

The Annual Growth Survey for 2012 was presented by the European Commission in November 2011 – its main message is that member states are not doing enough to achieve the targets they committed to under the Europe 2020 strategy.

A key part of the strategy is the National Reform Programme which each country's government must produce each year, telling what measures are being taken to achieve the targets. These reports must be prepared in consultation with all interested stakeholders, which of course includes the NGO community. However, assessments about the inclusion in the first set of NRPs was disappointing, and many governments consult very selectively and restrict the more open aspects to information-giving, without much or any opportunity to let the proposals expressed find their way into the finished document.

What actions are CEDAG members taking to have their views considered in the National Reform Programmes?

CEDAG is working with three of its members to develop a dialogue between national NGOs and governments. We also want to hear from you about your involvement in this process and how you judge your success.

CEDAG members have indicated three main steps to successful engagement, especially for countries where the government has not spontaneously organised or publicised an effective consultation process:

Contact the lead ministry and ask about the internal process – when will there be a draft internally, when will it be debated by the parliament, what measures are planned to include stakeholders.

Contact ministries where your organisation has an interest in their contribution to the NRP (especially education, social affairs, social security, health), and ask them their internal process is. Who is the responsible person, what do they expect to communicate to the lead ministry and what measures are planned to include stakeholders.

To reinforce these efforts it may be useful to contact sympathetic parliamentarians and have them ask the questions on our behalf.

German CEDAG member BAGFW has seen some encouraging success by using this approach. By doing a lot of work 'upstream' to show the government that they were engaged, informed and interested in participating, they have achieved the aim of a meeting with the relevant officials. BAGFW has been active by making a response to the 2011 NRP in the form of a two page letter to the responsible minister, with a concise analysis and proposals for addressing the poverty and social exclusion target.

As a result, and thanks to assiduously following up, BAGFW was invited to a meeting with the ministry in November to discuss their involvement in drawing up the NRP and about necessary proceedings for that to happen. In preparation for this meeting BAGFW had worked on a comprehensive position paper comparing the EU 2020 objectives, the last German NRP and the country specific recommendations on Germany of the EU Commission.

The position paper made a number of proposals on employment, education and social inclusion/combating poverty, namely:

- Employment, especially qualified personnel for the social economy, support for less qualified persons and migrants; tailor made measures for long term unemployed; volunteering is not an instrument to fight unemployment.
- Education; for all, independently of their social status and background, more training on the job for youth, but also independent of an actual employment.
- Social inclusion, combating poverty; reduction of more than 660.000 persons until 2020, more indicators than just long term unemployment, especially Children poverty and intergenerational poverty, in-work poverty, poverty of elderly people.

Organisations that have representation in Brussels can also develop a second strand of advocacy by contacting the European Commission officials who are responsible for the country specific recommendations for their country. CEDAG puts its resources at members' disposition to help them set up and prepare for a meeting.

BAGFW also pursued this line of advocacy, with the result that the Director General of the Employment and social affairs department of the European Commission, who visited the German capital in December to discuss the German NRP with high ranking government representatives asked for a meeting with the BAGFW president to discuss their positions.

We look forward to receiving your success stories (or otherwise...) regarding inclusion in the NRP cycle. For more information or to share your news, please contact CEDAG secretariat !