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TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL,
THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE
AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Interim evaluation report on the HELIOS II programme

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

Interim evaluation report on the Helios II programme

1 INTRODUCTION

The third Community action programme for disabled people, known as the "Helios II programme", was established by Council Decision 93/136/EEC of 25 February 1993¹. It covers the period 1 January 1993 - 31 December 1996.

Article 11(2) of the above-mentioned Decision lays down that the Commission must submit, by 31 December 1995 at the latest, an interim evaluation report to the European Parliament, the Council and the Economic and Social Committee on the implementation of Helios II together, where appropriate, with a proposal for a Decision revising Helios II.

In accordance with item 1.2 of the Annex to the Decision of 25 February 1993, the evaluation of each measure adopted under Helios II is carried out independently and objectively. For this reason the evaluation was entrusted by the Commission, following an invitation to tender, to the Tavistock Institute (United Kingdom) in cooperation with three other research institutes: Nexus (Ireland), ECWS (Netherlands) and Prisma (Greece).

The conclusions of the interim report produced by the independent evaluator are annexed in full to this Communication. The report is based on observations gathered during the first 18 months of work and provides a series of initial conclusions and recommendations. It also deals with certain avenues to be explored in greater detail in the latter phase of the research. It is therefore not an evaluation of all programme activities, nor a complete analysis of the data gathered so far.

2 SUMMARY AND COMMENTS ON THE REPORT

2.1 The innovative aspects of the Helios II programme

According to the evaluation, the Helios II programme offers innovations in three areas:

¹ OJ L 56, 9.3.1993, pp. 30-36.

1. The programme is based primarily on an approach recognising the equal rights of disabled people as opposed to being based on assistance

The report points out that the objectives of the Helios II programme, which are to promote equal opportunities and integration for the disabled, form part of an approach to policy on the disabled in terms of human rights as opposed to a "social welfare" approach. As such, the programme correctly reflects changes relating to the subject of disability in contemporary European society.

The evaluator points out, however, that at different levels there are differing and sometimes contradictory views of this approach, with the result that certain aspects of the programme conceal unresolved tensions which are likely to give rise to ambiguities, misunderstandings or confusion.

For the evaluator, this is particularly apparent in:

- the lack of a precise definition of key terms such as "equal opportunities", "integration", "independent living" and "best practice";
- the wide diversity in the type of programme participants and in their outlook;
- differing views on the most appropriate action, intervention and development models for the programme;
- segmentation in terms of participation in the programme;
- a certain scepticism with regard to the impact of the programme on the disabled.

The Commission notes with interest the evaluator's analysis on this point and considers that it may have a degree of relevance.

It is important to point out, however, that the promotion of an approach based on the principles of equal opportunities has always been the basis for Community action, including in previous programmes, although in this respect Helios II represents a step forward.

For a number of reasons, the Commission cannot, however, avoid the programme partly reflecting the contradictions inherent in all policies concerning the disabled as implemented in the Member States, and in particular the tensions between the "medical" and "social" concepts of disability².

² It is worthwhile recalling the distinction between these:

- the first, and perhaps still the most widespread in practice, referred to as medical, sees disability essentially as a medical problem and stresses the functional limitations of the

Observation of policies carried out in all Member States shows that this tension is present at all levels, as is a gradual development favouring a social approach to disability. It is also important to note that this development is not proceeding at the same rate, nor has it reached the same level in the various Member States.

Community action has the clear objective of encouraging this development and convergence of policies, in particular by encouraging the exchange of information and experience at different levels on a Union-wide basis, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity. Such action thus reflects at different levels the variety of approaches encountered in practice in the Member States, and this is all the more inevitable since the latter are largely responsible for structuring the programme and for the choice of those taking part in activities.

In other respects, however, as the evaluator points out, the fact that the programme, which is based entirely on dialogue, enables differing standpoints to meet but not clash may be considered one of its major strengths. Many practical examples from the programme do in fact show that this peaceful confrontation between different models and cultures relating to disability may give rise to the most appropriate types of consensus with a view to promoting the concepts of equal opportunities and full participation.

A particular illustration of this view is the working methods used in the four sectors of exchange activities; participants are invited to develop for themselves, in the context of priorities established by wide-ranging consultations, the principles they consider most appropriate by means of meetings, dialogue and the contrasting of their respective practices. It is from this work in particular that the guides to good practice, based on a consensus between differing approaches, will be drawn up at the end of the programme.

individual. This concept implies that the disability is inherent to the individual and that it is the task of professionals in the rehabilitation sector to improve the individual's functional capacity as much as possible. In this context, little or no reference is made to the disability and its environment;

- the second, social, approach stresses the environment ahead of the individual. Disability is not seen primarily as an individual characteristic but as the product of a disabling society. According to this approach, resources should first be allocated to changing the environment. The social approach considers the disabled as one group among others in society, whose main problem is not linked to functional limitations but to a physical or mental characteristic which serves as a pretext for discriminatory attitudes in the rest of the population. This approach consequently sees disability in terms of an effort to obtain equal rights and not as an attempt to overcome functional limitations.

For example, in the context of unemployment among the disabled, a medical approach highlights the characteristics, personal history and residual productive capacity of the individuals while the social approach looks in particular at the sociological context, economic policy, the economic situation, provisions with regard to social rights and the attitudes of employers and of the population.

These two concepts are complementary, and clearly overlap in that they take account of social and individual factors, but their implicit priorities are diametrically opposed.

In general terms, the Commission also intends to encourage a European debate on the key concepts of policy for the disabled and to clarify such concepts. Organising a European conference on the disabled, on fundamental subjects such as the definition of disability or non-discrimination, enabled true exchanges and a better understanding of these concepts to be achieved. Moreover, publications such as "Helioscope", which appears in the 11 official languages of the Union, have made it possible to tackle from different points of view key questions such as the equalisation of opportunities or an independent way of life.

Nevertheless, in the light of the report, the Commission considers that it might be worthwhile in the future to establish more firmly a common frame of reference for measures to encourage equal opportunities for the disabled, and which might serve as a guide for the introduction and evaluation of activities under any new programme. With this particularly in mind, the Commission is intending to propose to the Council and European Parliament the adoption of a Recommendation in 1996 on the principles of equalising opportunities for the disabled.

2. The programme allows the coexistence of an approach based on the exchange of experiences between those taking part in activities and on the dissemination of these experiences on a wider scale

The evaluation highlights the fact that the programme's aims are, simultaneously:

- innovation, the exchange of ideas and experience and the transfer of know-how between the various participants;
- identification and evaluation of innovative measures implemented in practice at local level, in order to disseminate them on a broader scale.

The report points out that participants are confused by these two approaches and that this may give rise to appreciable differences in the measures undertaken and in the evaluation of those measures.

This dual aspect to the programme is given clear expression, however, in the Helios II Decision and in the various mechanisms and structures introduced by the programme. It is also a complementary and non-confrontational approach. The Helios II programme is based on key concepts such as mutual learning, innovation and dissemination. Measures such as exchange activities or the NGOs' "Europrogrammes" are the approaches adopted to begin these interdependent processes of learning and dissemination.

The aim is therefore to encourage and seek out good practices among participating networks and to disseminate the results outside these networks in order to act as a source of changes on a much larger scale.

Though, as the report emphasises, it seems clear that the programme is full of specific examples of direct advantages for the participants, evaluating the impact of the programme on a much wider scale appears more complex. The mechanisms for transferring and disseminating results are certainly more difficult to implement, by the participants themselves as well as at national level.

Independently of the conclusions, which the evaluator will only put forward in his final evaluation report in 1997, the Commission has already implemented a number of initiatives in order to stress the dissemination of experience at different levels:

- those taking part in exchange activities have been encouraged to promote the transfer of experience on the basis of the most appropriate mechanisms for this purpose;
- the Member States have been invited, in the context of national information meetings, to implement mechanisms at national level for the dissemination of experience acquired by the participants;
- in parallel with the presentation of the Helios II awards, the Commission has encouraged the publication of the guides of "best practice", drawn from the most relevant experiences of the programme.

3. Active participation by the disabled people

The evaluation stresses the efforts made in the programme to fully involve the disabled as operators in the programme.

For the Commission, such participation is also a consequence of a model based on equal opportunities.

The disabled participate in the programme mainly in one of two ways:

- through consultation of disabled people via the European Disability Forum;
- through "Europrogrammes" enabling disabled peoples' organisations to hold pan-European events to exchange information.

In addition, as the report points out, significant efforts have been made to increase the involvement of the disabled in all other sections of the programme: exchange activities (although the Commission is limited as nominations are made by Member States), the Handynet network and activities to inform public opinion and increase public awareness.

Encouraged by the positive experience provided by the European Disability Forum, the Commission has decided to provide its new social action programme 95-97, which is to follow on from the Helios II programme, with a permanent advisory body with a remit extending to cover the whole range of Community competence. The Commission shares

the evaluator's opinion of the essential nature of this achievement by the current programme and of those arising from cooperation between disabled people's organisations at trans-European level, illustrated in particular by the organisation of European conferences on the disabled.

2.2 The main constraints

Apart from the points already mentioned, the report points out that the programme encounters the following major obstacles:

1. *Excessive expectations given the size of the programme and the European Community's competence*

The report reveals that there is disappointment arising from excessive expectations in relation to the objectives of the programme. As the evaluator points out, the Helios II programme, while very ambitious, is limited to the exchange of experience and information. It is not intended to make good any shortcomings in policies for which the Member States have sole responsibility. This aspect is also given formal expression in the recitals to the Decision.

Nor does the programme pursue the same objectives as the Horizon strand of the Employment initiative which, while providing resources for the joint financing of initiatives, is limited to the employment sector. Horizon does not seek to establish a global vision of the question of disability, nor to stimulate a political discussion on the subject. There is therefore no relevance in comparing the budgets of the two programmes.

It is true to say that this confusion surrounding the programme has a negative effect in so far as it reflects on the motivations of participants and the meaning of their activity, as well as giving rise to an unfair evaluation of the programme. The Commission will therefore ensure that this aspect is clarified.

2. *Excessive fragmentation of the programme*

The evaluator highlights the fact that the various measures in the programme tend to be independent of each other, and that this detracts from an overall, coherent view of the programme.

The Commission can only admit that there is a degree of fragmentation of the programme. This is, certainly to some extent, the result of shared visions of policy for the disabled and of the Commission's obligation to take account of the different points of view. Nevertheless, the Commission has taken a whole series of initiatives intended to make the various parts of the programme interdependent. In particular, these include:

- organising joint seminars between the various sectors of exchange activities and the NGOs;
- setting up joint meetings between the Handynet centres and organisations of disabled people;
- the synergy established between the Helios prize awarding process and exchange activities;
- national information meetings enabling all participants (in all the programme's measures) in each Member State to meet and share their experiences.

The very structure of the Helios II Decision makes it impossible to go beyond these initiatives. However, the Commission's opinion is that this point will have to be dealt with when discussing any new Community measure.

3. *The role of advisory structures*

The report stresses the importance of the role of the advisory structures established by the programme, namely the Advisory Committee, the European Disability Forum and the Liaison Group.

As referred to above, the positive experience of the Forum has led the Commission to make provision for the establishment of a permanent internal advisory structure within the Commission to issue opinions on all aspects of Community policy.

Despite the efforts made, the Commission recognises a number of problems hampering the most fruitful dialogue possible in the context of meetings of all of these bodies. In addition to the material obstacles relating to the limited number of possible meetings, the size of the bodies and the need to provide documents in good time and in all languages (significant improvements have been made here), there is still a case for drawing attention, once again, to the absence of a common vision on the part of the members concerned.

Nevertheless, by making use of more informal working parties and more flexible procedures for discussing documents, the Commission considers that it has been able to begin a true debate and dialogue with these structures. These efforts will need to be continued. In particular, the Advisory Committee and the Forum have been invited to put forward their own content and structure for future meetings of the Liaison Group.

4. *Coordination at national level*

Coordinating activities at national level is a key to success in the dissemination of activities undertaken within the programme. In this regard, a large share of responsibility

within the current programme rests on the Member States, who receive useful assistance from the Commission through the national information days.

The report reveals a great diversity of approach and great differences in dynamism between the various Member States in this regard. Whatever the situation, the evaluation points out that Community action has often represented a step forward, facilitating coordination between the officials in charge and disabled people's associations at national level. Adding depth to coordination structures and machinery at national level should also be on the agenda for any new Community initiative.

5. *Coordination at Community level*

The political approach to the programme involves giving priority to promoting an awareness of the interests and needs of the disabled in structures and programmes aimed at the mainstream population.

In addition, one of the main tasks of the "Integration of the Disabled" Unit within the Commission is to ensure that such interests and needs are taken into account. For this reason, when the programme was adopted on 9 October 1991 the Commission decided to establish, under the responsibility of the Unit, an interdepartmental working party to ensure the internal coordination of various Community programmes, measures and initiatives relating to the disabled.

There is obviously no denying that, as with the internal policies of Member States, this objective of inclusion also comes up against a number of obstacles at Community level as a result of widespread prejudices.

Nevertheless, as the report points out, very substantial progress has been made during the programme, as shown by the close links established between programmes such as Horizon, Tide, Socrates, Leonardo and Eures. These contacts have often gone beyond the exchange of information and joint discussion and have made it possible to develop an integrated approach to the disabled outside the Helios II programme.

The establishment of a permanent advisory body for disabled people should also make it possible to reinforce this integrated policy in the future.

3 CONCLUSION

Although these are only preliminary conclusions, the interim evaluation report provides valuable indications of the constraints and the achievements of the Helios II programme.

As the evaluator points out, the Commission has already taken a series of initiatives to improve certain aspects of the programme. These are intended in particular to:

- improve integration between the various measures of the programme;

- encourage complementarity between the programme and other Community initiatives;
- improve the dissemination of experience and results;
- increase participation by the disabled in all the various measures in the programme;
- improve administrative procedures such as the reimbursement of meeting expenses and the dissemination of documents.

These efforts will continue. In addition, in the light of the interim report, the Commission will, during the final year of the programme, ensure that:

- the concepts and the policy objective pursued by the programme are made clearer;
- participants are given a clearer picture of the programme's development models and institutional limits;
- the transfer of successful results is developed;
- media coverage of the programme is improved.

The Commission does not consider it appropriate to propose an amendment to the Helios II Decision to correct all the points raised by the evaluator. There are, however, problems which could only be properly resolved by a new programme. The interim report provides valuable guidelines in this respect.

ANNEX

Extract from the Interim Report

Evaluation of HELIOS II

(October 1995)

THE CONCLUSIONS

7. CONCLUSIONS

An ambitious agenda

HELIOS II is attempting to implement an ambitious agenda, combining on the one hand a social welfare and an equal opportunities orientation and on the other a policy development (top-down) and social learning (bottom-up) model or action.

Lack of consensus and broad support

It furthermore has invited into the programme and established mechanisms for incorporating very diverse participants, including NGOs, disabled people and policy actors. Unsurprisingly the programme is easily criticised given the lack of prior consensus within the disability field and among programme participants. Yet there is also broad support for the intentions of HELIOS II even among those who criticise it.

The need for a framework for emerging consensus

The programme's broad aims, resourcing that is not commensurate with these aims, lack of definition of key terms, and differences of interest among programme participants and stakeholders contribute both towards the programme's strengths and account for criticisms and (sometimes) conflicts. The programme appears to be having some success providing a framework in which new forms of consensus can be developed. This fulfils an important need.

From an evaluation standpoint however the fact that HELIOS II accommodates divergent and sometimes contradictory models and approaches to disability, and aims that are broad and sometimes unclear or ambiguous poses special problems. Criteria for 'success' are not straightforward.

Different criteria for success and failure

Different stakeholders favour different criteria, whilst what in terms of a policy of top-down approach might be considered a 'failure' (e.g. lack of consensus among actors) might be considered a success from a bottom-up, social learning perspective (e.g. encouraging those with different interests and models to exchange and potentially learn from each other).

Addressing issues of uncertainty

Whilst much of the above is unavoidable in the field of disability policy and practice there are particular sources of uncertainty and unclarity that are avoidable and should be addressed. For example the role of the programme's consultative structures in influencing programme policy. Potentially the Forum represents one of the most powerful 'activities' of the programme in relation to identifying areas of European policy which directly impinge on the life of disabled people, which the programme might address, and in encouraging the active cooperation between some very diverse organisations involved in the field of disability.

*Confusion
between the top-
down and bottom-
up models*

There is also confusion concerning the role of information and exchange activities both between partners selected by national governments, and within the NGO Europrogramme. It is unclear how far these are intended as instrumental activities, designed to identify and clarify criteria related good practice and innovation, which might then be promoted at a European level through other means, or whether these are designed to promote good practice and innovation in themselves. The diversity of practices among member states in the selection of partners may have made the former aim difficult to achieve, the resource, and policy constraints on local agencies may make the latter to difficult to fulfil. Nevertheless, there is considerable evidence to suggest that many participants have found these activities useful in identifying new approaches to integration and equal opportunities. They have also led to the first stage in the development of a set of guides to good practice, which will be further developed and disseminated in 1996.

*Parallel rather
than integrated
activity*

Under pressure to set up HELIOS II there is some evidence that programme elements and activities have been pursued in parallel rather than as an integrated whole. This is further reinforced by the 'segregation' of programme participants: i.e. groups involved in one part of the programme are generally not the same as those involved in other parts. It is likely that 'external' (public and policy) assessments of HELIOS II will be enhanced if the programme is judged as a whole. This has implications for HELIOS II management. Whilst it is fair to say that synergy between parts of the programme is beginning to be seen as a management issue, it needs to be taken further.

At this interim stage in the evaluation we would highlight the following particular recommendations.

The programme would benefit from:

*Further focus and
clarification of
links between
aims and activities
required*

- continuing efforts to increase the focus of its aims and objectives;
- clearer statements of its activities and how these relate to one another in order to enhance programme integration;
- clarifying the link between activities, aims and objectives and being more explicit about the model(s) of intervention being used;
- greater clarity about the programmes limitations in terms that different partners can understand;
- greater work in the area of public awareness, especially in 'relation' to the general (wider) public complementing links with implicated professionals and disabled people themselves;

- stronger, and more structured links with other programmes, and other DGs that emphasise that disability is not only the province of DGV. This is part of a limiting paradigm of disability that needs to be challenged at every opportunity.

*Directions for
further policy
development*

Finally, the evaluation team recognise that there are limits to how far these recommendations can be fully acted upon within this HELIOS programme. They also begin to highlight directions for policy development that might usefully be taken further in future Commission initiatives and programmes intended to enhance integration and equal opportunities for Europe's disabled citizens

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