



What is the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion?



The Get Heard project is a way for people at the grassroots to be involved in a wider European process by having a say in the next UK **National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (NAP)**.

The NAP is a European initiative that aims to make 'a *decisive impact on poverty*' by 2010. All EU member governments have to produce a NAP every few years. This means the different European NAPs are part of a mechanism that national governments use to prepare anti-poverty plans and share learning to produce better and more co-ordinated European strategies to combat poverty.

There have been two National Action Plan rounds so far: the first NAPs were produced in summer 2001 and the second in 2003. The third round will be published in June 2006.

The reports are prepared according to **four specific anti-poverty Objectives** agreed by European governments:

- Participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services.
- Preventing the risks of exclusion.
- Helping the most vulnerable.
- Mobilising all relevant bodies.

The process for preparing the NAPs

According to European governments' agreement, there should be national-level involvement of a range of groups in the preparation of a NAP, including: the different levels of government (local, regional, federal, national); and civil society (e.g. NGOs, people experiencing poverty and 'social partners' such as trades union and business organisations). The **Get Heard** project was put together to ensure that the views of grassroots people are heard more clearly in the process for the 2006 UK NAP.

There is also a *peer review* process in which a group of governments visit another government and review and report on one of its anti-poverty measures. There is also participation by voluntary organisations (NGOs) in these visits.

After national governments submit the NAPs, the European Commission prepares a *Joint Inclusion Report* on all the NAPs, which reviews the strengths and weaknesses of each government's strategy and highlights common themes and lessons. The NAPs are then adopted by the European Council – the decision making body of the European Union (made up of Ministers from the member states).

All NAPs are prepared according to a common format. They must contain: an analysis of the problem, an outline of the strategy and objectives, the policy measures and the groups and



problems addressed by particular policy measures, innovative elements and examples of best practice, targets and indicators, monitoring mechanisms, and financial information. However, in its own NAP each country outlines its own key challenges and approaches to tackling poverty and social exclusion. The NAPs help to give a clearer picture of the complexities and differences in poverty across the EU.

The NAP process is a process of learning and development about what works and what doesn't work in addressing poverty and exclusion. There are no legal penalties for missing targets. However, they do give a set of measures of how each government is doing, called the *Laeken Indicators*, which enable comparison between countries. In the second Joint Inclusion Report, the UK was praised for its clear targets and achievements on cutting child poverty and raising employment. But attention was drawn to the number of workless households and the extent of low income.

What was in the 2003 UK NAP?

The 2003 NAP set out the government's strategic approach to eradicating child poverty and tackling social exclusion. This was based on three principles: maintaining a strong economy; ensuring flexible labour markets; and developing first-class services.

The NAP included details of key government programmes designed to achieve these goals, including: New Deals, Jobcentre Plus, Tax Credits, National Minimum Wage, Housing


Strategies, NHS reforms, addressing fuel poverty, tackling underachieving at school, providing quality childcare, pensions reform, tackling over-indebtedness, the Disability Discrimination Act, and many more. It also stated who would provide these programmes, including local authorities and devolved administrations (i.e. the Scottish Executive, National Assembly for Wales and Northern Ireland Departments). It discussed the work done by voluntary and community groups in delivering services and helping to build a more participatory approach to the next NAP (this approach resulted in the **Get Heard** project).

The UK NAP Inclusion report acknowledged the role of civil society organizations in the NAP Inclusion process, specifically the Social Policy Task Force (SPTF), a joint working group of the European Anti-Poverty Network (UK) and the UK Coalition Against Poverty (UKCAP) which brings together representatives of their member organisations who want to work on the UK NAP process.


The SPTF joined with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to develop the **Get Heard** toolkit and workshop, that grassroots groups can use to give their views in the next NAP...

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