



PEER REVIEW
IN SOCIAL PROTECTION
AND SOCIAL INCLUSION
2009

DEVELOPING WELL-
TARGETED TOOLS FOR
THE ACTIVE INCLUSION OF
VULNERABLE PEOPLE

OSLO, 29-30 OCTOBER 2009

SYNTHESIS REPORT



On behalf of the
European Commission
Employment, Social Affairs
and Equal Opportunities



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ASTRI RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY GROUP

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This publication is supported for under the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007–2013). This programme is managed by the Directorate-Generale for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the European Commission. It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment and social affairs area, as set out in the Social Agenda, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy goals in these fields.

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2010

PRINTED IN BELGIUM



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Executive Summary

A new labour and welfare administration has recently been created in Norway — the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation or NAV — the aim of which is to achieve a better coordination of benefits, more user-friendly services and a more effective and work-oriented casework.

This new body has been tasked with implementing the “Qualification Programme”, a new tool created as part of the “Action against Poverty” Programme, which aims to improve people’s quality of life by helping them into employment through individualised pathways. The programme focuses specifically on those people that are furthest away from the labour market, that have substantial and complex problems and a significantly reduced working capacity, and that live in a “dependency culture” with regard to welfare benefits.

A core feature of the programme is the improved coordination between various public bodies (employment services, social security administration and municipality), achieved thanks to the creation of the NAV.

Participants in the Qualification Programme can be aged between 19 and 67 years. They must follow the programme on a full-time basis (37 hours a week), participating in various activities and trainings that prepare them for the transition towards working life. They receive a “qualification benefit” (ca. €17 000 per year) for the duration of the programme, which is generally not significantly higher than the ordinary social assistance benefit.

The Peer Review highlighted the fact that the Qualification Programme comprises many elements covered in the EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Policy, namely:

- the creation of a single agency (“one-stop-shop”) providing income support, employment and social welfare services to persons with multiple problems;

- a broad focus on vulnerable groups, with variation in municipal policies, depending on the local or regional prevalence of vulnerable groups;
- a shift from supply-oriented group provisions to a more client-centred, demand-driven approach that better takes into account the needs and demands of individual clients;
- the provision of adequate income support during programme participation.

Familiarising with the design and implementation of the Qualification Programme enabled the Peer Review participants to make a series of observations and insights.

Some of the discussion focused on the question of whether participation in the Norwegian programme is *voluntary or more or less compulsory*. Policymakers and case managers indicated that programme participation remains voluntary, but that the financial benefit provided to participants functions as an important incentive. Representatives from Poland and the United Kingdom questioned whether there should not be some level of “formalisation” of programme participants’ commitment, similar to what exists in their own programmes, in which the client has to sign a legally binding document (“contract”). In the Qualification Programme, this is not the case: the motivation of the client is considered to be the core driver of participation.

During discussions, it further became clear that NAV offices have some degree of freedom in deciding who to select for the programme. It was suggested that decisions relating to client selection and programme content could be improved by applying a standard assessment tool in all offices. Such a tool should not only focus on needs, demands and incapacities, but also on competencies and potentialities.

In terms of programme operation, it emerged that Norway shares some experiences with other EU countries. For instance, programmes for the most disadvantaged tend to focus more on social and health needs than on



the labour-market needs of the client, reflecting their actual needs. It was nevertheless suggested that providing staff members in the new “merged” teams, which are less familiar with labour-market and employment topics, with additional training could be useful in this context.

In terms of results, it was pointed out that the Qualification Programme has been *implemented in a period of transition and transformation* (creation of new NAV agencies, intensified cooperation with municipalities, etc.) and that this should be taken into account when setting targets for NAV offices (namely in terms of the number of clients they have to include in the programme annually). On top of this, other time-consuming elements of programme operation, such as the outsourcing of training or job search activities to private providers and related additional support activities, such as monitoring, also put pressure on NAV staff. Moreover, as confirmed through experiences in several countries, social inclusion pathways followed by clients with multiple problems generally take longer and require more support and supervision than programmes focussing on clients that are closer to the labour market.

As regards the *transferability* of certain aspects of the policy, several representatives expressed their appreciation for the NAV structure, enabling better service provision through good cooperation between state and municipal workers, and between bodies on various policy levels. However, experts from some countries indicated that such a structure would meet *resistance and would not work (yet) in their country*, due to legal, organisational, budgetary and psychological barriers. In other countries, a merger of public providers and an integration of service provision may be further complicated by the prominent position and role of employers’ organisations and labour unions.

It was further stressed that cross-national differences in *budgets, resources and facilities available* for social welfare, employment, social inclusion and healthcare policies would affect the “applicability” of elements of the Qualification Programme in other countries.

Representatives of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) nevertheless consider the Qualification Programme as an attractive means of combating



poverty by providing adequate income support, as well as access to the labour market and welfare services. It added that positive results could be achieved from transferring several principles and practices of the programme to other countries.



1. Norwegian social policy and institutional context

Vocational rehabilitation and employment integration measures have been core elements of governmental social policy in Norway since 1991. The ageing of the population and the need to ensure the financial sustainability of the social protection, pension and healthcare systems were a major reason for introducing these policies. The Norwegian welfare system consists of an active workforce of around 2 400 000 people, as well as 700 000 persons that are out of work and dependent on benefits and allowances.

As is the case in other European countries, the Norwegian administrations in charge of employment and welfare services are in the process of merging, leading to the creation of a new labour and welfare administration: the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation or NAV. The aim of this new administrative body is to achieve a better coordination of benefits, more user-friendly services and a more effective and work-oriented casework. One of the core elements of the reform has been to establish a NAV office in every municipality, providing a “one-stop-shop” for all types of clients requiring services related to employment, income replacement, rehabilitation, training, etc.

Within the new NAV structure, services dealing with employment, social security (state level) and welfare services (municipal level) work together. This collaboration has led to the development of a new “Qualification Programme”, aimed at promoting social inclusion and employment among the most vulnerable groups in Norwegian society.



2. The Qualification Programme

The Qualification Programme was launched in November 2007 as part of Norway's "Action against Poverty" Programme. The aim is to reduce long-term dependency on benefits and improve clients' quality of life by helping them into employment through individualised pathways. The programme focuses specifically on those people that are furthest away from the labour market, with substantial and complex problems and a significantly reduced working capacity, which cause them to live in a "dependency culture". In Norway, 40% of social assistance recipients are dependant on benefits and face multiple problems, ranging from mental health conditions to housing needs or chronic ill-health. Moreover, 50% fall below the poverty line.

The programme has become a key policy instrument in attempting to help out these people, acting on two fronts: the labour market component, in which it seeks to move people into work and work-related activities, and the welfare component, providing income security and a decent life for those who cannot work.

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A core feature of the programme is the improved coordination between various public bodies (employment services, social security administration and municipality). The Qualification Programme links and integrates the formerly fragmented provision of services in the fields of social assistance, employment and health, making them available to a targeted set of vulnerable clients. The staffs directly involved in the Qualification Programme are further required to establish close contacts with other important actors working in these fields, including health services, employers and NGOs.

The programme's design is based on earlier pilot projects with integrated service provision, some of which focused on migrants and the socially vulnerable. It is a job-oriented programme with a low-entry threshold. Participants may be aged between 19 and 67 years. Before entering into the programme, candidates have to undergo a work ability test to determine whether they meet the programme criteria and have any special needs. People eligible to the programme are those with significantly reduced work ability or who receive only limited national social insurance benefits.



Participants also must show that they are sufficiently motivated to make the transition to work.

After the assessment, which consists mainly of a self-assessment form that the client has to complete, an individualised activity plan is elaborated. It sets out the actions and measures that will be undertaken in framework of the programme to prepare the participant for his or her transition to working life. These comprise both confidence-building and work-oriented activities. The programme usually begins with training activities relating to clients' social and coping skills.

Participants follow the programme on a full-time basis (37 hours a week), during which they receive a "qualification benefit", which is generally not significantly higher than ordinary social assistance (approx. €17 000 per year). Persons under 25 years receive a smaller sum. This amount is subject to 25% income tax, but will contribute to the individual's pension. The target period for completing the programme is one year, with a maximum duration of two years (although there is a possibility of an additional one-year extension under certain conditions).

Since the Qualification Programme began, roughly 7 000 persons have participated. By the first quarter of 2010 the programme should be operational on a country-wide basis.



3. A first assessment

Initial evaluations of the Qualification Programme revealed some discrepancies and problems that can be considered inherent to any new programme and to a rapid nation-wide implementation. The first evaluation report showed there were some variations within the government as to the exact objectives of the programme. Whereas the Ministry of Labour considered the programme aim as “getting people into labour market”, the Ministry of Social Inclusion viewed it as “moving people closer to the labour market”.

Also, at the NAV office level, the evaluation highlighted differences among the groups targeted for participation in the Qualification Programme. While these variations may reflect differences in local populations of social welfare recipients (e.g. proportion of immigrants, drug-users, etc.), they could have been caused by the setting of overly-ambitious participation targets at central level. In the first year within the main municipalities, these targets could often not be reached when rolling out the programme and some NAV offices may have been tempted to choose people who were most likely to succeed.

It also became clear that the programme faced some initial implementation problems, like a lack of tools (e.g. standardised assessment tool) or guidelines.

As the programme is still in its infancy, programme participant results are still limited. Preliminary results show that in the first four months of 2009, 37% of the 303 people who completed the programme got ordinary employment, 4% went on to further education and 8% entered other labour market schemes. In municipalities that have been implementing the programme for some time, the majority of participants are (very) satisfied, expressing appreciation for the fact that they were consulted on their needs and that they receive a monthly “salary”. On their side, NAV staff appreciated the wider range of measures they could use under the Qualification Programme, ranging from providing motivation and counselling, to social skills (e.g. dressing properly, organisation of daily life) and work-capacity related measures. However, it was also found that staff with a social-work



background displayed a lack of knowledge and experience when it came to employment schemes, networking with employers and the monitoring of participants in work placements. Sometimes, private agencies were contracted to provide training or to find job placements, but often there was not sufficient time taken to monitor the quality of these agencies' activities.



4. Links to EU Policy and Strategies

The Peer Review procedure is an important tool within the Social Open Method of Coordination. It has the considerable objective of promoting social inclusion policies and social protection systems that are accessible, adequate, efficient and financially sustainable and adaptable.

The key objective of the EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process is to ensure universal access to the resources, rights and services needed for participation in society. An important factor in achieving this goal is multi-actor participation, meaning that all relevant stakeholders, including people experiencing poverty themselves, should be involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of the policy to combat poverty and social exclusion.

This should be achieved through strong coordination of all levels of government and of all actions undertaken by various stakeholders in the area of social inclusion, and through the promotion of dialogue and partnership between all relevant bodies, public and private.

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As there are a number of groups within society that face a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion compared to the general population, the *inclusion of vulnerable groups* is one of the priorities of the EU Social Protection Social Inclusion Process. These vulnerable groups include (but are not limited to): people with disabilities, migrants and ethnic minorities, homeless people, ex-prisoners, drug addicts, people with alcohol problems, isolated older people and children.

The European Commission has in fact launched a new holistic approach to tackling poverty and promoting social inclusion of people furthest away from the labour market. The Commission Recommendation of 3 October 2008 stresses the need to apply three principles when dealing with employment and social inclusion of people excluded from the labour market: adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services¹.

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:307:0011:0014:EN:PDF>



It underscores the need to promote job retention to prevent “revolving door” situations, in which persons with multiple problems find themselves in an endless cycle of limited periods of employment followed by long periods of benefit dependency.

The Peer Review sessions confirmed that Norway’s Qualification Programme comprises various elements that meet the aims of the Social EU Protection and Social Inclusion Policy:

- a. the creation of a single agency (“one-stop-shop”) to provide income support, employment and social welfare services to persons with multiple problems means service provision is now less fragmented. Social assistance clients are served by a new and transparent organisation (NAV) structure, in which various stakeholders in the area of social security, employment and social welfare are gathered “under one roof”;
- b. a broad focus on vulnerable groups, with variations in municipal policies depending on the local or regional prevalence of vulnerable groups. Several categories of vulnerable groups can now be reached more easily and a mix of social welfare and employment focused services are available, including (better) cooperation with health services;
- c. a shift from supply-oriented group provisions to a more client-centred, demand-driven approach. The needs and demands of individual clients are taken into consideration through individual consultations and initial evaluations show that the clients appreciate this aspect.
- d. adequate income support during programme participation and activities covering the third strand of the EU Commission Recommendation (2008) on an inclusive labour market.

After noting that the Norwegian programme reflects many principles of the EU active inclusion policy, participants in the Peer Review programme went on to raise various issues and questions, both reflecting similar problems

within their own country, and highlighting elements in contrast to policies and practices “at home”.

5. Policies and experiences in peer countries

From the country papers compiled by participants in view of the Peer Review and the discussions during the Review meeting itself, it emerged that reaching the target group and elaborating an appropriate programme is a challenge in several countries. Implementation issues, dilemmas with regard to programme participation criteria and a lack of information on the early stage of implementation were all issues widely recognised by participants from other countries.

In the *United Kingdom* several programmes have been introduced to improve the accessibility of services for the most vulnerable. The Ace programme, which seeks to provide more targeted local support, has found that clients usually have various needs — such as healthcare, housing or financial support — that can only be met if practical support is close at hand. In another programme targeting drug users, which seeks to help them to put a stop to their dependency and increase control over their lives, the participant's commitment is strengthened by signing a rehabilitation plan. A specialist programme for ex-offenders has also been set up, targeting the person right from the start, while he or she is still in prison, offering health, benefits and employment advice. Immediately after the detention period, the client then enters a “fresh start” programme at the local job centre. From each of these programmes, it has become clear that help should be available close to the client, in particular at transitional stages in the client's life, for instance after completing school, after leaving prison or after a period of caring for a family member.

In *Poland*, most groups at a large distance from the labour market, such as ex-offenders or persons with disabilities, are not serviced by the public employment office and have to rely on social assistance services alone. Employment services are often unable to deal with the most vulnerable as the repertoire of available measures is not sufficiently flexible to meet their needs. Following the country's legal reform in February 2009, those furthest from the labour market who are socially insured may now receive support from the employment office under specific qualification programmes. The most prevalent categories are unemployed people over 45 years, unemployed

women after child-birth, single parents, ex-offenders and ex-agricultural workers who lost their job after privatisation. Local employment agencies may now initiate specific programmes for these groups.

Since 2005, *Cyprus* has been implementing a vocational programme for people claiming social assistance and often facing multiple problems (lack of work experience, drug addiction, housing problems). Participation in the scheme is voluntary and, as participants continue to receive social assistance benefits during their participation in the programme, the drop-out rate is reported to be high. Those who have completed the courses, which include vocational training and language skills, evaluated the programme positively. However, the next step in the process — that is to say the job placement, which allowed for a financial incentive for the employer — was not very successful. This is mainly attributed to the fact that the wages earned through work were at a similar level as the benefits. Moreover, some categories of clients, such as lone parents, continued to receive benefits in addition to the wage from the job placement. The experience has shown that persons with multiple problems need to be involved in a longer and more holistic approach than mere vocational training service provision. This could include measures to gain self-confidence or the provision of health services in the case of clients with mental health problems.

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Spanish participants reported that integrated service provision as it exists in Norway could not be applied in *Spain* in light of the legal framework and distribution of responsibilities. The division of the administration between national and local levels means service provision remains uncoordinated. In an attempt to overcome this incongruence, the government provides funding to NGO's for them to provide more integrated services to specific groups of disadvantaged, like immigrants and persons with mental health problems.

Ireland faces restrictions similar to Spain as regards the implementation of integrated services for the most vulnerable, due to the fact that unemployment offices and social assistance services also work separately. Moreover, employment offices may have an interest in “transferring” long-term unemployed people with medical problems to a disability pension, in order to relieve the high workload faced by the employment services. Such a



focus on benefit eligibility may push clients into a vicious circle, in which the application of employment-focused services and provisions is lacking.

In *Austria*, persons at a large distance from the labour market for a long time had only limited access to personalised employment and training programmes. This situation took its roots in the fragmentation of responsibilities between employment and training services, which are administered by the federal public employment service, and social assistance programmes, which are the responsibility of the federal states (“Länder”), and — partly — the municipality. Employment services mainly focus on the unemployed, rather than on social assistance recipients. Reforms scheduled for the coming years do not include the creation of a Norwegian-style “one-stop-shop” that provides all types of services.

Romania reported that increasing the employment of vulnerable groups is defined by government as a first priority objective. As regards the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market, attention will be paid to the development of tools to assess their capacities and needs, and to develop adequate social services. Other priorities include the promotion of integrated family policies (for instance providing accessible pre-school education and decent housing) and improving the quality of life for Roma (including better access to primary health services, increased educational participation and a reduction of school drop-out rates).

Representatives of the *European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)* appreciate the quality of life and the labour market participation objectives of the programme, the integration of activities on various governance levels, the provision of individualised pathways and the accessibility for maximally two years. However, they also note that the voluntary character of the programme is not recognized by more than half of the participants, and question the financial incentive to stimulate participation. Further it is unclear how far health services are integral part of the programme and whether health needs should not be substantially included in the initial needs assessment. Notwithstanding, the Qualification Programme is considered as an attractive means of combating poverty and of providing adequate income support, as well as access to the labour market and welfare services.

6. Discussion topics on the Qualification Programme

During the Peer Review meeting, discussions focused on several key issues, namely: the programme objectives, the more or less voluntary character of programme participation, the role of benefit levels and motivation, aspects of client commitment to programme participation (e.g. by signing a “contract”), needs assessment, programme content (social skills or work placement focused), the impact of the programme, as well as organisational issues.

Programme aims

As the first evaluation study of the Qualification Programme already pointed out, there still are somewhat contrasting viewpoints as regards the aims of the programme: whereas some parties involved see the aim as being to get people *into* the labour market, others apply a more moderate target, namely to move people *closer to* employment. In the Peer Review discussions, questions were raised as to the underlying objectives of the programme and namely as to whether the aim is to get more people into work, to move them from the social assistance benefit rolls or to improve their wellbeing?

The Norwegian side clarified that participants in the Qualification Programme are primarily motivated to extract themselves from their dependency on benefits (the “dependency syndrome”). The second step is then to increase skills for work and then, finally, the programme aims to support the client to move into employment. At the same time, an improvement in wellbeing and a reduction of the number of benefit recipients are also sought.

Incentives for client participation

In terms of incentives for participation, the question of whether programme participation is voluntary or in fact more or less compulsory is obviously key. In the Norwegian case, policymakers and case managers in the Qualification Programme indicated that participation is in principle voluntary. Clients have to apply to enter the programme, although they can also be actively



approached by NAV staff when the target group and annual objectives have been defined.

Incentives for participation are of course also linked to the benefit provided to the participant. The Norwegian practice evoked some discussion among Peer Review participants, some of which pondered on the long duration of payment. However, many other countries reported experience — as in Norway — that the most disadvantaged often need longer trajectories than the “ordinary unemployed”, because needs in various areas, such as health or housing, also have to be dealt with. The level of the benefits received also raised some questions. Indeed, whereas some countries, such as Cyprus, stressed the potentially disincentive role of a substantial level of benefit, the Norwegian experts held their view that the benefit has a positive effect. According to them, the benefit that is provided (“wage”) functions as an important condition for participation: persons are no longer in poverty and receive a regular income. Furthermore, the NAV can use the benefit to stimulate programme participation, for instance, by temporarily reducing it in cases where the client drops out.

Another aspect relates to the question of whether a “formalisation” of client commitment is desirable. Some Peer Review participants felt that signing an individualised plan could serve to strengthen the instrument’s power. Representatives from Poland and the United Kingdom reported that, in their programmes, clients have to sign a legally binding document (“contract”). According to them, this requirement helps to ensure that the client understands the aim and contents of the programme (in case of disputes) and provides a feeling of ownership. Moreover the contract specifies the rights and obligations of all parties involved.

The UK further reported a tendency to increase the possibility of sanctions in cases where the client does not follow the plans. On the other hand, experts from other countries indicated that sanctioning these groups, who are most often in poverty, would not work in their country.

In Norway, entering into the Qualification Programme does not involve signing an agreement. The client’s motivation is considered to be the core driver of participation. Contracts are only signed in cases where an individualised

plan is drawn up and an exchange of (medical) information between various providers requires informed consent from the client.

Initial assessment of client needs and capacities

It has become clear that local NAV offices have some degree of freedom in deciding which specific target group to select for the programme. This choice is not only affected by the targets set centrally by the Directorate of Labour and Welfare, which the NAV office has to fulfil, but also by the presence and availability of specific providers in a municipality (e.g. institutions dealing with substance abuse). This may lead to regional differences and, in some cases, to a “creaming off” of certain disadvantaged groups and to reduced efforts for the hardest-to-help and those furthest away from the labour market.

One way of ensuring a more standardised client selection process and programme content would be to develop an initial assessment tool. Some country experts suggested that this assessment should focus not only on needs, demands and incapacities, but also on competencies and potentialities. Using a standard assessment technique would not only increase equal treatment (across municipalities) and focus on the most vulnerable, it would also allow for a better comparison and benchmarking of programme outcomes across the country.

It was suggested from experiences in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands that it may be useful for assessment procedures to take a less static approach and enable more flexibility. In the Pathways to Work Programme (UK), work-focused interviews are held, but there are also possibilities to conduct a medical assessment, for instance in the case of persons with mental health problems. In various Dutch municipalities, a two-step approach is used, in which, after the initial assessment and first stage of the programme, which focus broadly on improving social skills and self-esteem, the client’s skills are tested again, this time focusing on labour-market competencies.



Increasing focus on employment rather than the welfare perspective?

The Qualification Programme considers that a minimum amount of (re-)organisation and stabilisation of the client's personal life is necessary before a fruitful start can be made with regard to job search and employment measures. However, evaluations conducted so far indicate that the share of labour-market measures in the Qualification Programme has in fact decreased over time, whereas the share of "sheltered" measures to enhance quality of life has increased.

Experts from other countries (e.g. United Kingdom) reported similar experiences, noting that programmes for the most disadvantaged tend to focus more on social and health needs than on the labour-market needs of the client. In Norway, this trend may be even stronger as the merged institution includes staff that (initially) is not familiar with employment perspectives and conditions. Although the site visit indicated that a network of local employers could be built up, it was also suggested that those staff members in the new "merged" teams who are less familiar with labour market and employment topics, and how to deal with employers, etc. should be provided with additional training.

The impact of programme participation

Some of the discussion was also devoted to the need for insight into performance indicators and success rates. With the programme being at such an early stage, it was clear that a sound evaluation of outcomes was not yet feasible. Not surprisingly, initial evaluations had had to focus more on process evaluations than results.

Nevertheless, the initial evaluation found that programme participants have so far reported high satisfaction rates. Some experts wondered whether these high satisfaction rates could be the result of a "placebo effect", reflecting the fact that people appreciate receiving help, rather than an evaluation of the particular plan they are following.



In light of the relatively small number of participants and the costs of the programme (in terms of individual training plans and benefits paid), it was suggested that further analyses, including cost-benefit analyses, be carried out to assess the programme's success. This is indeed being done and further evaluations will cover various aspects, including savings from social assistance payment reductions, as well as improvements in the quality of life and (employment) placement rates of programme participants.

Some other implementation lessons

The Qualification Programme is being implemented by an organisation that is in a state of transformation, namely with the creation of new NAV agencies and the setting up of intensified cooperation mechanisms with the municipalities. At the start of the programme, the central government formulated some ambitions and set targets for each municipality as to the number of clients that should be covered annually. However, the evaluation showed that the targets for NAV offices should have taken into account the time consumed with the introduction of the programme, including the elaboration of guidelines and tools (e.g. assessment) and the adoption of new business procedures. Experiences in other countries showed similar tensions between serving the most disadvantaged and having adequate organisational conditions and sufficient time. The pathways of clients with multiple problems generally take longer and are more labour-intensive, requiring more support and supervision than programmes that focus on clients closer to the labour market.



7. Transferability

The policymakers, administrators, researchers and NGO's participating in the Peer Review identified a series of elements of the Qualification Programme and its current operation that could be successfully applied in other countries.

NAV structure overcomes traditional institutional barriers

Several representatives expressed their appreciation for the NAV structure, which seemed to facilitate cooperation between the central state and municipal workers, as well as with bodies at various other policy levels, in order to ensure a better service provision to clients that need to be served by more than just one provider. Nevertheless, experts from Austria, Spain and Ireland, among others, indicated that such a structure would meet resistance and could not work (yet) in their country, due to legal, organisational, budgetary and psychological barriers. In other countries, such as the Netherlands and the UK, similar merger processes have already been made.

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Role of social partners and NGOs

In countries where the merger of public providers and an integrated provision of services may prove more complex, other stakeholders, such as employer organisations, labour unions and NGOs, may have a prominent position and role. In Austria the social partnership between labour unions and employers plays a strong part in providing labour market and social assistance. This is particularly relevant when it comes to concluding regional employment agreements and changing employer attitudes with respect to the employment of disadvantaged groups. In Poland, "employment councils", consisting of authorities, employers and unions from the local, regional and central levels, have been established in support of employment strategies.



Adequate resources

Several experts indicated that cross-national differences in budgets and expenditures for social policy affect the applicability of elements of the Qualification Programme. This is not only the case as regards available budgets for social welfare, employment and social inclusion or healthcare policies, but also on an operational level, as resources and facilities may be too restricted to allow for the introduction of new, less-fragmented service provision models. In terms of organisational infrastructure, shortcomings can relate to facilities (for identifying the most disadvantaged clients, information campaigns) or to the number and qualification of staff, as well as to case load targets for case managers dealing with clients.

EU stakeholders' organisation comments

Regarding transferability, the EAPN noted that several principles and practices of the programme could serve as best practice in other countries. However, besides from eventual budgetary constraints that could restrict implementation, it stressed that certain other unfavourable developments, such as growing prejudice against the poor in some in low- and middle-income countries, must also be taken into account as they could further restrict implementation.



8. Some lessons and recommendations

Despite the fact that not every country has the economic conditions to carry out a similar programme, some elements of the Norwegian programme and its organisation may be of relevance to other countries too. Peer reviewing the Qualification Programme provided an insight into various conclusions and recommendations, namely:

1. A programme that includes various tools (health, housing, employment, self-confidence) and is performed through the cooperation of formerly separated working agencies, has the capacity to reach out to the most vulnerable;
2. The provision of regular payments to programme participants prevents drop-out and provides the supporting agency with a tool to stimulate participation;
3. Providing integrated services also implies that case managers — who previously only regarded one client aspect or need (e.g. training, employment) — are now able to consider the multiple character of client problems and design a plan that addresses these problems in a proper order;
4. Despite initial problems that arise when agencies and organisational cultures merge, the Norwegian NAV structure shows that state and local agencies can fruitfully work together to the benefit of the client;
5. Programmes designed for the most vulnerable clients bear the risk of focusing more heavily on social and health needs than on labour-market needs, due to the fact that many claimants have health problems related to long-term unemployment. It seems difficult, as also reported from other countries, to shift — after addressing health and social needs — attention and activities to vocational skills improvement and job search activities;



6. Various tools can be applied to stimulate programme commitment. Whereas in some countries, trust and client motivation are considered crucial, in others, signing an agreement with the client may provide a useful tool to ensure participation;
7. Agencies that implement a new programme, involving new tasks and competencies for administrators, should provide adequate conditions like training, tools (e.g. needs assessment) and time to the workforce, and — at least initially — adapt internal productivity targets.





<http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu>

Developing well-targeted tools for the active inclusion of vulnerable people

Host country: **Norway**

Peer countries: **Austria, Cyprus, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Spain, United Kingdom**

A new programme for supporting the integration of people with reduced working capacity into the labour market was set up in 2007 as part of Norway's Plan of Action against poverty.

The programme is targeted at people with a severely diminished working capacity, a low income, long-term dependency on social assistance, and limited access to training and activation programmes. The aim is to help them into full-time employment through a personalised two-year scheme under which they receive fixed income support.

However, persuading vulnerable people to participate in the programme and putting in place a mix of employment, social and fiscal measures that corresponds to their multiple and complex needs are major challenges.

The Peer Review will address these challenges and the best way of responding to them and will enable Member States to exchange views on this issue.