



SOLIDAR statements and positions on OMC

SOLIDAR is **in favour of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)** as a European form of governance based on common objectives and jointly agreed indicators, in general, and the OMC in the field of social protection and social inclusion in particular. The OMC can provide for an adequate framework for mutual learning by exchanging on experiences and good practice and particularly for **involving all stakeholders, including social NGOs**, in the process of preparing, implementing and evaluating action plans in the field of the fight against poverty and social inclusion. SOLIDAR believes that the OMC can also **facilitate a better link between processes at European level and activities done by SOLIDAR member organisations** at local and regional level, both in their service provider role and as civic movements.

SOLIDAR acknowledges that the OMC is a soft governance tool dealing with policy areas where the Community competences are low, and expectations on OMC need to be realistic. The social OMC has still **produced some positive effects** in a number of Member States on their procedures (improving statistical capacity, horizontal and vertical cooperation...) or even allowing some policy shifts, being OMC used as a leverage during political bargaining. SOLIDAR recognises the role of OMC as an important instrument to bring the issues of poverty and social inclusion, especially child poverty, into the national agenda of some Member States. Moreover, social OMC will be strengthened with the Lisbon Treaty.

SOLIDAR, however, stresses that the social OMC presents some **important shortcomings and has a great unexploited potential**:

- A lot of hesitation about priorities/thematic focus, especially in strategic terms, and confusion about the aims of OMC – social pillar of Lisbon (little potential) and/or policy progress in the Member States (huge potential)
- OMC can be perceived sometimes as a **bureaucratic reporting process/machine** for experts and insiders, with SOLIDAR members and other civil society organisations finding it difficult to find concrete benefits of getting involved in these European-level processes.
- **Short time frames** do not allow for a real top-down, bottom-up approach, and the integration and coordination of the European-level process with national policies and decision making processes is underdeveloped.
- A **multiplication of OMC** or OMC-like process in the fields of social policy might lead to a mixing up of policy processes and priorities, an overloading of steer OMC-processes and difficulty to coordinate them with other processes, and an overloading of stakeholders, putting into question their ability to have a comprehensive and in-depth involvement in the process.
- Finally, a **real political commitment** from EU Member States to the process **is missing**, with no real involvement or even awareness of high-level politicians in the OMC process.

SOLIDAR believes that OMC has a great potential and that the agreement of a certain common language and common principles and priorities can be no a little achievement, as long as the **OMC process is reinforced** by:

- SOLIDAR would welcome the strengthening of OMC or OMC-like processes in social policy and related fields (e.g. migration; education) **to give more visibility and make them work more effectively**, also better integrated with the Lisbon Strategy (feeding in and feeding out) and with more leeway for learning and exchange on good practice and questions of transferability to other institutional contexts and for policy dissemination.
- SOLIDAR believes that **defining some priority topics themes**, e.g. child poverty and over-indebtedness, for analysis, exchange of experience and reporting during one year or longer **would also help strengthening the OMC**, by yielding practical and more ready-made useable results and insights.

- SOLIDAR calls for a better involvement of actors from the ground **in the whole process, e.g. avoid short timelines or consultation of NGOs in the last stage while drafting National Action Plans**. SOLIDAR stresses the importance of European networks of NGOs to translate the abstract OMC process into concrete actions by enhancing the involvement of national civil society organisations. The establishment of codes of good conduct regarding the timing of the consultation and how to take inputs into account to improve the bottom-up element of OMCs.
- In favour of quantified targets and indicators, SOLIDAR calls as well for also developing **qualitative criteria including criteria reflecting institutional arrangements while monitoring Member States' performance**, as quantitative data alone are insufficient to evaluate social inclusion progress.
- SOLIDAR stresses the fact that implementation of national policy strategies and NAP is the key issue and that attention is not only focused on policy priorities, but also and even more on how to implement measures to fight poverty and social exclusion. SOLIDAR calls for **better exploiting the strengths of the peer review process, in particular of the transferability component**, to reinforce mutual learning.
- SOLIDAR also calls for a **more active involvement of the European Parliament and national Parliaments** in the OMC process.

February 2009