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**NATIONAL ACTION PLANS FOR
SOCIAL INCLUSION 2003-2005
AS INSTRUMENTS IN THE
FIGHT AGAINST EXTREME POVERTY**

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Introduction

Foreword

In 29 countries across the globe, ATD Fourth World brings people living in poverty together with others from many different walks of life to learn from each other, build mutual support and take action together. It is in this way that we move forward towards our objective of eradicating poverty and building an inclusive society where everybody can enjoy access to all of their fundamental human rights.

Poverty and social exclusion are ever present across Europe and those affected by them continue to feel mistrusted, seeing themselves as non-participants in the construction of society, not really associated with the struggle against poverty, and unable to exercise their rights as citizens in their own communities. European citizens refuse to accept that this situation continue in repeatedly demanding that the fight against poverty and social exclusion be treated as a priority of the European Union¹.

The International Movement ATD Fourth World has been active in pursuing this priority at a European Union level for the past 30 years. The establishment of our Delegation to the EU has allowed us build relationships with the various EU institutions and to act as a bridge between people living in poverty, those working alongside them and the decision makers that are shaping the future of Europe. We are founding members of the principle NGO coalition active in the fight against poverty at an EU level, the European Anti-Poverty Network, and contribute our expertise to the work of the Platform of European Social NGOs.

This document contains comments on both the content of the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAP/incl) 2003-2005, and the development of the European Strategy for Social Inclusion in a wider sense. Our primary concern is whether or not this strategy is reaching and supporting those living in extreme or chronic poverty, who have been continually excluded from the benefits brought by economic progress and development on our continent. Families and individuals who, generation after generation have suffered multiple disadvantages, broken to the point that they are no longer able to exercise their rights and take up their responsibilities. People whose courage to continue to fight for a better future for themselves and for their children has gone largely unrecognised, and whose knowledge and expertise on how to build this future, is rarely asked for.

Development of the EU Social Inclusion Strategy

The conclusions of the Lisbon Summit in 2000, committed the EU to making *"a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010"* and proposed that the Open-Method of Co-ordination (OMC) be used to facilitate co-operation between the Member States in this domain. This was the beginning of the European Strategy for Social Inclusion, which continued to develop with the agreement of four Common Objectives in the Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion at the Nice Summit in 2000; the submission of the first National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAPs/incl) to the European Commission in June 2001; and the agreement of eighteen Common Indicators for Social Inclusion at the Laeken Summit later that year. The first Joint Report on Social Inclusion, analysing and evaluating the NAPs/incl, was published by the Commission and Council in December 2001, and the establishment of the Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion in 2002, provided a source of funding for activities across the Union that worked towards making this strategy a success. In addition, the organisation of an annual Round Table, to evaluate the progress the strategy was making, was secured in partnership with the Presidency of the European Council.

The fight against poverty and social exclusion at an EU level received a tremendous boost with the arrival of this strategy. Critics of the OMC were right to highlight the weaknesses of the process, with no legal basis in the treaties, the Social Inclusion Strategy did not receive the high level political attention that it deserved. Nonetheless, governments in all of the Member States mobilised personnel and resources to produce the first round of NAPs/incl, and NGOs and other actors on the ground started to get together to understand more about the process and to try to influence and engage with it. The last two years have seen this mobilisation and dialogue develop even further and today, a real momentum in the fight against poverty and social exclusion has been generated at both national and European levels.

¹ Source Eurobarometer surveys published by the DG Information of the European Commission. In Eurobarometer # 59, "The priorities of the EU", Spring 2003, 90% of those questioned from the 15 EU member states responded positively when asked if the fight against poverty and social exclusion should be a priority or not.

Economic and Political Context: Gap Between Commitments and Action

At the Lisbon Council in 2000, European countries stated **“that the number of people in the Union living below the poverty threshold and in a situation of social exclusion is unacceptable, and that measures must be taken which will have a decisive impact for the eradication of poverty, by setting appropriate targets, to be agreed by the Council by the end of the year.”**² The reaffirmation of this commitment at each Spring Summit is very encouraging. However, **the contrast between this and the lack of action poses real questions.**

National and European economic and political contexts can help explain this contradiction. The fragile international economic and political situation of today, has resulted in choices being dictated by the priorities of economic growth, security and technological progress; or other debates such as reforming pensions, decentralisation and international affairs.

These concerns, as much as they are real and justified, conceal the growing problem of poverty, which is far from being a minor issue, and can undermine the fight against it.

Budget reductions in the field of social protection are affecting the fight against poverty and social exclusion in most European countries. Some of these are on an alarming scale. Allocation of funding for social measures is made on such an arbitrary basis that countries give the impression that they do not believe in their social policies, and act as if the suppression of measures does not impact on people’s lives.

It seems that the pursuit of economic growth is the sole objective, no matter what the price. This pursuit has been further reinforced by the recent economic slowdown and the high unemployment rates observed in the most developed European countries, or in the context of convergence criteria for other countries. It must be noted that the growth of collective wealth is not in itself an instrument to fight against poverty. This is because it does not impact on the poorest, people living in extreme poverty who face an ensemble of difficulties, who are excluded and cannot participate, and whose poverty cannot only be measured in financial terms.

The way in which the market functions produces exclusion: those who do not contribute to the national output or the national pension funds are left behind. The fear produced by the current climate over security, also leads to exclusion: “the poor” and “the foreigner” appear as the first potential dangers to peace in our society. The race for technological progress presents the risk of dividing society between those who have access to the advantages it brings, and those who do not. That is why it is necessary to **envisage an inclusive society (with inclusive policies), instead of being limited by using corrective measures in an effort to repair a dysfunctional system.**

If the fight against poverty was indeed the priority of European policy that it is claimed to be by Member States at each Spring Summit, we would have already seen results. The inherent danger in the current concept of sustainable development is the growing number of “priorities” and the resulting dispersion of efforts. **Opting for the fight against poverty and social exclusion as the prime objective is an investment for society as a whole,** at a social and cultural, as well as economic, level.

² « Promote social integration » paragraphs 32 & 33 Lisbon Summit conclusions

Analysis of the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion 2003-2005

Our Approach

In our analysis of the NAPs/incl 2003 – 2005, ATD Fourth World has chosen **to concentrate on the concerns of people living in extreme or chronic poverty**, whatever their ethnicity or country of origin. As such, there are many aspects of the NAPs that are not explored in this document.

We have highlighted both what we have found to be positive and what appears to be dangerous for the poorest in the NAPs, in addition to making propositions in areas which we find to be underdeveloped. We have also tried to take into account the different ways in which Member States have defined poverty and social exclusion, as this evidently effects the elaboration of policies and the choice of what to include in the NAP.

We analysed the policies proposed in the NAPs by focusing on seven domains which, in our experience, are fundamental to people living in extreme poverty: The right to **employment, housing, healthcare, education, access to services, culture and to live as a family**. Each area has been looked at from the perspective of guaranteeing **human dignity and the indivisibility of rights**.

The question of the right to adequate resources has been looked at across the board. However, ATD Fourth World would like to emphasise here the importance of creating and maintaining the **minimum income guarantees necessary to live in dignity, as a pre-requisite for social inclusion**.

Dignity

The overall aim must be for every human being to have the dignity that they are due.

A policy which respects dignity is one which **accompanies** each individual, family, or group on a pathway towards social inclusion and avoids the creation of provider/dependent relationships in favour of a partnership approach. The conditions for such partnerships must include respect for different paces, access to information about rights, listening and common decision making. **Personalisation** of this accompaniment is a step towards guaranteeing that the wishes and ambitions of a person or family are really being understood and taken into consideration. This becomes even more important for the most vulnerable, who have huge difficulties in achieving their personal projects when faced with institutional frameworks that appear complex and unapproachable. In order for this personalised accompaniment to be effective in the long term, the importance of **follow-up** cannot be overestimated as those with the most difficulties are often disproportionately affected by failures and life crises, such as the loss of employment or housing.

Indivisibility of Rights

The refusal to accept poverty and social exclusion must be expressed in terms of guaranteeing access to fundamental human rights. The indivisibility of these rights and the multidimensional nature of poverty call for global and coherent policies to fight against it.

First of all, for such policies to be developed, the **participation** of people living in extreme poverty is essential as they are the real-life experts on poverty and the first to fight against it. Moreover, the existence of social exclusion implies that society is in some way doing the excluding, albeit often in a passive manner. Hence the need for widespread **mobilisation** on the part of not only the State, NGOs and other interested parties in the fight against poverty; but also the private and public sectors, and of all citizens. Finally, all of these efforts need to be **co-ordinated** in order to mutually reinforce each other rather than negate or weaken each other's positive effects.

It is also important to take into account that the content of this analysis has been determined in many ways by the time and resources available to produce it.

- As our focus is on the impact of the NAPs/incl on people living in extreme or chronic poverty, our analysis is based primarily **on comments made by ATD Fourth World teams on a national level**, that gave us an overview of how different policies affect people's lives and clarified the political and economic contexts within which the NAPs were written. Teams from Belgium, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Spain, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands contributed to our work in this way.

- All of the NAPs and their translations were not submitted at the same time to the Commission. We were thus obliged to begin our analysis with the first NAPs to arrive and then proceeded by integrating comments from the others as we received them. Unfortunately, our work was completed before the NAP/incl from Portugal was made public.

As a result, the reader may find that some NAPs are quoted more than others.

In general, our analysis aims to bring together comments from the NAPs/incl 2003-2005³ produced by the EU Member States, the International Movement ATD Fourth World⁴ and the experience of people living in poverty across Europe⁵.

What is Extreme Poverty?

"The lack of basic security connotes the absence of one or more factors enabling individuals and families to assume basic responsibilities and to enjoy fundamental rights. The situation may become widespread and result in more serious and permanent consequences. The lack of basic security leads to chronic poverty when it simultaneously affects several aspects of people's lives, when it is prolonged and when it severely compromises people's chances of regaining their rights and of reassuming their responsibilities in the foreseeable future. "

Despouy Report on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty⁶

Member States show significant differences in the way in which they define poverty and social exclusion.

For ATD Fourth World, there are three fundamental components of extreme or chronic poverty:

Multidimensionality

Many countries still consider the lack of financial resources to be the main cause of poverty and see employment as the main route out of it. Even if the importance of employment as a means of gaining financial security and self-confidence is not questioned, it is fundamental to understand that the roots of extreme poverty and the obstacles impeding the individual from getting out of poverty, are also anchored in other aspects of life: education, health, housing, family, culture, access to services.

It is encouraging to see that the multidimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion emerges, or is confirmed, in some NAPs.

NAP UK: *"Poverty and social exclusion are complex and multidimensional problems. While household income clearly has an important impact on well-being, there are many other factors that can help or hinder efforts to transform the lives of those suffering from poverty. "*

NAP France: *"Public authorities are attempting to propose solutions to the pauperisation of persons that are confronted by an accumulation of difficulties which prolong their exclusion from society."**

The fight against poverty should:

- Not be limited to the pursuit of economic growth, employment policy or social protection.
- Take equal account of all aspects of life affected by poverty.
- Not be categorial.
- Involve co-ordination between all relevant authorities.

NAP Ireland: *"Poverty proofing"* goes in this direction as it calls for different Ministries to look at the impact of their policies on poverty in the context of a National Anti-Poverty Strategy. This mainstreaming approach is interesting but needs to be more coherent with economic policy in order to be effective.

³ Examples quoted from the NAPs/incl are indented and introduced by the name of the NAP. Direct quotes are in italics. Our own translations are marked with an asterix*.

⁴ Our most important comments are in bold.

⁵ Experience and testimonies from people living in poverty or national teams are in boxes at the beginning of each chapter. Direct quotes are in italics. Our own translations are marked with an asterix*.

⁶ The final report on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty presented by the special rapporteur Leandro Despouy (UNESCO), 1995, uses the definition proposed by Father Joseph Wresinski in the report Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security adopted by the French Economic and Social Council in 1987.

Denial of Fundamental Rights

More and more, it is acknowledged that programmes aimed at fighting against poverty do not reach those who need it the most. The refusal to accept the persistence of this poverty must be expressed in promoting access for all to all fundamental rights.

These rights are interdependent. Political and civic rights are indivisible from economic, social and cultural rights.

NAP Belgium: *"Social Inclusion policy is nothing more than an implementation of Human Rights policy, with special attention given to those for whom this implementation has been complicated by certain social, cultural, economic or personal factors."*

Anti-poverty policies must:

- Accompany, not assist, the person. Taking into account their opinion is essential if the best-suited solution, adapted to their specific needs, is to be found.
- Guarantee the participation of the people living in extreme poverty in decision-making processes and political life by recognising them as full citizens.
- Be for everyone, avoiding stigmatisation and the creation of "second-class citizens", but reach the most excluded by adapting to their needs.

Persistence

Extreme poverty is persistent and it has to be fought on a long-term basis.

NAP Germany: *"The result of reinforcing poverty throughout life, and of its multidimensionality, can be characterised as extreme poverty"**

Getting out of poverty is long-term process.

- The gradual recovery of personal autonomy should be the eventual outcome. The fight against poverty must not only consist of "managing" poverty but rather aim to eradicate it.
- A coherent and continuous strategy would reduce the swings in policy direction that can have a devastating impact on people's lives.

These three components combined are generally not to be found in the definitions of poverty used in most of the NAPs/incl. Some of them do not even mention poverty at all. Others simply list a number of "at-risk" or "vulnerable" groups.

It should be noted, however, that even if the policies proposed do not always have the eradication of poverty as an objective, significant progress has been made in recognising the extent to which poverty and social exclusion exist in many countries.

Participation of the 'Real-life Experts' - People with Experience of Poverty and Social Exclusion

One major innovation of the Social Inclusion Strategy has been the common objective *"To mobilise all relevant bodies"* in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. It is this objective which recognises the extent of engagement necessary across society, in both horizontal and vertical directions, in order to make a real impact on the goal of eradicating poverty. A vital element of this mobilisation is that which calls for the promotion, according to national practice, of *"the participation and self-expression of people suffering exclusion, in particular in regard to their situation and the policies and measures affecting them"*.

This objective is a recognition of the need for knowledge that people living in poverty and exclusion possess with regard to their own situation and is a first step towards including them in the process of developing policies to fight against it. However, simply wanting the participation of people with experience of poverty is not enough to make it possible. The ways and means of achieving this participation need to be thought out and put in place in order to bring people from different worlds, and often with different logic, to work for a common purpose, that of increasing the positive impact on people's lives.

Le croisement des savoirs et des pratiques⁷
- When the Fourth World, Academics and Professionals Think Together-

In a 1983 lecture at the Sorbonne, the founder of ATD Fourth World, Joseph Wresinski, called on the academic world to *"ensure that the thoughts and reflections of the poorest are recognised as valid. Without you, their validity is constantly challenged and denied; nobody listens to the poorest; instead, we impose outside interpretations on them that prevent them from reflecting on their own life."*

This challenge was taken up over a two year period, from 1996 to 1998, by French and Belgian participants in the pioneering research programme Quart Monde Université⁸. The project was experimental in that it attempted to produce a new kind of knowledge through the merging of three different types of knowledge: **knowledge gained through experience; knowledge gained through action; and academic knowledge**. It demonstrated the potential success of people from very different backgrounds working together. Combining their vast and varied knowledge and experience, the participants were able to reach a clearer picture of what constitutes poverty and in doing so, to look at progressive ways forward in the fight against it.

The success of the programme led to a similar methodology being used in 2000 for the programme Quart Monde Partenaire⁹. This time instead of academics, professionals from different sectors (education, law, police, culture, social work, housing, training) worked together with people that had direct experience of poverty on ways to improve relations between the two groups.

The lessons learnt from these two programmes are extensive and have led, amongst other things, to the following reflection on **participation**:

Dialogue and co-construction are possible only in so much as we depart from 'alibi-participation', or 'user participation'; that claims to give people a voice without really understanding them; and that claims to give people a place, without enabling them to really have an influence on decisions or orientations that directly affect their lives. Pooling knowledge and experience must go hand in hand with the pooling of power of all the participants present: power from position or role, power in means of expression, decision-making power.

In order to learn from each other and act together, the fundamental pre-condition is the **recognition of people living in poverty as full participants in the process**.

In order to learn from each other how to act together, certain conditions are essential :

- **Create opportunities for people living in poverty and social exclusion to get involved in learning processes** that can help them take on questions, formulate their own interrogations, build up their own autonomous reflections on the basis of analysing their living conditions and immediate environment. **This presupposes that people are not left alone**, that they can get together, be part of a group, have places where they can express themselves, enter into dialogue in real confidence, and be legitimised as representatives that address common challenges.
- **Take into account a person in their entirety and the interdependence of fundamental rights, by creating a multidimensional and multicultural process** that freely links and mobilises participants from different sectors of education, health, social services, employment and vocational training etc. It is impossible to consider a person in their entirety by taking into account only one aspect of who they are, no matter what its significance, or by looking only at their wants and needs. Poor people are not simply 'have-nots' who possess solely their knowledge about poverty. They have a wider reflection and expertise to share on how they are treated and how to tackle problems in all areas of life.
- **Assure that within the process, those facing the most difficulties are not dependent on the professionals participating in any way** that might affect decisions to be taken about their lives. Participants should be completely independent from one another.
- **Adopt an attitude of co-researcher, co-trainer, co-participant** in facing the situations presented, the identification of questions, their conceptualisation, and the search for solutions. This common attitude, supported by educational and methodological means, permits equality to be restored between the different types of participants, and moves away from the *"we know better than you what is best for you"* attitude. This then enables appropriate solutions to be found together; having agreeing at the outset what the situation is, the objectives to be reached, the ways and means of doing so, the different stages of the process and the times for evaluation with the various partners involved.
- **Establish a team of 'trainers'**; made up of people with knowledge of poverty and of people with knowledge of the professional and institutional world. This is in order to allow such different types of participants to come together, understand each other, confront each other with consideration for their respective positions, and create together. The accompanying team should foster, throughout its work, the conditions favourable to the development of critical awareness and a transformation in experience of the participants.

⁷ Pooling Knowledge and Experience (translation)

⁸ Fourth World University (translation). The publication detailing this programme's findings is *"Le croisement des savoirs. Quand le Quart Monde et l'université pensent ensemble."*, Editions Quart Monde, 1999.

⁹ Fourth World Partner (translation). The publication detailing this programme's findings is *"Le croisement des savoirs et de pratiques. Quand le Quart Monde et les professionnels se forment ensemble."*, Editions Quart Monde, 2002.

Annex 4 of the French NAP/incl is devoted to a presentation of the ATD Fourth World project the Croisement des savoirs outlined above.

In the context of the Social Inclusion Strategy, the aim is to involve people suffering from exclusion in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policies and measures to combat poverty and social exclusion that are being outlined in the NAPs/incl . Evidently, because of the many conditions that need to be put in place to enable this real participation to take place, the practice is not yet widespread in the Member States. There is however, both recognition of the value of this kind of participation and tentative ways of putting it into practice in many of the NAPs

The first condition in fostering the participation of people living in poverty, is the **recognition of the value of their knowledge**, gained through experience.

NAP UK *" The recognition that people with a direct experience of poverty have much to offer a successful anti-poverty strategy is beginning to transform the UK's approach. "*

NAP France *"After having recognised that they have a real knowledge that could be merged with that of others, academics or professionals. The knowledge of poverty that the people themselves have through experience, has to be expressed and confronted with other, more theoretical, kinds of knowledge ."**

After having recognised the value of this participation, there is also the willingness to encourage input into the consultation processes surrounding the production of the NAPs/incl and even consultation with people living in poverty and NGOs on ways to achieve this.

NAP UK In order to further explore how the NAP/incl process could be a catalyst for the participation of people living in poverty in policy development and evaluation, the Department of Work and Pensions set up a Participation Working Group *" The group concluded that establishing a culture of community participation will take a long time, and that the NAPs/incl - and other participative activities underway - are early steps in a longer process. Developing this will require the active support of all concerned, but the lessons that can be learned reward the effort involved. "*

NAP Belgium *"The consultation process is detailed in a report entitled 'Political participation and the NAP/incl : Work remains to be done – method and conditions'. Backed up by their experience of political consultation, the associations underline that 'participating' in policymaking cannot be limited to having a say, being consulted or being heard during political hearings. For them, participation means a structural involvement within a framework of permanent consultation between partners that are committed to one another and that enter into agreement on the content, timing and procedures for discussion. In particular, the associations underline the value of the political participation of people living in poverty."**

It has to be noted that where the direct participation of people experiencing exclusion themselves is not mentioned, there is often instead a participation of NGOs or associations representing them.

For people living in poverty to have the freedom and the support necessary to express themselves and then to be able to take part in dialogue with authorities on policies and measures that could ultimately affect their lives, they need to be a part of a reference group. There are many NGOs, associations, voluntary and community organisations which offer these spaces of expression in confidence and their involvement in the NAP/incl process needs to be encouraged, as does the promotion of participatory practices within other NGOs.

NAP Spain The intention is *"To carry out activities to guarantee the presence of those affected in the bodies for participation and decision-making of the associations that represent them."**

NAP Finland *"In the best cases, organisations are simply experts in everyday life."*

NAP Sweden *" The goal of popular movement policy is to ensure that people have the best possible opportunities for forming and participating in popular movements, societies and other kinds of citizens' associations. Such associations are especially important as a means of giving economically and socially vulnerable people a chance to make their voices heard. "*

Whilst specific input into the NAP/incl is important, the overall objective should be for this kind of participation to take place wherever decisions are being taken that will affect the lives of people living in poverty and social exclusion.

NAP Ireland *"At local level, members of Community and Voluntary Fora, which are representative of local communities including the disadvantaged, have an input into the operations and policies of the City/Council Development Boards (CDBs). In particular, the Fora provide input on matters relating to social inclusion and policies and programmes for the disadvantaged as well as cultural, sporting, recreational, residential and general local development issues."*

There is always a risk that even if direct participation is accepted as a principle, it will either never be put into practice or stay at the level of simple consultation, rather than developing into real partnership with people experiencing poverty and exclusion. Some countries, however, have taken the step of transforming this ambition into a requirement for participation enshrined in different forms of legislation.

NAP Denmark *"Section 112 of the Act on Social Services focuses on users' possibility of gaining influence in organising their own lives. The legislation calls for advisory and consultative user councils to be established, to support political bodies."*

NAP Netherlands *"With effect from 1 January 2003, a National Client Council has been set up based on the Wet Structuur Uitvoering Werk en Inkomen¹⁰. This National Client Council advises the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment on policy issues within the work and income fields, and the design of client participation."*

NAP France *"The Act relating to the fight against exclusion (1998) provided for the expression of people through various mechanisms. [...] In the same way, the Act regarding the modernisation of the social and socio-medical action, January 2002, defined people's fundamental rights, including the participation of users and their entourage in the conception and implementation of these rights."**

NAP Belgium *"Organisations of people living in poverty are recognised by the authorities, structured in networks and represented in the Accompaniment Committee of the Service de Lutte contre la Pauvreté, la Précarité et l'Exclusion sociale¹¹, which is a means of permanent consultation between political officials and other relevant bodies. This Service was created in 1998, on the basis of a Co-operation Agreement between the Federal State, Communities, and Regions, an agreement regarding the continuity of policies in the fight against poverty."**

A legislated right to participation is certainly a step in the right direction but even those countries that have taken this step, admit that they have a long way to go before people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion will be able to take up their rightful place as full partners.

NAP France *"In spite, of encouraging outcomes and experiences, mainly within solidarity associations, it is important to find ways to anchor permanently these approaches in the policies to fight exclusion."**

Right to Employment

In Flanders, Belgium, we have seen examples of how long-term accompaniment (months and even years) can help a person get through difficult periods in their pathways for social and professional integration.

A 23 year old young man taking part in mechanics training, almost abandoned the programme because he had the impression that he wouldn't learn anything new. He benefited from the help of his adviser, who intervened and sent him to another place to complete his training where he felt that he was respected.

A 30 year old woman with four children, that worked as a care assistant in a hospital, could no longer continue with her job because of back problems. She started a training programme in secretarial work, organised by the VDAB¹², but faced a lot of difficulties during the second stage of the training which involved learning foreign languages. She was de-motivated but her adviser intervened, and together with the person responsible for the

¹⁰ Structure for the Implementation of Work and Income Act (translation)

¹¹ Fight Against Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service (translation)

¹² Flemish Regional Employment Office (translation)

training, made arrangements which permitted her to resume the programme and finally succeed. We know that when this accompaniment continues for a while after a person has found employment, then this increases the chance of them keeping the job or having the necessary support to overcome failures.

The role of a long-term adviser, who must remain the same no matter what, can be a determining factor in the social and professional integration of those who face the most difficulties and for whom a stable and decent employment is not conceivable in the short-term. Such a person needs someone who believes in their capacities and who looks to go forward with them, intervening at the most difficult moments of failure and de-motivation.*

ATD Vierde Wereld, Belgium

All of the NAPs/incl underline the role of employment as a factor in promoting social inclusion. Indeed, employment is considered as a means of providing income, a more developed social life and even more self confidence, as it enables the person to feel independent and useful.

Looking at the employment policies proposed in the NAPs/incl, with people that are far from the labour market in mind, we found that:

- The notion of **pathways towards employment** emerged in most NAPs, which is in line with the challenge put forward by the Joint Report to develop " *measures (...) tailored to personal needs*"¹³. This notion of accompaniment needs to be assessed in terms of to what extent it is **personalised**, how it is **followed-up** and how it is evaluated with the person being supported.
- Efforts must be made to ensure that the personal project of the individual is being valued, so that they can have a real freedom of choice in employment.
- Accessibility to these kinds of measures for the most disadvantaged groups is not always developed.

Some examples of accompaniment :

NAP Austria: Despite a general approach that does not appear to reach those with the most difficulties, the following measures of accompaniment are proposed for young people: " *With "Clearing", a new type of service was developed which acts directly at the interface between school and employment. Clearing facilities have the task in the final or penultimate school year of determining, together with those affected, the best-suited individual package of measures for integration into employment.*"

NAP Finland: " *The Act on Rehabilitative Work came into effect on September 1, 2001, providing new opportunities for easier access to the labour market clients who have been unemployed for a long time. The Act requires local authorities and employment offices to co-operate in shaping an activation plan and service portfolio individually for each client*"

NAP Belgium: " *In the Walloon Region a new initiative called "integration pathways" is due to come into force at the end of 2003. It aims at providing a series of quality and individualised services free of charge in order to meet the needs of job-seekers. A contract called "crédit d'insertion"¹⁴ that is set to last up to a maximum of 24 months would guarantee the individual accompaniment, follow-up and support by a personal adviser from the Public services of employment.*"*

Freedom of choice is threatened by measures such as those proposed in Germany to merge unemployment benefits and social allowances: an individual who refuses a job loses 30% of his social allowance (60% after his second refusal, 90% after the third)

In the countries whose employment policy in the NAP/incl focuses on measures for general 'at-risk' groups (e.g. young people, women, older people, the disabled) it is difficult to establish how those with the most difficulties in these groups will be reached.

Is the challenge only to integrate people into the existing labour market, or shouldn't we be " *developing an inclusive labour market*"¹⁵ at the same time?

The consideration that today's labour market is a factor in producing exclusion it is not adequately developed in itself, although we were able to identify some of the consequences highlighted in the NAPs/incl :

¹³ Joint Report on Social Inclusion, 2001, European Commission and European Council

¹⁴ Insertion credit (translation)

¹⁵ Joint Report on Social Inclusion

NAP UK: The United Kingdom makes a distinction between unemployment and joblessness : *“ Joblessness is now a far more significant driver of social exclusion than unemployment. Although unemployment rates in the late 1970s were broadly similar to those in the late 1990s, significantly higher numbers of people found themselves living with relatively low income in the latter period. The key difference is the large rise in people who are neither in paid employment, living with somebody in paid employment, nor actively seeking work ”.* The NAP also deplores the fact that the number of individuals receiving incapacity allowances has tripled over the last thirty years and represents 7,6% of the population even though general health has improved. *“ These numbers represent a waste of talent and opportunity. ” “ Structural changes to the labour market since the 1970s have produced a weakening labour market for unskilled, as compared to skilled, workers. ”*

NAP Italy: Italy states that black market work represents 22% of its activity rate.

These observations illustrate some labour market inadequacies and lead us to ask the following question : Should pathways towards **paid employment** be the only option or should we be considering **activity** in other forms as a priority ?

Two different and interesting means of social activation are outlined in some of the NAPs/incl :

- voluntary work
- social economy

Of the two, the **social economy** is an approach favoured in many countries and its further development, alongside the appropriate training and accompaniment measures, needs to be encouraged and supported financially.

NAP Ireland: The Community Employment and Jobs Initiative schemes have allowed for the creation of many jobs within community based organisations that have been accessible to people living in the communities themselves. The NAP/incl mentions that in some cases, limits on participation of three years in these schemes has been extended which is a welcome development. At the same time, the NAP states that they are due to be replaced by the Social Economy Programme, currently under revision. We hope that with these changes, the positive impact on community organisations and their members will not be lost and that these kinds of schemes continue to receive the financial support that they deserve as alarming budget cuts for these programmes have recently affected the some of the most vulnerable people.

NAP Netherlands: Social activation experiments that took place in the Netherlands from 1996-2001 are highlighted in the NAP/incl as an example of good practice. The emphasis now, however, seems to have shifted towards valuing this type of social activation only as a means to eventually finding paid, ‘regular’ work, rather than as having its own intrinsic value for the individual and for society as a whole. This has resulted in the gradual phasing out of initiatives such as ‘additional jobs’ which offered subsidies to the voluntary and commercial sectors to create job opportunities specifically for people that would not otherwise access the labour market.

NAP Greece : *“ Legislation will introduce part-time employment into the broader public sector, in combination with the provision of social services. The employees will be recruited from social groups, such as the unemployed, people under 30, mothers of children aged up to twelve, individuals with disabilities. The needs to be met include care for the elderly on low-incomes, child-care at home, social inclusion of immigrants, guarding of school buildings etc. It is thus hoped to meet social needs while employing individuals who, for various reasons, are unable to work a full working day. ”*

Another approach which could transform the labour market is that of promoting the **benefits to society** (or to the economy in particular) that would come if the human potential currently being wasted, were instead being used.

NAP Germany : Initiatives in this direction are proposed at a Federal level as businesses are being encouraged to overcome prejudice by employing people that have been on social benefits for a long time; and in Westphalie, young immigrants are being promoted as potential assets to employers.

To achieve the aim of a more inclusive labour market, **businesses and public services have to be involved** as full and willing partners, that commit themselves to this goal for reasons beyond the mere financial incentives available. Efforts need to be made to ensure that the needs of the people being supported to find work are given as much consideration as those of the employers.

It should also be noted that in times of economic boom, the small proportion of the population that do not succeed in finding employment are often wrongly considered to be voluntarily unemployed, and thus no longer taken into account in employment policy. For this reason, the fight against unemployment should never be fought solely on the basis of numbers.

There are also many **practical and financial barriers** to employment for people living in poverty. Here are some of the actions taken by Member States to remedy the situation :

- **Child care services.** The development child care of possibilities in terms of affordability, quality and quantity is explored in many of the NAPs.

- **“ Making work pay ”.** People are encouraged to take up employment only if they have the guarantee that they will be better off in work, i.e. that their income will be higher than that which they receive on benefits (also taking into account the fact that they may no longer be eligible for certain concessions like free transport, healthcare, help with school costs etc)

The realisation that “ making work pay ” had to become a priority emerged in the Members States after certain observations :

For example, Ireland and the United Kingdom have some of the lowest unemployment rates in the EU, but at the same time, the highest poverty rates. This correlation brings the existence of the **“ working poor ”** (all over the EU) into the equation.

In an effort to overcome poverty traps, some countries propose changes to the tax system:

NAP UK : The **tax credit system** has now also been extended to working people on low incomes without children and is entitled Working Tax Credit. It is a system whereby instead of paying tax for an eligible employee to the Inland Revenue, employers pay a tax credit directly to the employee. This money serves as a top-up income and as it is not a benefit, it does not come out of the budget for welfare payments. One main advantage is that there is extra money to pay for child care available for beneficiaries with children. The main disadvantage is that it is only available to people working full-time (over 16 hours per week) and so does not benefit either part-time or casual workers.

Even though there is an increased awareness of financial barriers to employment, we fear that some measures being proposed are counter-productive. For example in France, the decentralisation process has transformed the RMI into the RMA¹⁶, which no longer offers the possibility of continuing to receive benefits for a certain length of time after having started work.

Essentially, whilst employment policy is an important element in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, it is also being developed in the framework of the European Employment Strategy, and should therefore not be prioritised here to the detriment of other equally important policy areas.

Right to Housing

“If you live with other people, within society, you have the opportunity to show who you are, good or bad. But if you live isolated from the rest of society, you are marginalised. We want to live among people coming from different backgrounds and we want our children to grow up with other people.”

“I often wake up at night and tell myself : ‘Oh my God! Where am I ?’ It’s raining outside and my bed is not wet. I can’t believe it because before the only place where I could sleep without getting wet was in jail. In the shanty town, you had to put plastic on your bed and see your children ill under four blankets. You don’t live and you never rest. Having your own apartment really changes your life. You talk with your neighbours, one of them invites you to drink a cup of coffee. Another one encourages you : Come on! Let’s find a job!”

ATD Cuarto Mundo, Spain¹⁷

Indecent housing and ghettos for people in poverty take different forms in different countries: living permanently on campsites in Belgium, in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in the United Kingdom, in shanty towns in Spain. The respective NAPs/incl of these countries each include efforts to change the situation, whereas in other NAPs,

¹⁶ RMI = Révénu minimum d’insertion (Minimum Integration Income), RMA = Révénu minimum d’activité (Minimum Activity Income)

¹⁷ Testimonies included in the contribution of ATD Fourth World Spain to the NAP/incl

the priority is given to the problem of homelessness. Whatever the reality, the means need to be put in place to ensure that actions are coherent and aim to guarantee housing for all in decent accommodation.

- There has to be sufficient affordable accommodation available

Some countries consider that they have enough social housing but many acknowledge that there is a deficit and that the construction projects in place are not ambitious enough.

Renovation schemes are plentiful but they are often accompanied by rent increases which instead of improving living conditions for the poorest, force them into finding alternative accommodation.

As the challenge posed in the Joint Report is that of : *“Ensuring good accommodation for all: access to good quality and affordable accommodation is a fundamental need and right”*¹⁸, maybe the capping of rents on newly renovated or recently built private accommodation should be considered.

NAP Luxembourg: Highlights the *“Launching by a Non-Governmental Organisation of a project of social housing for target-populations as well as owners who are ready to rent to those populations”*^{**}

- Families must be able to stay together

People living in poverty know from experience that when a housing problem occurs, women and children can often only be accommodated in a shelter if they are prepared to be separated from their husbands and fathers. Another unsuitable alternative is that of long-term accommodation in hotels or bed-and-breakfast establishments, where there is no possibility of privacy for the family.

- Social mixing is a response to the creation of ghettos for the poorest populations

NAP France: Refers to Act n° 2003-710 of 1 August 2003, ‘loi d’orientation et de programmation pour la ville et la rénovation urbaine’¹⁹ which stipulates in Article 6 that *“The national programme for urban renovation aims to restructure areas classed as being in sensitive zones, with the objective of social mixing and sustainable development.”*^{**}

When poor families are re-housed in better off neighbourhoods, the means need to be put in place to follow both the families and the communities in which they are being re-housed, if moves are to be successful in the long-term.

NAP Denmark: *“In 2002, the Danish government launched a new programme ‘Urban areas for everyone’, involving five projects that will run over a four-year period. The programme focuses on integrating newly arrived refugees and immigrants into housing areas, including, in particular, into non-profit housing areas. The funds earmarked for the programme are to be used in a holistic and cross-sectoral initiative to improve local employment and integration in the housing areas. The establishment of binding local partnerships is one of the requirements in ‘Urban areas for everyone’, just as the initiative must be based on extensive participation from voluntary locals.”*

The right to suitable accommodation according to cultural needs must also be recognised, for example, in Ireland, where the Traveller population is fighting for the right to decent housing, in whatever form they choose it to take.

- A major requirement for decent housing in Europe must be access to electricity and water supplies. Yet, the importance of this dimension should not lead to the sacrifice of other, equally important requirements.

NAP UK: *“Tackling fuel poverty remains a key part of wider policies on energy and social inclusion. Progress is encouraging as the number of fuel poor households continues to fall. Fuel poverty is being tackled through a combination of energy efficiency measures, energy market measures (maintaining downwards pressure on fuel costs, supporting the development of fuel company initiatives etc), and other measures (e.g. changes to the benefits system). Warm Front, the main programme for tackling fuel poverty in the private sector in England, aims to lift households out of fuel poverty by providing insulation and heating improvements to those in receipt of qualifying benefits. Other programmes focus on vulnerable households.”*

¹⁸ [Joint Report on Social Inclusion](#), 2001, European Commission and European Council.

¹⁹ Programme and Act for Towns and Urban Renovation Act (translation)

The proper administration of housing benefit payments can help to **prevent evictions and over-indebtedness**.

NAP France: *"Setting up a procedure of personal recovery (...)which allows fast decisions on debt cancellation, is provided for in the project of the 'loi d'orientation et de programmation pour la ville et la rénovation urbaine'. The aim is to give to those concerned a real 'second chance'. "**

NAP Ireland: *"The MABS provides an independent, free and confidential service primarily to low-income families who are in debt or at risk of getting into debt. It has an emphasis on practical, budget-based measures that will succeed in removing people permanently from dependence on moneylenders and open up alternative sources of low cost credit through their local Credit Unions. The MABS frequently intervenes to prevent repossession of the family home and also to prevent disconnection of gas and electricity supply."*

It is important to realise that in some countries, individuals and families who are evicted for non-payment of rent are often considered to have made themselves 'voluntarily homeless'. This being the case, they do not necessarily benefit from programmes to tackle homelessness or to re-house them. This practice needs to be condemned if some of the most vulnerable are to be supported.

-The homeless need to be supported **beyond the provision of emergency services**, and be approached and accompanied in an appropriate manner to take steps towards finding suitable accommodation.

NAP France: *"Some 200 'Maisons-relais'²⁰ will be built in total with around 5000 places, 1000 of which will be available in 2003. This type of alternative housing should enable those who are strongly de-socialised to re-adapt to social life in a friendly environment, thanks to the presence of a host, or host couple, in charge of facilitating and regulating everyday life."*

Opportunities for accompaniment should be at the disposal of all those who need it because difficulties in accessing housing can go beyond financial obstacles. Other barriers that the most vulnerable need to overcome include complex administrative structures, ignorance of the market mechanisms, difficulties in expressing themselves, fear of landlords, different types of discrimination, making places feel like their own and integration into neighbourhoods.

Right to Healthcare

"I would like first to tell you that it is expensive to go to the doctor when you are on a low income or unemployment benefits. What money is left to take care of your health at the end of the month? It's possible to get some help from the CPAS²¹ but it is not often granted. You have to explain the situation to the social worker and this can often be humiliating. Some doctors even refuse to treat us because we do not have money. People who are very poor do not have insurance so it is impossible to take care of your health. But health, is not only curing illnesses. Living in poverty means living with constant worries and problems. Parents tend to feel ashamed when they lack everything. Poverty also threatens your health: noise, pollution, unfit housing, dampness, worries ... year after year, it undermines your health and your state of mind as well (...)

*We know that our children have poor health. We love them more than anything. We want to live as a family and be proud to have beautiful and healthy children. What we need is to be treated in decent conditions, with humanity, even if we do not have enough money. We want to be able to choose our doctor. We want to feel useful and be helped when one of the parents is ill so that the family does not get broken up. We want to be respected and even more so when we are ill."**

ATD Quart Monde, Belgium

The **link between health and poverty** seems to appear in most of the NAPs/incl, even though it is only treated as being a priority for certain groups such as drug addicts. Ireland notes that *"a clear social gradient exists for the major causes of mortality"*. In the Netherlands, a target has been set to extend the life expectancy of the poorest groups from 53 to 56 years of age! The French *Observatoire national de la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale*²² shows that there are no diseases that are specifically linked to poverty but rather that there are greater risks of

²⁰ Relay Houses (translation)

²¹ Centre Publique d'Aide Sociale (Centre for Social State Aid*)

²² National Observatory on Poverty and Social Exclusion*

having some common diseases. As a result, the issue is often tackled on the basis of reducing inequalities in access to healthcare.

There are different models of healthcare systems:

- Certain countries have universal healthcare where the same treatment is available to all. This said the development of parallel private healthcare services, has brought along with it the tendency for a two-tier system.
- In other cases, healthcare is either free of charge or refunded for those living on low incomes.
- In some countries, however, healthcare services remain inaccessible for those without enough money to pay for them.

Attention must be paid to the affordability of healthcare for those who are the most disadvantaged.

However, other obstacles can still stand in the way of good health:

- **Fear** of a bad reception from the medical staff, lack of understanding, indifference, or loss of control.
- **Lack of hospitals or health centres** and long periods of wait, especially in disadvantaged areas.
- **Lack of information** about health risks.
- **Personal constraints** on time or resources in everyday life

So is an overall view of an individual's situation being taken into account when it comes to health policy?

NAP UK: *"In Northern Ireland, 'Investing for Health' aims to reduce inequalities in health between geographic areas, socio-economic groups and minority groups. This will be achieved through seven cross-cutting objectives concerning wider determinants of health including poverty, educational attainment, mental health and well being, living and working conditions, the wider environment, reducing accidental deaths and injuries and enabling healthier choices."*

In order to overcome some of the obstacles to good health for the people experiencing chronic poverty, the accent needs to be put on prevention. **Co-ordination between social services and medical services** can help the anticipation or early consideration of health problems and follow-up after treatment.

NAP Ireland: *"The Primary Care Strategy provides for an inter-disciplinary team-based approach to primary care provision including General Practitioners, nurses/midwives, health care assistants, home helps, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers and administrative personnel."*

Preventive information campaigns are often cited in the NAPs/incl but on many occasions are limited to the dangers linked with drug or alcohol abuse, for example. More attention needs to be paid to issues affecting the general health of the population which are of particular concern to people living in poverty and social exclusion.

Right to Education

During the period 2000-2002, ATD Fourth World teams in the Netherlands visited over 160 very poor families across the country. Around 80 of these families had been regular participants in the activities of the Movement by taking part in different projects. The purpose of the visits was to try and understand better what the poorest people in the Netherlands were living, and one of the recurring themes was that of education.

- Children from poor backgrounds are afraid to go to school because they learn from the experience of their parents that school for them means failure.
- Parents suffer because they see that their children are going through the same exclusion, the same tests that show their incapability, that they went through when they were young.
- Schools make decisions about children without consulting the parents rather than trying to make decisions together with them.

For example, an investigation by the Child Protection Agency was asked for by the special school of one child following a psychological test, done without the knowledge of the parents, and without the school speaking first of all to the child and their parents. Consequently, the parents registered their child at another school where they feel that they were taken seriously and their child was respected. In the end, the results of the test were found to be false because the anxiety that the child felt in going to the school itself had not been taken into account.

So what is the link with poverty and social exclusion? This particular family had lived for generations in poverty and in neighbourhoods with a bad reputation. The different attitude of the two schools shows how much respect for people living in poverty, and a commitment to working with them, can make a difference. Our experience is that children love to learn, and they can only do so in an atmosphere of friendship and respect. Not only for the children, but also for their parents.

So what do we expect from the NAP/incl? That schools:

- Have the same ambitions for the poorest children as for those from richer, more educated families.
- Are a place where all children can feel safe and respected.
- Allow for the sharing of knowledge in friendship and of learning together in solidarity. Knowledge should not be viewed as a means to differentiate, of competition or as a source of personal power.
- Provide information about the Charter for Children's Rights.*

ATD Vierde Wereld, Netherlands

Despite its vocational nature, school is still proving to be a major instrument of social reproduction, in the sense that children whose parents succeeded at school, have a tendency to succeed at school, and those whose parents failed, tend to fail also.

The cost of education is one of the concerns addressed in the NAPs/incl. However, few take adequately into account the difficulties faced by some families in paying for school trips and materials etc. that must be overcome in order to guarantee truly free education.

NAP Belgium: *"Efforts to suppress financial barriers to primary, secondary and higher education are being made in Flanders. (...) In 2003, Flemish decree obligations with regard to complementary school fees will be evaluated."**

Some countries put forward interesting views on education:

NAP Belgium: *"The discussion is slowly shifting from equality of access to education, towards equality in terms of school results."**

When children attend school, they bring along their environment. Schools need to be able to welcome children together with all their possibilities and their difficulties. If the challenge made by the Joint Report to adapt *"the education system so that it successfully responds to the needs and characteristics of children from disadvantaged backgrounds"*²³, then **partnerships between teachers and parents** need to be reinforced.

NAP Spain: Education policy aims *"To develop relationships between teaching professionals and families so as to encourage greater knowledge of the reality in which they live and improve the attention given to students with special difficulties."**

Children also need to be reconciled with going to school.

NAP UK: *"In Scotland, work to tackle pupil disaffection includes initiatives to promote positive behaviour and to develop alternatives to exclusion, for example flexible curricula and programmes to provide alternative success and achievement for disaffected learners."*

There also needs to be more co-ordination between social, health and educational services.

NAP Finland: *"The legislation covers pupil welfare and related services, i.e. school health care and the services of school psychologists and social workers. Measures to be developed include school health care and school social work."*

In the framework of these partnerships, we feel that the following policy direction in England is **counter-productive** and does not get to the root cause of why children are not going to school:

NAP UK: *"A Behaviour and Attendance Strategy promotes, for example, co-ordinated truancy sweeps, electronic registration and early intervention through the Fast-Track to Prosecution pathfinder. Guidance will support more effective prosecutions of negligent parents. Further sanctions may be imposed in the forthcoming Anti-Social Behaviour Bill."*

²³ [Joint Report on Social Inclusion](#), 2001, European Commission and European Council.

Some poor families, whose children have been placed in special classes or schools for children with special educational needs, underline the stigmatising effects of such segregation. Nonetheless, the challenge remains to find the appropriate type of schooling to offer children having difficulties in learning at school, whatever the cause. Some countries propose programmes aimed at integration into mainstream education, whereas others support separate schools and classes.

NAP UK : *"The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 strengthened the rights of English children with statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN) to mainstream education."*

NAP France : *"Relay mechanisms (classes and workshops) aim at young people that have been excluded from school institutions in order to allow them, after having benefited from an adapted accompaniment by teachers and monitors for a few months, to reintegrate into their school of origin and resume their normal schooling. The offer of these mechanisms will be doubled in two years."*

NAP Sweden : *"The Education Act provides for special support for pupils who experience difficulties in their schoolwork. Personal development dialogues and action programmes are important tools for identifying the various needs of pupils. The purpose of personal development dialogues is to give the pupil, teachers and parents an opportunity to discuss his/her learning and social development."*

NAP Denmark : *"Homework assistance. These schemes will be started as pilot/experimental projects together with a more closely defined number of local authorities."*

It is positive to note the awareness regarding **illiteracy**, especially amongst adults, in the NAPs. This phenomenon is not limited to immigrants and particularly affects people from poor backgrounds. Some of the measures to promote literacy proposed are : teacher training, awareness campaigns for the public at large, efforts in early childhood, partnerships with schools, businesses and trade unions, financial incentives, and the use of television and the Internet.

NAP Netherlands : *"Around a million adults in the Netherlands cannot read or write or can only barely do so. They run an increased risk of ending up in a situation of social exclusion. (...) In 2000 it was found out that illiterate indigenous Dutch citizens do not or cannot make sufficient use of literacy courses. Through the Action Plan on literacy the cabinet is attempting to counter illiteracy among this group, and to increase the supply of courses at vocational training centres (so- called ROCs)."*

NAP UK : *"Skills for Life, the strategy for improving adult literacy, language and numeracy skills in England, aims to create a society where adults have the basic skills they need to find and keep work and participate fully in society. (...). For those not in employment, substantial help is already available."*

NAP Ireland : *"Primary school: Ensuring every child obtains a threshold of numeracy and literacy".
"The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has trained a number of tutors to provide literacy programmes in the workplace and will continue to promote the availability of the service among employer organisations."*

NAP Germany : *"The Federal Government funds innovative projects that contribute to modernising literacy work, such as the development of the APOLL (Alpha-Portal Literacy Learning) internet platform (...), over which information, support and contacts for teachers, students and the general public will be offered in future."*

Right to Access Services

Angela has four children and she lives in a two-bedroom flat owned by a housing association. When she moved into her first flat she didn't know that she had to make a separate application for Housing Benefit because she was already living off other state benefits and thought that meant she automatically qualified. By the time she realised and made the application, then she had large debt arrears which then had to be paid back over the years through deductions to her other benefits.

As Angela's family grew, she wanted to move to a larger house but the rent arrears held up her application for quite some time. Finally, last year, she was offered somewhere bigger on the other side of town and a moving date was fixed. At the last minute, Angela got scared and changed her mind about the move. Even though the new house was bigger, it was in an area where she didn't know anybody and she was worried about how she would cope.

She told the housing association that she wanted to stay where she was and the move was cancelled. However, unbeknown to her, the application had already been made to change her Housing Benefit to the new address and so even though she didn't move in the end, the rent on her flat stopped being paid because the housing association did not inform the Housing Benefit office. Eventually somebody supporting Angela and her family realised and her Housing Benefit was restored and the rent paid again, however, the rent was not back dated. Angela now has more rent arrears that the Housing Benefit office want to see deducted from her benefits.

ATD Fourth World UK

European States guarantee most citizens access to more or less good quality public services. However, the aim needs to be to provide access to all, not only the majority, of citizens. A public service which accessible to the most disadvantaged, is accessible to all. **Priority should therefore be given to ensure effective access to universal, quality services for the most disadvantaged individuals and families.**

Awareness of the importance of equality of access to public services emerged in nearly all of the NAPs/incl.

NAP Greece : *"However, the subjective experience of those at risk is coloured by their degree of access to a range of goods and services. The most crucial of these are medical and care services. (...) If these services let him down in the moment of need, the chain of negative consequences extend far beyond the immediate area of health care."*

NAP Ireland : *"The process of adapting administrative and social services to the needs of people experiencing social exclusion and of ensuring that front-line staff are sensitive to these needs will continue over the period of the Plan."*

Simplifying the process is a means of guaranteeing easier access to services for people with the most difficulties, and can take many different forms.

-Simplification of procedures:

NAP Belgium : *"The Kafka Plan, approved in 2001, aims for social protection to be more accessible and respectful of the client. The plan consists of a number of simplification projects for the (future) retired, the self-employed, the unemployed [...] Those, who on the basis of their benefits or a reduction in their autonomy, are entitled to additional social advantages, e.g. tax reductions, social tariffs for the telephone or a reduced-tariff card for public transports, will be exempted from giving an attestation to benefit from these advantages as soon as all the authorities in charge of granting them, have the agreement of the Banque Carrefour de la Sécurité Sociale²⁴. [...] Moreover, the treatment of applications for family benefits, guaranteed to those entitled to integration income, will be automated in such a way as to ensure that the individual no longer has to make the application themselves."**

-Simplification of forms:

²⁴ Social Security Banking Crossroads (translation)

NAP France : *"The COSLA²⁵ is composed of persons from the cultural world and administrative officials, as well as representatives from solidarity and users' associations, and has the objective of simplifying administrative language. In this perspective, various documents have been revised, including those for the Minimum Insertion Income (RMI), Universal Medical Cover (CMU), and family benefits. In the long term, the COSLA aims to revise all 1600 documents that exist today. In the same way, instructions have been given to public civil servants instructing them to simplify the way in which they write letters to individuals."**

-Centralising services in multi-agency locations

NAP Spain : *The aim is "To promote the creation of 'Single Windows' for information and processing of Minimum Insertion Incomes, Active Insertion Incomes, Agrarian Benefits and Social Emergency Aid Payments."**

NAP France : *"The creation or development of social and employment public service centres will be reinforced in difficult areas ."**

Quality of reception and listening are essential in order to connect with people that have a lot of difficulties and understand their situation. However, fear of judgement from officials or social workers is often an obstacle in developing these relationships. A way to overcome this barrier is through the training of front-line staff.

NAP UK: *"ATD Fourth World is involved, alongside academics and social work professionals, in a project to bring the knowledge of families living in poverty who are users of social services, into social work training. This will mean that service users will be classroom trainers, giving students an opportunity to learn directly from those who have real experience of poverty."*

The right to access public services should not be governed by where you live. The **maintenance of quality services in disadvantaged and rural areas** needs to be ensured, in order to give everybody the chance to benefit from them.

NAP Germany : *"The social and geographic polarisation in cities is increasing. For this reason, since 1999 the Federal Government and the Länder have supplemented urban construction promotion with the new programme "Districts with a Special Need for Development – the Social City". The aim is for viable development in these districts. For example, investment is being made in measures covering public participation; life in the district; local economy; work and employment; district centres; social, cultural and education-related infrastructure; neighbourhood environment; ecology; and local district management. Significant, short-term programme objectives have been achieved in the implementation of this programme. "**

Finally, some good Government initiatives are blocked at the local level by authorities, or the electorate, and vice-versa. That is why it is important to **involve all of the relevant bodies** in developing a common anti-poverty strategy from the outset, and increase awareness in order *"to build greater public support for the policies and programmes necessary to shape an inclusive society."*²⁶

NAP Spain : *It is an objective "To organise events, campaigns and debates of a general nature on social exclusion, and more specifically, on 17 October, the International Day for the Eradication of Extreme Poverty."**

NAP France : *"A campaign in the media and on the ground will be launched at the beginning of 2004 which will aim to change the opinion of the public at large and enable awareness with regard to the fight against poverty. This campaign will be organised at the regional level with the participation of all the relevant bodies."**

²⁵ Committee in charge of simplifying administrative language (translation)

²⁶ Joint Report on Social Inclusion, 2001, European Commission and European Council

Right to Culture

In 2001, ATD Fourth World Luxembourg launched the project "Publica", the creation of a sculpture in stone in the shape of a table with the message that only a community of solidarity, built on the strength and will of everyone, can win the battle against poverty. During the first stage of the project in July, members of the team and the coordinating artist, visited families living in poverty across the country. Going out to the families themselves and meeting them in their own environment, was a condition that ATD Fourth World felt was necessary in order to involve families that would not otherwise be able to take part. Some people are afraid to go and meet or talk with others and it seems difficult for them to leave behind their daily troubles and tasks. Nevertheless, they also possess a potentially valuable input.

During a visit with the artist, Ms A. began to speak about the daily problems that make her life extremely complicated. However, when she was told again what the aim of the visit was and about the project, she changed her attitude and the way in which she spoke. The artist managed to raise her interest in his works of art. After that meeting of two people, the artist and Ms A., she was from then on no longer 'a person with lots of problems', but instead a full participant in a creative process.

This changed everything: *"I am not a number anymore, but a full human being"*, she said later on. The experience had awakened new strengths in her that had previously been suppressed by her hard life.

ATD Quart Monde Luxembourg

Access to culture is a priority for ATD Fourth World.

Culture is not a luxury, a second class right or an 'extra'. It has been recognised as a fundamental right of every person. To create a work of art, go to a concert or discover an exhibition, opens up the mind, gives new opportunities, and provides new strength to face everyday life. Culture means moments of freedom, pleasure, and sharing. The right to 'beauty' plays a part in building self-respect. Culture is an affirmation of a refusal to accept poverty.

It is important to note the efforts and progress that have been made in recognising the right to culture in some Member States.

NAP Ireland : *«Improving access, however, to facilities for arts, culture and recreation is an important means of increasing participation in voluntary activities and has a positive impact on socially disadvantaged individuals, groups and areas.»*

NAP Belgium : *"The project 'Article 27' as a model of cultural participation : This good practice presented by the 'Communauté française'²⁷ finds its origins in the commitment of members of the cultural community to concretise Article 27 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights : « Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts ... ». They created the association 'Article 27' and developed actions in link with social partners active in areas concerned with poverty and insecurity: the Centres public d'aide sociale²⁸, local employment offices, social restaurants, shelters, associations working with unemployed, sheltered housing, centres for psychiatric re-adaptation, literacy, community social work, and with cultural operators (theatres, cinemas, museums, cultural centres...) to enable access of the disadvantaged (social integration income, social aid, unemployed) to cultural facilities."**

Unfortunately, however, the comment made in the Joint Report still applies : *"it is striking that the legal, cultural, sporting and recreational dimensions remain undeveloped in many NAPs/incl."* Some NAPs do not mention culture at all, or when they do, it is in the annex. Others confuse culture with the imposition of national values on a certain section of the population.

For those that do mention it, they often promote access to culture for children and young people instead of developing it for everybody, without exception. Generally, projects are organised by the voluntary or non-profit

²⁷ Francophone Community (translation)

²⁸ Centre for Social Public Aid (translation)

sector and when action is taken at a governmental level, it is more often than not in the form of small, pilot-projects.

Dealing with the financial obstacle seems to be the main concern:

NAP Luxembourg: The proposition of ATD Fourth World was adopted to *“Promote access to culture for those on low income by granting them free access to State and local museums through a passport “culture for all” provided by the Ministry of Culture on the basis of a certificate of low income established by the SNAS.”**

There are other obstacles impeding the access to culture for people living in poverty and it is important to encourage and support them to overcome these.

NAP UK : *«The Welsh culture strategy, Creative Future: Cymru Greadigol contains a key commitment that all people are able to participate and share in cultural life.»*

The fact that the NAPs/incl refer rarely to culture and leisure is maybe due to the lack of knowledge on what can be done and proposed in this area, but there are some interesting opportunities to learn from other Member States.

- Developing accessible infrastructures is the first step in some countries:

NAP Greece: *“In the area of culture provision, has been made the development of a network of 20 general interest libraries in remote rural areas. Wherever the construction of a library is not feasible, the role of the mobile libraries will be strengthened. 32 mobile libraries are already lending books to schools in remote areas.”*

- Access to artistic training enables people to show, develop and value their abilities. Museums and cultural centres could also consider going out to more disadvantaged areas. Few initiatives are developed in this respect.

-Family holidays are a time to relax together and take a break from daily life.

NAP Belgium: *“The ‘Steunpunt Vakantieparticipatie²⁹ of the ‘Toerisme Vlaanderen³⁰ takes various initiatives to support group holidays and individual holidays for people on low incomes and their children. In 2003, The objective is to increase through various initiatives participation of this target-group. The aim is also to improve qualitatively existing initiatives.”**

NAP France: *“the action ‘Bourse solidarité vacances’ (BSV)³¹ is aimed at promoting holidays for people with social difficulties and will be reinforced.”**

The importance of avoiding the further marginalisation of certain groups of the population due to the development of new Information Technologies, is echoed in many of the NAPs. Included amongst the measures proposed are: the establishment of Internet access in all schools, reinforcing its use in public spaces, and its use as a media for training and literacy programmes.

NAP Spain: *«Through Red.es and the “Rural Internet” Programme, the creation of units for access to new technologies is supported, especially in disadvantaged and in rural areas and the use of the Internet as a tool for permanent connection and communication is promoted between isolated rural communities, the most important towns nearby and social services centres.»**

²⁹ Point of Support for the Participation in Holidays (translation)

³⁰ Regional Flemish office of Tourism (translation)

³¹ Solidarity Holiday Vouchers (translation)

Right to Live as a Family

" When families like us ask for help, we can find ourselves caught up in a system of monitoring and surveillance. We understand that professionals get caught up in this climate of distrust towards parents and fear for the children, because if anything serious happens, they have to face the consequences. So we must change attitudes so that we parents are heard when we say 'We could do without being considered immature or incapable parents. We love our children, we have hopes for them, and we want help to carry those hopes through'."

" One thing I want to say is that sometimes children cannot be in the family, they have to go away for a while because of circumstances. But parents and children should still be able to see each other and the children should see one another. That's one thing I want to change. It's easy to break a family but it is not easy to keep it together."

ATD Fourth World's experience is that the family in its various forms is the foundation on which efforts to eradicate child poverty have to be based. However disadvantaged or dislocated, a child's family, except in extreme situations, provides his or her identity, a place where he or she is recognised and loved and from where attitudes and experiences are gained that prepare children and young people for their roles as adults and parents.

ATD Fourth World Ireland³²

Even considering that the family and family life have changed in form and nature over the years, it can still be argued that the family remains one of the fundamental factors affecting socialisation. As a result, the family has to be considered in policies to promote social inclusion.

Some NAPs demonstrate the importance that certain Member States place on the role of the family in fighting against social exclusion.

NAP Italy : *"Italy recognises the role of the family as being an important instrument in the development of social cohesion, as a decisive factor in the process of social inclusion of those who are threatened to be excluded, and for maintaining inter-generational relationships."**

Nevertheless, family policy is very sensitive area and can present some hidden dangers :

- It should not be a pretext for State disengagement.

NAP Italy : In this respect, the affirmation of the importance of family in Italy could also be interpreted as means to replace services provided by the State *"Family is considered to be the principal active party in the organisation of a modern system of protection, especially for the support of the most disadvantaged : elderly, disabled, minors."**

Furthermore in many NAPs, reference is made in the area of family policy to the role of local authorities, the voluntary sector and sometimes the Church. This sharing of responsibilities between civil society and the State can be complementary on the condition that the intention is not for one to substitute the other.

-It should not be perceived as a means of control

NAP Luxembourg: The manner in which the following policy is put into practice is crucial if it is not to be seen as a way in which to have control over the lives of very poor families: *"Implementation of the accompaniment of families in their daily lives [...] Accompanying families in managing their daily lives consists of : 1. Showing the family how to organise their day. 2. How to clean the house and do the laundry. 3. Raising awareness of the parents about their role. 4. Helping parents put order in their daily life."**

- It should not focus solely on correcting the potential consequences of a deterioration in family relations, such as domestic violence, the abuse of alcohol and drugs or lack of attention paid to the children. Measures in these areas are of course sometimes necessary for the immediate security of the person, and for children in particular, but will prove to be inadequate in the long-term if they are not accompanied by more global preventive measures that support the family and all its members.

³² Extracts from the contribution of ATD Fourth World Ireland to the NAP/incl

NAP Finland : *“The aim of improving the capacity of the service system to intervene at an early stage in the problems encountered by children, young people and families and to support them in coping with these problems. Early intervention and support are encouraged in both services and everyday life.”*

The ambition of family policy in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, should be above all to support each family, no matter what its structure, in achieving its own goals. **This support is the most effective when it is based upon the skills and competencies that exist within the family, on the connections between its members and the hopes that they each have for each other and for the future.**

NAP Ireland : *«In addition to the other relevant policies under the Action Plan, a range of family supports on mediation, counselling and social supports through Family Resource Centres are to be further developed by the recently established Family Support Agency.»*

This support can take many different forms: financial assistance, local and community development, family services (toddler groups, parent-child groups, mentoring of a family, help in the home), the development of parenting networks as a place of friendship and support (parent groups, 'parent schools') etc.

Some countries develop family policy in the NAP/incl on the basis of **the fight against child poverty.**

NAP UK: *“Contributing to the European Union’s (EU) long-term goal that there should be a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty, across Europe, by 2010, the UK has set itself a target to halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020.”*

For these children, family life can be the first and last protection against exclusion. **To be able to live as a family is a right** which is why *« Preserving family solidarity »* is one of the challenges that Joint Report³³ highlights as needing to be met.

In France, the NAP/incl integrates observations made by the French Economic and Social Council which show that precarious living conditions often play a leading role in forcibly splitting up families and that the wishes of the families themselves are not sufficiently taken into account. In Europe, children from families at the bottom of the socio-economic scale represent the majority of children taken in charge by Child Protection Services.³⁴ **The placement of children into care is expressed as being one of the most tragic and unjust experiences** for the families living in extreme poverty that ATD Fourth World brings together.

NAP Belgium : *“Whether it be through social security, taxation or more specific actions, authorities should always ensure that, on the one hand, poverty does not threaten the right to live in family and on the other hand, that family break-up, no matter what the cause (divorce, death, placement, jail, ...), does not lead to poverty of its members.”*

NAP Denmark : *“Parents hold the main responsibility for their children, and the public sector holds the primary responsibility for providing services, e.g. in day-care institutions. Consequently, one target is to enter binding agreements with the parents of socially disadvantaged children (...) In 2003, a new act is expected to come into force, enhancing children’s right of consultation.”*

Family policy also need to be more transversal and integrated into education, health or housing and neighbourhood renewal policy areas so as to ensure that the interdependence of rights are as central in policymaking as they are to the family.

Generally we have found that the area of family policy in the NAPs/incl, to be either under developed (if at all), or not developed around the objective of fighting poverty and social exclusion. We would therefore call for more effort to be made in this area in the elaboration of future NAPs.

³³ Joint Report on Social Inclusion, 2001, European Commission and European Council

³⁴ This issue is further explored in the European Working Paper, Valuing Children, Valuing Parents, which is due to be published by ATD Fourth World in November 2003.

ATD Fourth World's Role in the Social Inclusion Strategy

Investment of ATD Fourth World

At a European Union level, ATD Fourth World, alongside EAPN, the Platform of European Social NGOs and others in civil society, called for the Open Method of Co-ordination to be used to fight poverty and social exclusion. Inspired by the European Employment Strategy, it seemed to be the ideal instrument to promote co-operation and exchange, and move forward in a common combat at this level. After the challenge was taken up during the Lisbon Summit, we worked with the French Presidency to help shape proposals for the Common Objectives, hoping to ensure that they adequately reflected the concerns and expectations of people living in poverty themselves. The resulting Objectives in the Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion, adopted at Nice, reflected a rights based approach, looked to prevent the risks of poverty and exclusion; targeted actions towards helping the most vulnerable; and called for everybody concerned to be mobilised. They represented an ambitious and sustainable course which if followed, could certainly have an impact on the lives of the populations living in extreme poverty that the International Movement ATD Fourth World has been built around.

For this reason, **the Movement closely monitored the efforts of the Member States to produce their first National Action Plans for Social Inclusion** and after their submission to the Commission in June 2001, worked on an a document commenting on aspects of all fifteen NAPs/incl, as a contribution to the drafting of the first Joint Report on Social Inclusion³⁵. Even though it was widely recognised that mobilisation around the first round of NAPs/incl was not as extensive as it should have been, and the resulting documents did little more than outline existing anti-poverty and exclusion policies, this was nonetheless **a major step forward and provided a broad overview of efforts underway across the EU.**

This breakthrough, however, was **far from visible to Europeans struggling on a daily basis to overcome poverty** or even to those committed alongside them. Groups without representation in Brussels would have been unlikely to learn about the mere existence of their country's NAP/incl. Even National Members of Parliament were largely unaware of their content when questioned by their European counterparts. The average European citizen, whilst consistently affirming that the fight against poverty and social exclusion be a priority for the EU in surveys, was not made aware of progress in achieving this objective.

Within ATD Fourth World, we have made the commitment to try and transmit advances made at a political level, back to those people upon whose life experience and reflections our positions have been based. This is not always easy to achieve and there are many obstacles to overcome, not the least of which is the often complicated and technical language used in political documents. Nonetheless, people are encouraged by progress on whatever level it takes place and we aim to keep them up to date and involved in developments.

Currently, the Delegation to the EU is in regular contact with ATD Fourth World teams in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain and Germany. **The European Social Inclusion Strategy has given us more scope for co-operation**, to build mutual understanding of our different realities and encourage coherence in our actions. Aided by funding from the trans-national exchange programme of the Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion, visits to the teams, working sessions and seminars on different aspects of the strategy have taken place. As always, it has been a concern of ours that whenever possible, **people with direct experience of poverty themselves participate fully.** Again, this has not always been achievable, but remains a fundamental objective.

³⁵ [Comments on the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion of the 15 Countries in the EU](http://www.atd-fourthworld.org), September 2001, available on the website www.atd-fourthworld.org

Contributions to the NAP/incl at a National Level

The production of the NAPs/incl 2003-2005 has given a general **boost to dialogue and consultation** between NGOs, governments and others involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. In some countries, this has been in addition to ongoing processes whereas in others, it has opened a new doors of opportunity.

United Kingdom

Consultation between the UK Government and NGOs has always been difficult to achieve, especially for ATD Fourth World, who only has a small London based team dedicated to political action. In general, there was no consultation in the preparation of the NAP/incl 2001-2003 and so, even if it remains limited, that which has taken place this time around could certainly be considered as making progress.

ATD Fourth World UK is a member of the Social Policy Task Force (SPTF), a network set up on the initiative of EAPN England and the Scottish Poverty Alliance, specifically to bring NGOs together to engage with the NAP/incl process. Some other grassroots organisations close to people living in poverty are members, as are larger NGOs and networks representing the interests of people living in poverty.

As well as contributing on policy issues, the SPTF was asked by the Department of Work and Pensions to propose models of best practice to involve people with direct experience of poverty in the consultation and evaluation processes surrounding the NAP/incl. The need for this participation was an issue being pushed for and so they agreed to take part in a Participation Working Group that met three times to make proposals in this area. Two Fourth World representatives from England and Scotland took part in this group on behalf of people living in poverty and other members of ATD Fourth World in the UK. **It is hoped that the lessons learned from this process will lead to a more participatory approach to policy making in other areas.**

Spain

The ATD Fourth World team in Spain is, again, relatively small and localised in Madrid. A relationship with members of the Government's administration was built up during the organisation of a European meeting between people living in poverty and others involved in the fight against poverty, in May 2002, at the EU offices in Madrid. Before the organisation of this meeting, the Madrid team was not really engaged in action at a political level. The positive impact on the Spanish officials that took part, however, led to a request for ATD Fourth World Spain's input during the consultation process from the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, alongside that of other NGOs. As members of a Platform of Social NGOs, they were also encouraged to get involved.

The approach of the team in Madrid was to base their contribution on the content of the NAP/incl 2001-2003 and try to link what they knew of the reality that people in poverty were facing, with what was being proposed. A big question in Spain is the impact that a national plan of this nature can have in a system where the majority of the power for implementation is in the hands of regional authorities. **ATD Fourth World Spain considered one of the main positive effects of the NAP/incl, to be its translation into regional and local level action plans;** the national level giving the framework, with the regional and local level concretising the actions. They asked themselves whether or not it would, in fact, be more effective to contribute to the local action plan for Madrid, this being where their expertise lay. The conclusion that they came to, however, was that it was still important to make a contribution to the NAP/incl, understanding that this could eventually be complemented by more involvement at a local level.

In general, ATD Fourth World Spain had the impression that the Government was having difficulties in mobilising voluntary and community groups around the NAP/incl. Larger NGOs and networks were implicated but smaller associations did not know enough about the process to get involved.

Ireland

ATD Fourth World has been present in Ireland for the last four years. **The team has chosen to make links between people fighting poverty on a daily basis and those working alongside them, allowing them to gain strength and encouragement from each others actions.** They have also supported this kind of exchange on a European level, between people from different countries who live with a lot of difficulties themselves and who are committed to fighting poverty and injustice. ATD Fourth World is also in link with other NGOs and national networks that aim to promote the participation of people living in extreme poverty. Working in this way has enabled ATD Fourth World in Ireland to build strong links with EAPN Ireland, who in turn invited them to participate in the consultation process around the NAP/incl.

In addition, the team met with the head of the Office for Social Inclusion that has both the responsibility for producing the NAP/incl, and that of integrating the European strategy with the pre-existing Irish National Anti

Poverty Strategy (NAPS). This meeting helped to highlight the fact that in certain areas, ATD Fourth World had experience gained in other European countries that could be shared in Ireland and the team were encouraged to prepare their own contribution for the NAP/incl.

It has also been the case, however, that in countries where there is existing dialogue in the framework of a national anti-poverty strategy, the structures in place have not automatically been used to feed into the NAP/incl. The use of all the instruments and tools currently available on a national level as an input to the NAP/incl, is something that needs to be promoted if European level exchanges are to be as challenging and fruitful as possible.

Belgium

In Belgium, ATD Fourth World is one of the associations giving a voice to people living in poverty that was involved in the writing of a General Report on Poverty in 1994. As a follow up to this report, an independent agency called the 'Service de lutte contre la pauvreté, la précarité et l'exclusion sociale'³⁶ has been set up to maintain this dialogue and monitor the implementation of the recommendations made in the General Report, producing their own report every two years. ATD Fourth World in Belgium considers the Service to be an important instrument in facilitating the participation of people living in poverty in the development of policies and measures which directly affect their lives. **The position of the Movement is that the knowledge and experience of the members of associations in dialogue with the Service could also be used to influence the content of the NAP/incl,** but this has not necessarily been the case.

In 2001, the arrival of the NAP/incl process prompted parallel demands on associations for contributions and comments on what should be included. Some associations joined the position of ATD Fourth World in choosing to promote the use of knowledge from dialogue with the Service also as an input for the NAP/incl, whereas others saw the arrival of the Plans as a new way to push forward certain issues and answered calls for direct contributions to its content. This resulted in a divergence of opinion on how the consultation process should take place and prompted the Government to consult widely with the associations and NGOs on this issue alone. The conclusions of this enquiry were presented to the associations in April 2003 and are included in the NAP/incl 2003-2005. In addition, it is proposed that the timing of the bi-annual report of the Service be changed so as not to repeatedly coincide with the production of the NAP/incl.

France

ATD Fourth World in France is an established and well respected organisation that has promoted dialogue between decision makers and people living in poverty since its foundation in 1956. The founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, Joseph Wresinski, was invited to be a member of the French Economic and Social Council and in 1987, he presented the ESC report entitled Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security. Its promotion by the International Movement ATD Fourth World has meant that this report has served as a basis for the development of anti-poverty policy not only in France, but across Europe. In France, however, it laid the foundations for the 1998 Loi d'orientation relative à la lutte contre les exclusions³⁷ which ATD Fourth World had played a part in developing. The relationship between ATD Fourth World and the ESC in France was maintained with the succession of Mme Genviève de Gaulle Anthonioz and then Mr Didier Robert as members. Most recently, on 18 June 2003, the ESC unanimously adopted a report presented by Didier Robert entitled L'accès de tous, aux droits de tous, par la mobilisation de tous³⁸.

As a member of the Conseil national des politiques de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale³⁹, CNLE, ATD Fourth World France was asked for their opinion on a draft version of the NAP/incl 2003-2005. In view of the importance of the issues treated in the ESC report, they asked that its content be integrated into the NAP/incl, with the result that reference is made to the ESC report on four occasions. **The lack of time available was an obstacle to a full consideration of the implications of the report but it is hoped that this will be further developed in the future.**

Finally, the question has to be asked whether consultation with NGOs is seriously being taken into account by governments when making policy choices or if it is having little effect on the final outcome.

³⁶ Fight Against Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service (translation)

³⁷ Action Against Exclusion Act (translation)

³⁸ Access for all, to all rights, through the mobilisation of all (translation)

³⁹ National Council for Policies in the Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (translation)

Luxembourg

ATD Fourth World in Luxembourg made the effort to build up a relationship with the officials responsible for writing the NAP/incl which they feel helped their contributions to be taken seriously. In addition to taking part in the official consultation seminars organised by the Government, they invited the person responsible for the NAP/incl from the Ministry of the Family to come to their headquarters for a discussion around the Plans. **The main action of the team in Luxembourg is centred around the right of people living in poverty to participate in cultural life and their headquarters is named the House of Culture.** By visiting the team, the government official was able to better appreciate why this was an important issue to people living in poverty themselves and why ATD Fourth World was to propose policies in this area in their contribution. When members of the Delegation of ATD Fourth World to the EU visited the team, both the person responsible for writing the NAP/incl and his superior joined the group for lunch. On this occasion, they were able to better appreciate the history of ATD Fourth World's involvement with the EU institutions and work done to develop the Social Inclusion Strategy at this level. In addition, the Luxembourg government was represented at a seminar organised by the International Movement ATD Fourth World in Brussels which explored ways in which the European Strategy reinforced existing national level strategies to fight poverty and social exclusion.

As a direct result of the investment of the team and their written contribution for the NAP/incl 2003-2005, a measure offering free entry to museums for people on low incomes is included in the NAP/incl. ATD Fourth World Luxembourg acknowledges that this is just a beginning but hopes, in particular, that in the future the Ministry for Culture will be even more involved making propositions for the NAP/incl.

Netherlands

ATD Fourth World in the Netherlands contributed to the NAP/incl process in three different ways and yet despite this, their proposals were not really taken into account in the final version of the NAP/incl 2003-2005.

The first way in which they were involved was through European Anti-Poverty Network. ATD Fourth World is a founding member of the EAPN National Network in the Netherlands who organised, amongst other things, five thematic seminars covering themes explored in the NAP/incl (income, health, housing, education, participation) for people living in poverty and other members of grassroots organisations. The outcome of these seminars was used as a base for EAPN's propositions for this round of Plans.

ATD Fourth World were also approached directly by the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs for a contribution. They were invited to an official NAP/incl consultation seminar after which each NGO was asked to write a letter outlining their position and propositions for the NAP/incl 2003 - 2005. There was supposed to be a second seminar in March but instead, NGOs were invited to respond directly to a draft of the NAP/incl.

The final way in which ATD Fourth World in the Netherlands contributed to the process, was through the Alliance for Social Justice. Although not a member of this Alliance, which is made up of 10-20 organisations, ATD Fourth World was one of the contributors to their 'Manifesto Against Poverty and Social Exclusion'. Fourth World representatives took part in a preparation meeting that the Alliance hosted for the organisations that had been invited by the Social Affairs Ministry to the official consultation seminar in October 2002.

The impression of the team was that the Government had used the contributions and criticisms of the NGOs to better explain their own policies, rather than making any fundamental changes which took on board the suggestions made. This becomes more serious, from the point of view of ATD Fourth World, when it is taken into consideration that many other 'users organisations', or associations with a large membership of people living in poverty themselves were represented within the various networks and groups that were consulted.

Working together with the national teams of ATD Fourth World on the NAP/incl 2003-2005, also **enhanced the input that the Delegation to the EU was able to make to the process at a European level.** Notably, as active members of the Social Inclusion Review Group and Steering Group of EAPN, and through our involvement in the annual Round Tables on Poverty and Social Exclusion held in Aarhus, Denmark, in October 2002 and Turin, Italy, in October 2003. In addition, thanks to financing from the Community Action Programme⁴⁰, we were able to organise in April 2003, a seminar in partnership with the Belgian Service de lutte contre la pauvreté, la précarité et l'exclusion sociale, on the theme of *"Harmonising National and European Anti-Poverty Strategies: Evolutions and Opportunities"*, the conclusions of which contributed to the propositions formulated in the final chapter of this document.

⁴⁰ Phase I, Trans-national Exchange Programme

Reaction of ATD Fourth World to the Streamlining Propositions

At Lisbon, a strategy was put in place with the aim of making the EU *"the most dynamic, competitive, sustainable, knowledge-based economy"*. This goal is to be reached through the positive interaction of a policy triangle of economic, employment and social policies. The social dimension of the Lisbon Strategy was mandated to the Social Protection Committee, made up of representatives from Member State governments and the European Commission, who then had the task of developing the use of the OMC in the field of social protection. The four major social policy areas upon which co-operation at an EU level was agreed were; social inclusion, pensions, healthcare and 'making work pay'. The first to be developed was the Social Inclusion Strategy, as already outlined, and more recently, the OMC has been used for pensions. Application in the field of healthcare has not yet been finalised and it has been decided to look at 'making work pay' as a more horizontal and cross-cutting issue in the three other areas.

Earlier this year, however, the Commission put forward propositions to streamline these processes with the aim of increasing the overall impact of the social dimension of the Lisbon strategy⁴¹. Although still in its infancy, this Communication proposed changes to the Social Inclusion Strategy and in particular, signaled the end of the NAPs/incl.

The major concern is the lack of visibility and political impact at a high level that co-operation in the social field is having. Two of the main instruments for co-ordination on economic and employment policies at an EU level are the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines (BEPGs) and the European Employment Guidelines, both of which are grounded in treaty obligations which render them more effective. The Spring Summits of the European Council, which are dedicated to reviewing the Lisbon Strategy, have concentrated primarily on these two areas and are a far cry from the 'Social' Summits that had been hoped for. **This reflects the overall tendency of economic and employment policy objectives to dominate over social ones.**

There needs to be more integration of social goals within the economic and employment processes to increase coherence between the different policy areas. On this subject, there seems to be a general consensus to which we adhere. What is more of a contentious issue, is the simplification of the reporting procedures that are being proposed as a part of the streamlining process. Instead of having separate National Action Plans or Strategy Reports for Social Inclusion, Pensions and Healthcare, the Commission is proposing that Member States produce an annual general Social Protection Report covering the three areas. Each year in turn, there would be a particular focus on one of the three 'pillars'. The Common Objectives for each pillar are to be revised on a three yearly basis and the timing is to coincide with revisions of both the BEPGs and Employment Guidelines, the next opportunity being 2006. Instead of producing joint reports on each subject, the Commission and Council would write one Joint Social Protection Report to submit to the Spring Council each year.

In effect, this would mean that the NAPs/incl 2003-2005, which we are reviewing in this document, would be the last. The message that this gives out those authorities at national, regional and local level; trade unions, and employers; NGOs, community and voluntary organisations; and people living in poverty themselves that have been mobilised around these Plans, is a mixed one. On the one hand, more co-ordinated action on social issues is being called for, and on the other, a new and innovative way of creating dialogue and co-operation between different actors in the fight against poverty is being undermined. To pull the rug out from under a process that has just got underway, and just started to win over supporters, runs the risk of de-motivating those that recognised the added value of the European Social Inclusion Strategy and invested in this process, and at the same time gives fuel to the arguments of those who believe that the OMC is an inherently weak instrument that it isn't worth engaging with.

Obviously the arguments are complicated and there is strong divergence of opinion on the possible outcomes of implementing the streamlining propositions as they stand. **The question in our minds is, as always, what will change for the most excluded populations, living in extreme poverty and experiencing a multitude of difficulties?** Theirs is the situation that is the most complex of all to address and a far reaching ambitious strategy, in which they can play a full part, is required if effective anti-poverty policies are to be developed, and

⁴¹ Commission COM (2003) 261 " Strengthening the social dimension of the Lisbon strategy: Streamlining open coordination in the field of social protection ", 27 May 2003.

the goal of the Lisbon Council to “*make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010*” is to be reached.

The Social Inclusion Strategy calls for the ‘mobilisation of all relevant bodies’ across policy domains and throughout society, that is needed in order to tackle the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion. The Common Objectives adopted at Nice, then reaffirmed and strengthened at the Copenhagen European Council in 2002, reflect in many ways the expectations of people living in extreme poverty. Their proposed revision brings along with it the danger that once again, the demands of those the most difficult to reach and to hear will be lost in the desire to simplify and streamline. Extreme poverty is by its very nature complex, and whereas **general overarching objectives may suffice to impact on the lives the majority of people living in poverty and social exclusion in Europe, once again, those who have been entrenched in deep poverty for generations risk being left behind.**

ATD Fourth World asks that : that the dynamic that has begun to gather strength and momentum in the fight against poverty and exclusion in Europe be allowed to grow. That the Social Inclusion Strategy be allowed to retain its visibility and prove its worth before being revised. That the efforts being made to involve people living in poverty, and those working alongside them, in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies that directly affect them, be allowed to mature and progress.

In this way, the greater coherence between economic, employment and social protection policies at a political level that is desired, could be complemented by greater awareness at all levels of European society of the poverty and exclusion in our midst, and result in concerted and co-ordinated efforts to finally eradicate it.

We are encouraged by the most recent opinion of the Social Protection Committee⁴² which, whilst supporting the core objectives of the streamlining process, also supports the idea of retaining the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion and the visibility of the Social Inclusion Strategy as a whole.

⁴² September 2003

The Future of the Fight Against Poverty and Exclusion

At the time of writing this document there are questions, related to the streamlining process, about whether or not the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion will exist in the future. Whatever the outcome and whatever the form of future co-operation at an EU level in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, particularly considering its upcoming enlargement, ATD Fourth World has the following propositions to increase the impact of this strategy on the daily lives of people living in extreme and persistent poverty across Europe:

- **Evaluation** of all policies and measures that aim to combat poverty and social exclusion must take place to see whether or not they are having any real impact. The involvement of people whose lives are affected by these policies is crucial in this evaluation, as is the development of more qualitative and comprehensive indicators to give a clearer picture of reality.
- **Action** necessary for change needs to be emphasised in place of simple reporting on the situation. This would stimulate exchange and mutual learning, and be a step towards achieving the ambition of eradicating poverty, an essential element in sustainable development.
- **Coherence** between various strategies and policy developments at European, national, regional and local levels, and across the different policy domains, is essential if the positive effects of one effort to fight poverty are not to be wiped out by the negative effects of another. Developing ways to systematically consider the impact on poverty and social exclusion would put certain checks in place, providing that such findings are then acted upon.
- **Partnership** and co-operation between all those concerned with the fight against poverty and social exclusion must be fostered and further developed. In particular, partnership with the most disadvantaged and excluded populations needs extra investment to create the conditions that would enable their full participation on an equal footing.
- **Mobilisation** of all citizens and stimulation of the debate as to what kind of society we want for the future or how we want to live together, is fundamental if social exclusion in all its forms is to become a thing of the past.
- **Human rights and human dignity** have to be the driving forces behind all efforts to develop a more just and inclusive society. Each human being should have the right to live in dignity and have that dignity respected. This can only come about through free and effective access to all interdependent and fundamental human rights.