see also 1.5).
- **A database containing the contact information of the participants** in the Peer Reviews should be set up, as this could encourage informal follow-ups afterwards. The lists of participants should also be distributed in advance to the participants. It would allow them to identify more easily their counterparts.

1.5 Increasing quality control over Comment Papers

Although participants have generally been satisfied with the quality of written contributions, many critical remarks have been voiced regarding the Comment Papers.

- Peer Review Managers (in collaboration with the Thematic Expert) should be given more leeway in the **Terms of Reference** of the new Peer Review programme to influence the content of the Comment Papers, specifically:
 - A first step could to adopt a ('soft') **service-oriented approach**: the Peer Review Manager can offer support to the Member states, with comments and feedback (that is, if papers are produced in time, see also 1.2 and 1.4 above).
 - Secondly, **quality criteria** for these Comment Papers should be developed. A number of key questions should be formulated that would need to be addressed in the Comment Papers (so as to focus them on the relevant portions of the reviewed policy).
 - Thirdly, the Peer Review Managers can be given a mandate to ask Member States to **revise Comment Papers**, in response to the recurring complaint in our assessment that essential time is lost for all participants because too much time is devoted to explaining national practices during the meeting itself².
 - Fourthly, Peer Country officials should be encouraged to **write their Comment Papers in collaboration with/benefitting from input from stakeholders**.
- In each of these scenarios, **the Thematic Expert should be involved** together with Peer Review Managers. Considering these new tasks, Thematic Experts' fees should be increased accordingly.

2. Comment papers should, for example, highlight similarities and differences (socio-economic, cultural and structural factors) between the host and Peer Country's practices.

2. DURING THE PEER REVIEW

2.1 Working methods

The agenda of the meetings should not be standardised, and a certain degree of flexibility to allow for the spontaneity of discussions is key. It is the responsibility of the Chairperson to adopt a ‘balanced approach’ between respect for the pre-established program and derogations from it (*floeu artistique*), depending upon the dynamic of the actual meeting. To that end:

- First, encourage all persons giving presentations to **print out their presentations and distribute the paper copies** during the seminar so that participants may listen more to what is said and take additional notes.
- Second, further increase the use of **focussed discussions with a number of key questions to be discussed**, rather than following a “tour de table approach”.
- Third, increase the use of **working groups, allowing an adequate level of participation among a broader group of participants**, including national and EU stakeholders.

In view of positive feedback from interviewees, Peer Reviews should, whenever relevant, make use of the practice of site visits and ensure sufficient time for informal activities.

2.2 Language: a difficult trade-off

The problems caused by *insufficient knowledge of English* are a recurrent feature in our assessment, both during the Peer Review as well as afterwards: this issue is particularly pronounced during the dissemination of meetings’ outputs. The obvious solution of offering *interpretation* during the PR in several languages entails important trade-offs, namely increased motivation to participate versus economic cost and ‘formalising’ discussions. To improve communication during these meetings, we recommend:

- That **interpretation to the host country language(s) would be provided for by the European Commission** where needed. In some countries, the prospect of having interpretation could remove a barrier to hosting a Peer Review, especially for senior policymakers with a weak knowledge of the English language (see also 1.3 on careful selection of participants). Contributions from such senior policymakers would be particularly valuable to any future Peer Reviews.
- Encouraging **host countries** to provide **additional interpretation** (as it works currently) if Peer Country representatives request it.

2.3 Dissemination: intentions and needs

The limited dissemination of Peer Reviews results in both the host and the Peer Countries is one of the major shortcomings emerging from our assessment. Three recommendations could make a difference:

- At the end of each Peer Review meeting, **all participants** (including Peer Review Managers and Commission officials) **should be asked whether and how they are planning to disseminate** information about the meeting in their respective contexts, i.e. within and outside participants’ own organisations or institutions.
- During such a round, participants could be asked about the **type of information they would need from the meeting. This would help decide what, and in what language to**

- disseminate.** For example, a short text could be produced fairly quickly by the consultant, while the contractors could explain what type of output-documents will become available.
- **Systematically translating the Synthesis report or (at the very least) the Short Report in several languages** (of Peer Countries) would considerably improve the dissemination of Peer Review results.

3. AFTER THE PEER REVIEW

The lack of a proper follow up to the Peer Reviews is a recurring issue for our interviewees. While there are no ‘quick fix’ solutions to this problem, we do have some suggestions to address the issue.

3.1 Follow-up on the impact of learning experiences

- Six, twelve, or eighteen months after the Peer Review, the participants of the event should be **asked about the impact of their learning experiences** at the Peer Review in their own country and if they have used anything which they have learned in this process. The consultants commissioned with the Peer Review could use **interviews with selected participants** for this follow-up, a practice used previously that has been discontinued.
- Such follow-up information should become an **integral part of the contactor’s annual reporting** on the policy relevance of the Peer Reviews, and it should be reflected in the other OMC tools (e.g. SPC Annual Report).

3.2 Publicising follow-up activities in Member States

- A way to report on **follow-up activities in Member States** is to exploit the **workspaces webpages previously created for each peer review** (see 1.4), which should be left open and accessible for up to 18 months after the Peer Review. All Peer Review participants should be responsible of uploading to this webpage information on follow-up activities carried out, as well as information about further developments concerning the topic of the Peer Review. It should be up to the Peer Review Manager to actively search for follow-up information and activity, and to upload it.
- In case the **host country sets up an evaluation or assessment of the reviewed practice after the Peer Review**, it would be useful to have short versions of such report in English posted in this workspace.

3.3 Accumulation of knowledge

- Lessons learned in one Peer Review should be systematically **transferred into the next Peer Review** on a related topic (and serve as its starting point), so that there is a genuine *accumulation of knowledge*. Peer Review Managers should provide Thematic Experts with the key documents from previous seminars.
- In drafting their annual reports, the members of **Commission-supported non-governmental expert networks** (including but not limited to the *‘Network of Independent Experts in Social Inclusion’* and ASISP) should be actively invited to build upon the material produced during Peer Reviews held on the topics covered in their reports.

3.4 Organise co-financed follow-up seminars (or study visits)

- **Follow-up seminars** (or study visits) should be organised with a smaller group of (highly interested) Member States to discuss new developments, evaluation results, dissemination, etc. These seminars (some of which could perhaps be part of the European Platform Against Poverty) should be an opportunity for involving a broader range of experts, stakeholders or people involved in the implementation of the practice at the subnational level (especially if their participation was limited in the initial Peer Review).

- Such Follow-up seminars could be **prepared by means of short Case Studies**, to be written by the consultant. These Case Studies would further explore the reviewed practice (implementation, monitoring, and further developments since Peer Review), assess its transferability to other contexts, and provide evaluation results.
- If the follow-up seminar or study visit were to demonstrate that the reviewed practice is particularly relevant for a variety of Member States, **the European Commission could launch a separate Call for Proposal on the topic**, with a view to enhance further dissemination and exchange of good practices.
- The **outcomes of such seminars should be reflected in other OMC learning tools** (e.g. National Social Reports, SPC reports, etc.), as is increasingly happening with the lessons of Peer Reviews.

3.5 Organisation of ‘dissemination and programmatic sessions’ within the framework of existing events

- We suggest the organisation of **dissemination or programmatic sessions**, to be held on an annual basis at the end of each Peer Review cycle and involve a wider range of participants³. The aim of these sessions would be twofold:
 - To present and discuss the results of the Peer Review exercise in the previous year.
 - To identify and discuss priorities and ideas for the Peer Reviews to be organised in the following year. In this way, the choice of the practices to propose for the Peer Reviews would remain up to Member States, but the conference would be an occasion for involving a wider audience (‘open up’) in the planning and organisation of the Peer Review exercise.
- These conferences could be organised **within the framework of existing events**. For instance, they might take the form of a dedicated session of the Annual Convention on poverty and social exclusion, or the European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty.

3. Including EC representatives, SPC members, members of Commission-supported Non-governmental expert networks, officials from national governments, EU stakeholder representatives and representatives from the consultants charged with the organisation of the Peer Review meetings.



ANNEX 1.

OVERVIEW OF SELECTED PEER REVIEWS (CASE STUDIES) AND EXPERTS

Date	Host Country (Code in Text)	Topic	Core Themes	Experts
05-06.05.2004	United Kingdom (UK 2004)	The Rough Sleepers Unit (England)	Quality and accessibility of social services; Homelessness and housing exclusion	Volker Busch-Geertsema with Freek Spinnewijn
19-20.05.2005	Czech Republic (CZ 2005)	Field social work programmes in neighbourhoods threatened by social exclusion	Integration of ethnic minorities and immigrants; Quality and accessibility of social services	Romana Careja
7-8.11. 2005	Belgium (BE 2005)	Minimum Incomes and social integration institutional arrangements	Promoting active inclusion	Ramón Peña-Casas and Sebastiano Sabato
04-05.06.2006	United Kingdom (UK 2006)	The UK government's Sure Start programme	Children and families	Mary Daly
13-14.09.2007	Sweden (SE 2007)	Freedom of choice and dignity for the elderly	Quality and accessibility of social services; Ageing and providing adequate and sustainable pensions; Health and long-term care	David Natali and Tereza Wennerholm Čáslavská
25-26.10.2007	Spain (ES 2007)	Multi-regional Operational Programme to Combat Discrimination	Integration of ethnic minorities and immigrants; Promoting active inclusion	Dalila Ghailani with Maria Carolina Melo
15-16.11.2007	Ireland (IE 2007)	The NAPInclusion Social Inclusion Forum	Governance	Bart Vanhercke with Charlotte Hick and Tereza Wennerholm Čáslavská
06 -07.11.2008	Slovakia (SK 2008)	Social impact assessment	Governance	Régine Kiasuwa
29-30.10.2009	Norway (NO 2009)	Developing well-targeted tools for the active inclusion of vulnerable people	Promoting active inclusion	Irma Budginaitė
18-19.10.2010	Germany (DE 2010)	Achieving quality long-term care in residential facilities	Ageing and providing adequate and sustainable pensions; Health and long-term care	Timo Weishaupt and Claudia Göbel

INVOLVED IN THE ASSESSMENT (VC/2011/0108)