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UNDERSTANDING
SOCIAL INCLUSION
IN A LARGER EUROPE.
AN OPEN DEBATE

PROCEEDINGS FROM THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING
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Understanding Social Inclusion in a Larger Europe. An Open Debate

Since 2001, all EU Member States are developing bi-annual National Action Plans for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPincl). The EU indicators in the field of poverty and social exclusion, the so-called “Laeken indicators”, which were established to monitor the achievements of the National Action Plans are of utmost importance in this context. Recognising the importance of these indicators and the political consensus-building process behind it, the indicators are object of criticism from both scientific and political perspectives. Firstly, a general problem considered is that the choice of indicators may have been influenced by limited data availability and therefore not necessarily reflect policy priorities in EU Member States. Secondly, the lack of a consensus on the causes could mean that national policy priorities might not get reflected in the conclusions of the EU-wide debate on social inclusion.

Nine of the total of 18 Laeken indicators are income-based measures and much of the political debate around “poverty” is often restricted to few among them, such as the income poverty rate. Therefore, another major question in the debate is to what extent these income-based poverty measures form sufficient ground to develop and implement policies and to set targets in a longer-term as well as a European perspective. Although recognising their usefulness in the political context, the example of Hungary shows that focusing on one single monetary indicator cannot satisfy all needs for monitoring and evaluation, since it does not take into account the dynamics of economies. It has been argued that reliance on a subset of purely income-based measures alone can give misleading pictures of the effects of policy. Furthermore, it prevents meaningful comparisons of poverty and social exclusion across an enlarged Europe. An exploratory contribution of the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research combines income and non-income elements and applies such a framework developed on this notion to a larger Europe (18 EU and EU accession countries), proposing and discussing alternative indicators of consistent poverty.

These issues were among the major themes, which were presented and discussed during the annual General Assembly Meeting 2002 of the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research. This publication reflects the contributions and discussions on that occasion.

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