

The EU Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion

Activation, Targeting and the Sustainability of the Welfare State

EVEN NILSSEN

STEIN ROKKAN CENTRE FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

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Preface

This paper is written as a part of the research project «Policy Discourses, International Actors and National Welfare Policy. Norway in a Comparative Perspective», funded by the Norwegian Research Council. It was presented at the ESPAnet conference «Transformation of the Welfare State: Political Regulation and Social Inequality» at the University of Bremen 21–23 September 2006.

Nanna Kildal
Project leader

Abstract

At the Lisbon Council of March 2000, the EU member states agreed that they should coordinate their policies for combating poverty and social exclusion on the basis of an open method of coordination (OMC).

This paper focuses on the main discourses which are expressed through the OMC in the field of social inclusion. Empirically it is concentrating on the joint reports by the European Council and the Commission and on National Action Plans from some member states (Germany, UK and Denmark).

The paper states that 1) the definition of problems is closely related to a more general discourse on the sustainability of the welfare state; 2) the main solutions are founded in discourses concerning «activation» and «targeting social benefits». Social policy has to a large extent become labour market policy. Despite some differences between the selected countries, this seems to be the general trends in European social policy; 3) these trends are not created by the OMC process, but it is fair to say that they are strengthened by it, and 4) the general discourses are not presented in a normative/moral language, but expressed in a purely instrumental fashion. The Social Inclusion Strategy (SIS) in the EU is subjected to economical rather than moral or ethical considerations. Nevertheless, it also affects some important questions of justice primarily related to the balance between rights and duties.

Sammendrag

I forbindelse med EU-rådet i Lisboa 2000 ble medlemslandene enige om å koordinere deres tiltak for å bekjempe fattigdom og sosial eksklusjon med utgangspunkt i den åpne koordineringsmetoden (The Open Method of Coordination – OMC). Dette arbeidsnotatet retter søkelyset mot de hoveddiskursene som har kommet til uttrykk i OMC-prosessen i forhold til EU's Social Inclusion Strategy (SIS). Det empiriske grunnlaget for analysene er i hovedsak fellesrapportene (Joint Report) fra EU Rådet og Kommisjonen samt nasjonale handlingsplaner (National Action Plan – NAP) fra tre medlemsland: Tyskland, Storbritannia og Danmark.

Notatet slår fast 1) at problemdefineringen på dette området er nært knyttet til en diskurs om «velferdsstatens bærekraft (sustainability)»; 2) at hovedløsningene er fundert i diskurser angående «aktivering» og «målretting». Sosialpolitikk er i stor grad blitt arbeidsmarkedspolitik. På tross av en del forskjeller mellom de utvalgte landene, ser dette ut til å være en generell tendens i europeisk sosialpolitikk; 3) denne trenden er ikke skapt av OMC-prosessen, men det er rimelig å hevde at disse prosessen har styrket en slik utvikling, og 4) at de generelle diskursene ikke er presentert i et normativt/moralsk språk, men på en ren instrumentell måte. EU's strategi for sosial inkludering (SIS) er underlagt økonomiske heller enn moralske hensyn. Strategien berører likevel viktige rettferdighetsspørsmål som i særlig grad relaterer seg til forholdet mellom borgernes rettigheter og plikter.

Introduction

From the late 1990s EU has developed a new mode of governance in the field of employment and social policy called «The Open Method of Coordination» (OMC). This method differs primarily from the traditional Community Method by a lack of binding rules and sanctions in the implementation of policy. OMC is primarily a system of mutual learning based on objectives, guidelines (in some areas), indicators, national action plans, peer reviews and benchmarking. Originating as a tool in the coordination of EU employment policy, the method has expanded to more and more areas of welfare policy (social exclusion, health, pensions).

This paper focuses on the content of the OMC concerning the EU strategy on social inclusion (SIS) as it is expressed through the National Action Plans (Naps) and the Joint Report from the Commission and the Council. Our main intention is to identify the basic ideas and policy proposals dominating this field of social policy at the EU and national levels, what we might call different policy discourses. Following Taylor-Gooby & Daguerre (2002:6) we may define policy discourses as «coherent systems of ideas that link normative judgements about policy goals to practical accounts of the policies likely to reach them». Hence, our ambition is not to analyse the effect of the OMC-inclusion on national policy formulation, but rather to elaborate on the relationship between different policy discourses as they are expressed at both levels. Are there any coherent discourses that are expressed in the field of social inclusion across levels and countries and how do they relate to each other? On the national level we have chosen three countries representing different kinds of welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen 1990) in order to examine possible similarities among member states with different kinds of welfare arrangements: the UK (a liberal welfare regime), Denmark (a social democratic regime) and Germany (a corporatist regime).

Background

Traditionally social exclusion policies have not been seen as positive policies in their own right at the EU level (Daguerre and Larsen undated). Until the 1990s such questions were given little attention due to the revival of liberal ideology and the idea that social policy should above all help to complete the internal market. The Social Rights» Charter of 1989 sought to guarantee minimum standards of social assistance within the EU. The fourth anti-poverty programme was vetoed in 1994 as member states argued that poverty should be dealt with at the national level (i.e. the subsidiarity argument).

At the Lisbon Council of March 2000, however, the member states agreed that they should coordinate their policies for combating poverty and social exclusion on the basis of an open method of coordination.¹ This was seen in the light of the Union's overall strategic goal of becoming, by 2010, «the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion». The Lisbon European Council agreed on the

need to take steps to make decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010. The Council stated that:

«Investing in people and developing an active and dynamic welfare state will be crucial both to Europe's place in the knowledge economy and for ensuring that the emergence of this new economy does not compound the existing social problems of unemployment, social exclusion and poverty» (quoted from O'Connor 2005:346)

In December 2000 the Nice European Council decided to launch the new method in the field of combating poverty and social exclusion and defined a common set of four objectives:

- 1) To facilitate participation in employment and access resources, rights, goods, and services for all. *Promoting employment* was specified as a) to promote access to stable and quality employment for all women and men who are capable of working; b) to prevent the exclusion of people from the world of work by improving employability, through human resource management, organisation of work and life-long learning. *Promoting access resources, rights, goods, and services* included a) to organise social protection systems in such a way that they help, in particular, to guarantee everyone necessary resources, overcome obstacles to employment b) to implement policies which aim to provide access for all to decent and sanitary housing, c) to provide appropriate healthcare for all and d) to provide effective access for all to education, justice and other public and private services.
- 2) *To prevent the risks of exclusion*, specified as a) to exploit fully the potential of the knowledge-based society of new information and communication technologies and ensure that no-one is excluded, taking particular account of the needs of people with disabilities, b) to put in place policies which seek to prevent life crises which can lead to situations of social exclusion, c) to implement action to preserve family solidarity in all forms.
- 3) *To help the most vulnerable*, meaning a) to promote the social integration of women and men at risk of facing persistent poverty, b) to move towards the elimination of social exclusion among children and give them every opportunity for social integration and c) to develop comprehensive actions in favour of areas marked by exclusion.
- 4) *To mobilise all relevant bodies* including: a) the participation and self-expression of people suffering exclusion, in particular in regard to their situation and the policies and measures affecting them, b) to mainstream the fight against exclusion into overall policy and c) to promote dialogue and partnership between relevant bodies (public and private).

The OMC may be regarded as an alternative model of governance compared with the traditional Community Model (CM).

«The Community Method is thought of as «hard law» because it created uniform rules that Member States must adopt, provide sanctions if they fail to do so, and allows challenges for non-compliance to be brought in court. In contrast, OMC, which has general and open-ended guidelines rather than rules, provides no

formal sanctions for Member States that do not follow the guidelines, and is not justifiable, is thought of as 'soft law'» (Trubek and Trubek 2005:344).

The concept of «law» seems less appropriate in the field of social inclusion. Unlike the European Employment Strategy, rules such as guidelines are absent in the OMC process of social inclusion. However, the OMC represents an alternative and softer mode of governance compared with the traditional CM. Social policy is still primarily the responsibility of the member states and the OMC lack any formal sanctions against member states who do not comply with the general objectives worked out at the Community level.

The open method of coordination is set up to include a lot of different actors at the national and community level. Empirically there is limited knowledge about who actually are participating in these processes. De la Porte and Pochet (2002) note that the member states are the key players, and the European Commission is the orchestrator, influencing the game in a more subtle manner than its former role as a fully-fledged political player. The Council is important in setting the overall objectives for action to combat poverty, while the Social Protection Committee (SPC) participates together with the Commission in the assessment of the Naps and has the main responsibility for the preparation of social indicators. The European Parliament and the European Court of Justice play minor roles, if any role at all.

The joint report on social inclusion

The application of the OMC-inclusion consists among other things of the process involving the submission of Naps/inclusion on the part of the member states and their assessment by the Commission and the SPC, which brings about a Joint Report of the Council and the Commission (Ferrera, Matsaganis and Sacchi 2002). In February and March 2001 the Commission held bilateral meetings with each member state in order to assist them in drawing up their national action plans (called Naps/incl). The first Naps/incl were worked out during 2001 and the next were available in 2003. In this section we are taking a closer look at these Naps, focusing mainly on the Joint Report by the Commission and the Council on social inclusion published in 2004. This report contains descriptions and assessments of the content of the national action plans of 2003 (embracing 15 member states) and short versions of the Naps. The report is mainly organised around the general objectives of the OMC-social inclusion strategy (see above).

Employment is considered a key factor for social inclusion, not only because it generates income but also because it can promote social participation and personal development. Some main measures to promote employment emphasised in the Naps are highlighted by the Commission/Council:

- Several member states consider active ageing by means of improving the working conditions for older workers, reducing early retirement schemes or stimulating demand on the part of employers as well as labour supply.

- Most member states refer to the active involvement of employers in the creation of a more open and inclusive labour market. Besides more traditional instrument of employment subsidies to employers, this is done mainly by employment campaigns in favour of specific target groups, particularly disabled people and migrants; measures to stimulate social corporate responsibility, and general actions focused on combating discrimination.
- Member states offer personalised guidance to the unemployed or job seekers, which means that an individually-tailored combination of measures is used to create pathways towards employment. More and more countries rely on such packages, where labour market interventions are often integrated with measures in other related areas, such as social services, health care and rehabilitation, language learning courses etc.
- Various approaches concerning families are identified – the extension of child facilities, the provision of financial support for families with young children, the creation of a family-friendly working environment, the increase in flexible or part-time working patterns, reviewing the parental leave and maternity schemes and raising awareness of employers about the importance of creating family-friendly working environment.

Promoting employment stands as the main objective in fighting poverty and social exclusion. The report emphasises that the Nap/incl must be closely coordinated with the Nap/employment and both plans should be read together to get a fuller picture of the measures being taken to combat social exclusion through participation in the labour market. Some guidelines from the European Employment Strategy (EES) are emphasised. One specific guideline promotes the integration of and combating discrimination against people at a disadvantage in the labour market and includes targets such as achieving significant reduction in the unemployment gap between non-EU and EU nationals and for other groups according to national definitions. Specific reference to the reduction of working poor is made in the context of the guideline on making work pay. Other guidelines are mentioned, such as lifelong learning, increasing labour supply and promoting active ageing and transforming undeclared work into regular employment.

The joint report states that a number of the EU members are undertaking wide-ranging reforms of their social protection systems which will have an impact on the inclusion policies described in the action plans. Generally, member states are facing difficult choices in times of sluggish growth between the need to control rising costs and the need to provide adequate coverage to more exposed fringes of society. The joint report identifies some trends in the Naps:

- Concerning family policy some reforms raising welfare support to child bearers are interpreted partly as a means to increase birth rate. The joint report claims, however, that to the extent that child care allowances are not conditional on any type of occupational status, they may act as a disincentive to participation in

employment. «Other countries are reflecting the goal of making work pay in their family support policies» (e.g. Finland, Sweden) (Joint Report 2004:53).

- Activation strategies in accordance with the EES are extended to beneficiaries of minimum income schemes and other social assistance benefits. The reports point at the recent Hartz IV reform in Germany, which merged unemployment benefits and social assistance schemes for those capable of working, as paradigmatic. «Following on the experience gained with the activation of recipients of unemployment benefits, many member states try to minimise the discouraging effect provoked by social assistance upon the willingness to search for a job or to participate in active measures» (Joint report 2004:53).
- A number of Naps/incl announce reviews of the eligibility conditions for minimum income and other welfare benefits in order to encourage recipients to participate in active labour market programmes, to intensify their efforts to look for work and to accept job offers (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands). The report emphasises, however, that the success of these policies is dependent on the performance of the labour market.
- An increasing number of member states seek to improve financial incentives to take up work. Measures include the retained payment of (a part of) benefits after a job has been taken up, tax reforms to increase the take-home pay of low wage earners and minimum wage increases. Other measures to make work more attractive include an adaptation of social security rules in order to better cover atypical contracts.

As we have seen, creating and investing in a dynamic knowledge economy was an important aspect of the Lisbon strategy. Knowledge and lifelong learning is also emphasised in the joint report as a crucial aspect of the battle against poverty and social exclusion. Firstly, the importance of effective adult education systems in developing employment related training is underlined. Secondly, early childhood education and supporting parents through multi-professional support, involving learning the family-related competencies, are seen as particularly important in breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty and helping children with special needs to catch up their peers before starting compulsory education. «Lifelong learning then provides second chances for all age groups, especially for those who left school earlier» (Joint Report 2004:64).

- In the field of family policy the report points at a trend of welfare payments as support to
- higher and tertiary levels of lifelong learning which is coherent with the Lisbon Strategy and the emphasis on access to the knowledge society while in former times support for access to lifelong learning was often limited to basic skills.
- The recognition of the extent to which poverty and social exclusion can be passed on from one generation to the next. There is an increased recognition among the member states of the extent to which those who grow up in poverty are at high risk of becoming the next generation of poor and unemployed (social inheritance). More attention is given to the ways in which the intergenerational

transfer of poverty takes place and on the particular dimension of child poverty that need to be addressed to break this cycle.

- According to the Joint Report (2004), there is also a tendency in some Naps to see education primarily through the prism of the access to the labour market and not to sufficiently acknowledge its importance for inclusion in civil society, particularly in the context of the emerging knowledge based society and active citizenship.

In the Joint Report 2005 (a much shorter report than 2004), the major trends are affirmed. Employment is confirmed as a key factor for social inclusion, not only because it generates income but also because it can promote social participation and personal development and contributes to maintaining adequate living standard in old age through the accrual of entitlement to pension benefits (Joint Report 2005:9). The report points out seven key policy priorities:

- 1) Increasing labour market participation.
- 2) Modernising social protection systems. [Ensuring that] benefits aimed at those who are able to work provide effective work incentives as well as enough security to allow people to adapt to change.
- 3) Tackling disadvantages in education and training.
- 4) Eliminating child poverty.
- 5) Ensuring decent accommodation.
- 6) Improving access to quality services.
- 7) Overcoming discrimination and increasing the integration of people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and immigrants.

Concerning pension and active aging, the report calls attention to two main policy responses: longer working lives and private provision.

National action plans – UK, Denmark and Germany

United Kingdom

The responsibility of working out the Nap-inclusion in UK is subjected to the central government Department of Work and Pension (Poverty and Social Exclusion Unit). In the UK the Nice objectives to «mobilise all relevant actors» has been used to develop a more participatory Nap-building process, providing opportunities for NGOs to mobilise and civil servants to do something different (Armstrong 2005:297). However, the first and second generation Nap-inclusion has tended to be viewed by civil servants as «reports to Europe» rather than policy-developing «action plans». Thus, the Naps have to be seen in close relation to more general policy trends in the UK.

The idea of the «Active society» has been extremely important in the field of social policy and labour market policy in the era of the New Labour government. The Blair

government wanted to change the balance between «rights and obligations» by strengthening the latter, coupled with better quality training and improving take home pay (Clasen 2005:82). The catch phrase was to «make work pay». At the level of policy-formulation this was expressed through several measures such as the New Deal programmes (for young people, for partners, for lone parents, for disabled people), minimum wage and tax credits.

While one of the Labour Party's central objectives during the 1980s and early 1990s had been to improve the material situation of benefit claimants (redistribution) and turn back the growth of means-testing (universalism), the party had undergone a U-turn during the 1990s asserting neo-liberal economic policies (Clasen 2005:84).

«The rhetoric within which the New Labour's welfare reform programme has been packaged, has tended to oscillate between the fighting a 'dependency culture' and even an 'underclass' on the one hand, and solving the problems of 'social exclusion on the other'» (Trickey and Walker 2001:190).

As Levitas (1998) shows there has been a development from emphasising redistribution (RED) toward emphasising the importance of work seen both from a cultural and moral(istic) perspective (MUD – cultural/moral integration of an underclass) and from a socio-economical approach (SID – material/social integration through work).²

The Nap-inclusion 2003–2005 establishes that

«For people of working age, a job is the best route out of poverty. So, efforts have been concentrated on strengthening active labour market policies, making work pay primarily through tax credits and a minimum wage and developing our skill base» (Nap, p 4).

Economic success is considered vital to securing the jobs that provide a route out of poverty. The Nap states that the revised EU Employment Guidelines provide a welcome focus on the need to reform structural barriers to employment, «balancing fairness and security to promote job variation and progress towards full employment» (p 7). Economic growth and social justice «go hand in hand» (p 19).

The UK's anti-poverty strategy is based on three pillars:

- Maintaining a strong economy.
- Ensuring through flexible labour markets that work is available for all who can work.
- Developing first-class services that meet the needs of all our population in a way that is accessible and accountable. Universal access to mainstream services is an important part of wider welfare provision in the UK (p 19).

Concerning work the Nap stresses the importance of:

- Active labour market policies to open up employment for all.
- Making sure work pays, for example by tax-benefit, the minimum wage and tackling the gender gap.
- Measures to support the creation of a skilled and adaptable work force (e.g. access to lifelong learning).
- Promotion of family-friendly approaches to work, and in particular encouraging creation of new childcare places (p 21).

Social protection systems have an important role to play in providing fallback support for those who cannot currently work and in helping work pay for those who can. Reforming the welfare system means «transforming it from a passive benefit payment machine to an active system that tackles poverty, creates opportunity, and helps people become self-sufficient and independent» (p 22). The Nap states that universal access to mainstream services is an important part of the wider welfare provision. This may be interpreted as a request for universal measures in social policy, although targeting is a much more conspicuous principle of this strategy. The welfare system «will deliver services tailored to meet the need of people» (p 22) and several target-groups are handled in the Nap: children, young people, pensioners, long-termed unemployed, ethnic minorities, disabled people, lone parents, drug users, homeless people etc. This is also reflected in the differentiation of target groups in the New Deal programmes. Concerning policy measures:

«Recent enhancements to the New Deal, aimed at those most at risk of exclusion, include StepUP (transitional jobs for the long termed unemployed) ethnic minority outreach schemes, and Ambition initiatives – helping disadvantaged people gain the right skills in key sectors, for example information technology (IT)» (p 29).

In order to facilitate participation in employment, jobcentres (Jobcentre Plus) are established locally. This is supposed to transform a passive benefit system into an active welfare state, helping people into jobs, and meet the needs of potential employers.

In the process of modernising social protection, two new tax credits, launched in April 2003, are mentioned: Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit. These are supposed to provide better financial support to families, tackle child poverty and make work pay.

Summing up, the UK Nap-inclusion (2003–2005) is very much dominated by the Labour administration's orientation towards a transition from welfare to work and preventing the risk of social exclusion through labour market inclusion (cf Armstrong 2005). Hence, it is permeated by the SID-discourse (Levitas 1998) and directed towards different groups considered to be in risk of social exclusion. For most people social exclusion is interpreted as exclusion from the labour market.

Denmark

In Denmark the Nap-inclusion is worked out by the Ministry of Social Affairs, with all ministries being invited to submit contributions (Jacobsson 2005). As in the UK the Nap is regarded as a report on current policies rather than a plan of action.

In Denmark there has been an increasing focus on activation since the late 1980s. Rosendahl and Weise (2001:159) points out that in response to the increasing numbers of working age people receiving out-of-work state transfers, successive Danish governments have developed an «Active Line» which links social and labour market policy. Such measures have become both a right and an obligation for recipients. Active measures may both be voluntary and compulsory, but during the last 15 years the compulsory (obligation) aspect has been strengthened. The origin of such policies may be traced back to 1990 and the introduction of a «Youth Allowance Scheme» which

required 18–19-years olds who claimed social assistance to participate in activation in return of benefit (Rosendahl and Weise 2001:160). In 1998 Denmark implemented a new social legislation (the Act on Active Social Policy, the Social Service Act, the Act on Integration of Foreigners in Denmark) founded on the labour market principle, emphasising that social problems should be prevented by helping people to keep employment (Ketscher 2002). This principle was particularly strong in the Act on Active Social Policy and reflects the social reform's general stressing of duty (i.e. the duty to work) rather than rights. In Denmark participation in the labour market is seen as the best way to avoid social exclusion. On the local level the authorities are also using workfare as a work-test tool and as a means of separating the «deserving» from the «undeserving» (Rosendahl og Weise 2005).

The Danish activation discourse has been dominated by the ideas of SID (social/material integration through the labour market), but have also been influenced by MUD (moral/cultural integration through the labour market). Today, enhancing the general quality of life of participations is also a legitimate goal, with the idea that «social activation» may help to reduce social problems (op.cit:160).

The Danish government sees itself as a leading country in employment policy and social inclusion policy, and has actively tried to influence the EU objectives (Jacobsson 2005).

In the Nap-inclusion 2003–2005 the Danish government states:

«Seen from a social-political perspective, unemployment is our primary concern, particularly long-term unemployment. ...The socially inclusive labour market is a broad term that does not concern one specific group of people. Rather, it represents an expectation that the labour market and workplace will make room for people who are not always able to live up to the performance requirements posed by a workplace» (p 5).

Several measures concerning the active social policy are mentioned: 1) Flexible and sheltered work arrangements, 2) the introduction of local coordination committees provided new opportunities for using rehabilitation as an instrument to integrate disadvantaged groups in the labour market, 3) Targeted job-seeking and recruitment channel for the disabled and recipients of anticipatory pension, 4) the introduction of the «working capacity concept» and the development of a new method for handling cases where a person's working capacity is threatened. «The active social policy in the local authorities now takes priority over passing income support in all respect» (p 14), 5) the establishment of Labour Market Centres, 6) a reform of the anticipatory pension attempting to strengthen the active social policy over passive income support and to create a more socially inclusive labour market.

Concerning ethnic minorities the Nap states that the government has prepared an integration policy package aimed at integrating immigrants and refugees: 1) finding jobs quickly, 2) effective Danish teaching, 3) improving utilisation of qualification. In June 2003, the parliament amended the Integration Act and the Act in Active Employment Measures, simplifying, harmonising and making labour-market integration activities more effective (p 39).

The approach «More people in work» embraces the long-termed unemployed and strives to differentiate efforts targeted at individuals. It establishes an intensive contact

between the unemployed and a public authority. The contact applies to all unemployed people, also disadvantaged groups. «The approach ensures that nobody is left dependent on public benefit, while also ensuring that all unemployed are constantly subject to contact and follow-up» (p 44). The future effort should depend on the help the unemployed person needs to regain his/her foothold in the labour market and not on what type of service the unemployed person receives.

The slogan «we must make work pay» also brought about new sanctions and incentives into the cash-benefit system:

«We must make work pay. For this reason Denmark has implemented changes to the cash-benefit system for benefit claimants having received cash benefits for six months or more. When married couples have received cash benefits for six months, their monthly benefit is reduced. As of 1 January 2004, a ceiling over public benefits was also introduced, meaning that public benefits such as housing benefits and special benefits partly or wholly cease after a six months' cash-benefit period, unless the benefit claimant has supplementary wage income. The financial incentive was further reinforced, since a smaller amount of wage income than previously is set off in the cash benefit as of 1 July 2003. Thus, married benefit claimants having received cash benefits for at least six months may retain a greater proportion of their hourly income than before» (p 44–45).

The Nap also states that «The Danish government intends to enhance our collective responsibility for the weakest groups in society» (p 20). Several target-groups are considered in the Nap: drug misusers, adult children from families with alcohol misuse, mentally ill people, prostitutes, battered women, children and young people with special needs, ethnic minorities, resource-weak older people, disabled people and the long-term unemployed. An action programme for concerted action aimed at the most disadvantaged groups in Danish society – «Our Collective Responsibility» – is specifically emphasised. «The Danish government intends to allocate more resources to the homeless, mentally ill and disabled and to prevent drug and alcohol misuse» (p 20). This implied earmarked resources for measures concerning these groups.

Germany

In Germany the Nap-inclusion process in the federal arena has been dominated by civil servants who do not perceive it as relevant to their work but rather as a reporting mechanism to the EU (Büchs and Friedrich 2005). Being a federal republic, many issues concerning social policy must be dealt with under the so-called «competing competencies» where in principle the Länder and/or the local level are in charge, but the federal level has to secure similar life conditions across the country, for instance by legislative action (op.cit:250). On the sub-national arena it seems that the EU initiative on social inclusion has gained some support, while for the local authorities, the Nap process largely remains an «alien».

In the late 1990s a turn was made in Germany towards activation policies which were developing elsewhere in Europe at the time (Clasen 2005) and structural changes in benefit programs were implemented some years later. For claimants of ALG (Arbeitslosengeld/unemployment insurance) a gradual decrease in benefit rates for long-term receipt was introduced in 1996, as well as stricter rules regarding active job search and work requirements. «The new legislation indicated a shift towards a system

of income protection, but no longer wage replacement or status-adequate employment integration» (Clasen 2005:69). Expecting individuals to adapt to changing demands on the labour market, the new legislation defined suitability criteria more narrowly merely in monetary terms. Recipients who refused to participate in «Help towards work» programmes were supposed to be sanctioned. «In this sense the job offer acts as a second means test to eliminate people who can sustain themselves without accepting job offers» (Voges, Jacobs and Trickey 2001:86).

A «Cornerstone of Action» programme to reduce youth unemployment was also established in 1998. This programme offered tailored forms of support, including training, education and job placements for unemployed young people (op.cit:98).

In 2003 Schröder announced the so-called «Agenda 2010» which implied a weakening of employment protection legislation and cost-constraining measures within several state areas. The change also implied a strong shift towards activation principles and a new emphasis on case management (Clasen 2005:74).

In the Nap-inclusion 2003–2005 the German government states that Germany is faced with the central challenge of improving employment and earning opportunities as a whole and reducing the persistent high unemployment in the long term. «Long-term unemployment is the main cause of poverty and social exclusion» (p 4). The Nap refers to the Agenda 2010 programme of the Federal Government which goal «is the targeted and increased activation of the individual's potential to enable social and economic participation and to dismantle material dependency on state benefits» (p 4). The most effective social policy is labour market policy. The Nap is specifically emphasising the importance of «integrating disadvantaged groups into the labour market by strengthening activation measures following the principle of 'Promotion and Demanding'» (p 56).

Hence, facilitating access to paid employment is presented as the main approach for political action 2003–2005. «To strengthen the momentum of activation within the context of a preventive policy, the qualification of these groups most at risk is especially important» (p 27).

Generally, the groups at risk were defined as long-termed unemployed recipients of social assistance and unemployment benefits, people with poor qualifications, severely disabled people and immigrants. Girls and young women was selected as the priority target group in the activities to improve the education and training situation of young people with poorer opportunities, for instance through a programme called «Promoting Skills – Vocational Qualification for Target Groups Requiring Special Support».

Overcoming unemployment «is the most important political goal and the most effective means of social integration» (p 29). Thus, politics must give priority to improving the conditions for sustainable growth and for more employment. The challenge is perceived to lie in further developing a high level of social protection in view of social and demographic changes.

With reference to the Hartz Commission³ the Nap stresses that important innovations aim among other things at improving the quality and speed of finding employment for people, the reorganisation of temporary work and the introduction of personnel service agencies as new means of arranging employment. In the future, the Nap states, job centres are to be the local centres for all services in the labour market.

One main intention of The Third Act for Modern Services in the Labour Market was to simplify and remove the bureaucracy from legislation to encouraging employment and unemployment insurance.

Another approach for political action was «Making Society Child and Family-Friendly», emphasising that a better work-life balance was a central reform project for social policy and a foundation stone for effectively counter poverty and social exclusion among families with children and, in particular, single parents.

A third approach was to increase the participation and self-determination of people with disabilities. Firstly, the Nap referred to the implementation of the Act on Equal Treatment of People with Disability, and secondly, to a report on the employment situation of severely disabled people and the Federal Government's suggestions for further measures (the strategy of joint effort by all involved).

A fourth approach was integration of immigrants. The Nap pointed out that Germany was, at the time, in a transitional stage with regard to the legislative implementation of immigration policy. The new Immigration Act was an attempt to put the promotion of the integration of immigrants on a new legal footing. This seems to imply a move towards more compulsory efforts in integration policy. The draft law made a provision for a requirement to participate as well as an entitlement to participate. The relationship between labour market policy and integration policy was conceived as necessary and of significant importance.

Discussion

There are two general (and interrelated) systems of ideas that are dominating the description of policies and measures in the Naps-inclusion and which are highlighted by the Joint Reports. These may be captured by the concepts of «activation» and «targeting». *Activation* embraces the objective of promoting employment. The dominant motto of the Social Inclusion Strategy is closely linked to the «activation» philosophy of the European Employment Strategy, and can be expressed as «The best safeguard against social exclusion is a job» (cf. de la Porte and Pochet 2002).

The idea of activation may be connected to a more general discourse on «rights and duties». The idea of a «new welfare contract» between the citizen and the state is salient in current western policy discourse, crossing national and political borders. The idea may be summarised as follows: access to welfare benefits is conditional on certain duties the citizen has to meet, above all, the duty to work (Kildal 1999, White 2003). Today, the idea of social rights, which has been coupled to the notion of citizenship, seems to give way to a principle of reciprocity, the essence of which is to combat a policy of «something for nothing» by balancing benefits and contributions, rights and duties. The needy shall receive aid, «but only in return for some contribution to the society» (Mead 1997:221). The idea of reciprocity is indefinite and there are many potential ways of structuring a reciprocity-based policy. One way, it may be claimed, is expressed by the policy of activation or workfare.

The language of the Social Inclusion Strategy (SIS) is only indirectly related to a language of morals or justice and ideas of individual rights and duties. It concerns

questions of justice in the sense that the idea of combating social exclusion and poverty itself embraces moral assessments. In SIS, however, the main concerns are to determine the best means to obtain the overall objective of social inclusion. The language of the Naps/Joint report is primarily instrumental. Activation is not justified in terms of rights and duties, but as the best way to achieve social inclusion for people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Activation is a consolidated key goal of labour market and social policy in many member states (Joint Report 2004:47). However, the instrumental formulation of «activation» in the OMC process does not necessarily imply that normative assessments of rights and duties are unimportant at the national level. Although moralistic perspectives of poverty and social exclusion (the MUD discourse in the term of Levitas (1998)) have been influential in Denmark, UK and Germany, the duty to work and the accompanying activation policies has rather been interpreted as a mean of material/social inclusion of people out of work (the SID discourse) rather than moral/cultural integration of an «underclass». There has, however, been a deliberate change in the balance between rights and duties (to work) in these countries with an increased influence of obligations. Dependence on welfare allowances is regarded as contradictive to social inclusion.

In the Naps the trend of «activation» is generally expressed in three ways (Joint Report 2004):

- Many member states are increasingly focusing their policies on promoting self-sufficiency through an employment friendly social protection system that fosters participation in the labour market.
- Most member states refer to the active involvement of employers in the creation of a more open and inclusive labour market.
- An increasing number of member states seek to improve financial incentives to take up work.

In the joint report (and of course in the Naps of the UK, Denmark and Germany) «activation» is principally interpreted and described in a positive language. No remonstrance is explicitly uttered and the report does not discuss the problematic relationship between activation policies and coercion (e.g. expressed in the phrase «An offer you can't refuse» (see Lødemel and Trickey 2001)) or the complicated distinction between people who are able and not able to work (which may re-establish a moral distinction between the deserving and undeserving needy). The increased importance of obligations on the expense of welfare rights also implies a general shift in focus from social policy towards labour market policy in combating poverty and social exclusion. This may bring about a change in the normative foundation of the welfare state that may not be without negative side-effects (e.g. for those considered less attractive in the labour market).

«*Targeting*» is another important concept in the current national and international debate about the development of the welfare state (Hatland 2001, Gough et.al.1997). By the concept of «targeting» we generally understand a kind of welfare policies emphasising that welfare measures as far as possible should reach the persons in most need of help. Such a principle may contradict a principle of universality although it does

not necessarily do so (Kildal and Kuhnle 2005). Targeted policies may be complementary to universal ones for example in the form of supplementary measures for people with special needs (Titmuss 1968). Targeting will, however, imply some kind of differentiation of welfare contributions. Targeting may be related to 1) the concepts of *inclusion/exclusion* which implies a differentiation of welfare contributions according to target-groups (membership) 2) a fine-meshed differentiation of social categories for instance of the terms of eligibility, what we may call *tailoring* and 3) the division between *legal rights* and *local assessments of needs* in the distribution of welfare services, for instance by the use of *means-testing* (Nilssen 1999). Here targeting indicates to increase the space of local (for example municipal or professional) use of discretion in the process of welfare distribution (Hatland 2003).

The policy trends described in the joint report include all of these forms of targeting.

- The Naps particularly highlight the challenge of developing tailored and individualised supports to those who are most disadvantaged and distant from the labour market.
- While many measures are planned to continue and reinforce a universal welfare system, there are measures on specific areas and attempts to tackle the problems of the most vulnerable people.
- Some countries, whether or not they have universal welfare systems, adopt a more individualistic approach directed towards those at risk.
- *More and more member states rely on packages where personalised guidance is offered to the unemployed or job seekers. An individually-tailored combination of measures is used to create pathways towards employment.
- Member states continue to devote particular attention to delivery mechanisms as a means of developing more effective programmes. The trend towards greater decentralisation continues (Joint Report 2004).

This is certainly reflected in the Naps of the UK, Denmark and Germany. Several specific target groups are identified, among others disadvantaged children and youths, the long-term unemployed, lone parents, disabled people, immigrants and ethnic minorities and substance abusers, and individually tailored measures are often seen as the best effort to achieve certain social goals (e.g. inclusion in the labour market).

The ideas of «activation» and «targeting» are very closely integrated in the policies against poverty and social exclusion. This is also reflected in the future key priorities in the field of OMC-inclusion, presented in the joint report (2004):

- Promoting investment in and tailoring of active labour market measures to meet the needs of those who have the greatest difficulties in accessing employment;
- Ensuring that social protection schemes are adequate and accessible for all and that they provide effective work incentives for those who can work;
- Increasing the access of the most vulnerable and those most at risk of social exclusion to decent housing, quality health and lifelong learning opportunities;

- Implementing a concerted effort to prevent early school leaving and to promote smooth transition from school to work;
- Developing a focus on eliminating poverty and social exclusion among children;
- Making a drive to reduce poverty and social exclusion of immigrants and ethnic minorities.

Targeting is interpreted as an effective means in the attempt to get people activated. Possible problems related to effectiveness, stigma and social control (cf Titmuss 1974, Marshall 1965) are not discussed. The alteration from rights to duties, for instance, seems to imply an increased use of compulsion in social policy and considerations about social control may emerge as an important aspect of social inclusion policies, hence blurring the distinction between social inclusion as emancipation and social inclusion as coerced normalisation. On the local level, for example, workfare seems to serve both as a work-test tool and as a means of separating «deserving» from the «undeserving» and in Denmark some of the measures directed towards immigrants who live on public support have been strongly contested. Controversial measures may be dressed up as unproblematic means in the fight against poverty and social exclusion both in the Naps and the Joint Report.

Social inclusion and the sustainability of the welfare state. The objective of «social inclusion» may be interpreted as a purely moral goal and the OMC-inclusion process as an instrumental approach to attain this goal. Activation and targeting appears as the most effective policy approaches to achieve such aims. However, the strength of these approaches may also be interpreted in relation to a more general discourse which we may call «the discourse on the sustainability of the welfare state». Generally this discourse concerns the social, moral and economical challenges of the welfare state and whether these will undermine or severely dismantle the historical accomplishments of this state structure. In the modern form the concern and critique of the welfare state included strong statements and certainties about welfare state provisions contradicting the basic logic of capitalism, hindering the function of market mechanism, create dependent people instead of making them autonomous, creating disincentives to work, and creating insurmountable fiscal burdens for the state because of uncontrollable costs which in its turn would undermine economic growth.

In the EU these (mainly) economical concerns must also be seen in relation to the establishment of a single market. Trubek and Trubek (2005:346) argue that

«because reform of national models promise to bring positive gains in single market performance, and because allowing unsustainable levels of social expenditure would have negative effects on the common currency, issues previously treated strictly as concerns at a national level have now moved into EU agenda».

The interpretation of the demographic development in Europe has also played an important role in the discussion about the sustainability of the welfare state. The Joint Report on Social protection and Social Inclusion (2005:7) states:

«In order to achieve their key role in European society and economy, social protection systems need to be responsive to wider social trends. The complex set of demographic, economic and societal factors that have driven and will continue

to drive structural changes across the EU have put societal protection systems under pressure to adapt and modernise».

The Report maintains that the shifts in age structure of the population will have important implications for the full range of social policies. Social protection systems need to be shaped so as to respond to the economical and social need of the future. Social inclusion policies are not only important to prevent and combat poverty «but may also contribute to increasing labour supply, through developing people's capacity to work and action to make work pay» (Joint Report 2005:8). As we have seen the Joint Report (2004) concludes that several member states also have considered active ageing by means of improving the working conditions for older workers, reducing early retirement schemes or stimulating demand on the part of employers as well as labour supply.

«Faced with demographic ageing, all EU Member States must modernise their social protection systems in order to ensure adequate pension and healthcare provision in the future without jeopardising the stability of public finances» (Joint Report 2004:51).

Economic growth and making work pay are as we have seen also emphasised as the main concerns in order to fight social exclusion in the UK, Danish and German Naps. Thus, in interpreting the content of the OMC-inclusion process it is important to see the means of activation and targeting in relation to such ideas of sustainability. On a general level some authors (Jessop 2002, Chalmers and Lodge 2003) have seen the impact of OMC (employment, inclusion) on European welfare states as being instrumental in moving from a Keynesian welfarism to Schumpeterian workfarism.

Final remarks

According to Armstrong (2005) the discourse of «social exclusion» originally came to prominence in EU discussion in the late 1980s in preference to the language of «poverty» which had underpinned the earlier «Poverty Programmes» of the European Commission. This was both due to the hostility of some national governments to talk about poverty and to the adoption of the language by the research community to define a research agenda for the analysis and measurement of the multidimensional phenomenon of exclusion. Combating social exclusion became an important goal at the EU level after the Lisbon Council of March 2000 and later that year the new method of open coordination was launched to this field of social policy. The Social Inclusion Strategy contains a multi-dimensional approach to social exclusion and poverty, but the dominating discourses influencing the content of these processes have been the discourse on «activation» (rights and duties) and «targeting». This implies among other things a strengthening of the duty to work, the use of sanctions (e.g. compulsory measures) and incentives (making work pay), selective efforts directed towards groups perceived to be social excluded or in risk of social exclusion, and decentralisation (individually tailored measures). Social policy has to a large extent become labour market policy. In spite of institutional differences (e.g. in welfare regimes) this seems to be the

trend in the UK, Denmark and Germany (obviously there are also dissimilarities between the countries).

The ideas of «activation» and «targeting» are not created at the Community level and passed on to the member states. Rather the opposite seems to be the case – these ideas convey a trend in the development of social policy in member states expressed in the national action plans. It is, however, reasonable to believe that such values are reinforced through the process of the open method of coordination. They are reflected in the objectives of the OMC-inclusion and indeed positively offered in the joint report on social inclusion by the Commission and the Council. Levitas (1998) associates the activation policy in the UK and its influence of the SID discourse (material integration through work) directly with EU discourses around social inclusion.

One important goal in this change of focus from welfare (redistribution) to work (labour market policy) has been to alter the relationship between rights and duties towards a stronger emphasis on the obligations of the citizens. This can, however, not be sufficiently understood with reference to the concept of «social inclusion». The strength of «activation» and «targeting» may also be understood in relation to what we have called the «discourse on the sustainability of the welfare state». These approaches are conceived as instrumental in order to diminish the press on the welfare state due to people's dependency on different forms of social benefits. One important aspect of this is the perceived demographic development in the EU member states, i.e. an ageing population and a future lack of labour. Following this kind of reasoning, the Social Inclusion Strategy of the EU becomes more of an economical than a moral or ethical project. Social inclusion is subjected to general economical objectives such as economical growth and financial sustainability. Activation and targeting are perceived as the dominating solutions to economically founded problems.

Notes

¹ According to De la Porte and Pochet (2002), the Blair government played a dynamic role in putting the question of poverty and social exclusion on the top of European agenda during the Portuguese Presidency.

² RED – redistributionist discourse; MUD – moral underclass discourse; SID – social integrationist discourse.

³ The Commission «Modern Services in the Labour Market» named after its leader Peter Hartz (head of the personnel executive committee of Volkswagen).

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