



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Directorate-General

Service Order No. VC/2011/0108

“Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme”

TASK 3 DELIVERABLE 3

HOST COUNTRY ASSESSEMENT: SYNTHESIS REPORT

May 2012



VIEŠOSIOS POLITIKOS IR VADYBOS INSTITUTAS
PUBLIC POLICY AND MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

This publication is commissioned by the European Union's Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013).

This programme is managed by the Directorate-General for Employment, social affairs and inclusion 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.

The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can help shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-27, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries.

PROGRESS' mission is to strengthen the EU contribution in support of Member States' commitment. PROGRESS is instrumental in:

- *providing analysis and policy advice on PROGRESS policy areas;*
- *monitoring and reporting on the implementation of EU legislation and policies in PROGRESS policy areas;*
- *promoting policy transfer, learning and support among Member States on EU objectives and priorities; and*
- *relaying the views of the stakeholders and society at large.*

For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>

The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	4
INTRODUCTION: ONCE UPON A PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT	5
SCOPE OF THE ASSIGNMENT AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: AN OVERVIEW	6
THE HOST COUNTRIES: CONTEXTUAL FEATURES AND SELECTED PRACTICES	9
2.1 Contextual features of the host countries.....	9
2.2 Selected practices: key features and variation	10
3. THE EVOLUTION OF REVIEWED PRACTICES	13
4. THE DRIVERS BEHIND PEER REVIEW HOSTING: DIFFERENT USAGES	16
4.1 Hosting a Peer Review: about ‘ideal’ and real motivations.....	16
4.2 Hosting a Peer Review: a variety of motivations.....	16
5. THE PEER REVIEW MEETINGS: PARTICIPANTS, ORGANISATION AND DISCUSSIONS	20
5.1 A variety of participants, or a closed shop after all?	20
5.2 Organisational features.....	21
6. PEER REVIEW DISCUSSIONS: DEPTH, TENOR, LEARNERS AND TUTORS	24
6.1 Depth and tenor of the discussions.....	24
6.2 About tutors and learners	26
7. MUTUAL INFLUENCE BETWEEN EU AND NATIONAL CONTEXTS	30
7.1 Relevance of the topics of the Peer Review in the context of the Social OMC	30
7.2 Dissemination of information produced during the Peer Review across Europe	31
7.3 Consequences at the European level	33
7.3.1 Development of networks among participants and follow-up activities in Member States	34
7.3.2 Feeding debates at the EU level by stakeholders and experts	36
7.3.3 Promoting topics on the EU agenda and keeping attention high.....	36
8. CONSEQUENCES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL	39
8.1 Dissemination of information about meetings and follow-up activities in the host countries.....	39

8.2	Consequences in the host countries: (modest) improved efficiency, mirror effects and legitimation	40
8.2.1	Barely improving efficiency and effectiveness?.....	40
8.2.2	Mirror effects: reflexive learning.....	40
8.2.3	Legitimising effects.....	41
9.	WRAPPING THINGS UP	43
9.1	Motivations for hosting Peer reviews: going beyond showcasing.....	43
9.2	Between window dressing and critical discussions.....	43
9.3	Participation in Peer Reviews: more than “non-accountable bureaucrats”.....	44
9.4	Reflexive learning: when tutors become learners and vice versa.....	44
9.5	Learning from difference: opening up perspectives	45
9.6	Tracing domestic impact: mirror effects and legitimising practices.....	45
9.7	EU-level impact: weak networking but stepping stones to building European consensus.....	46
9.8	Organising Peer Reviews: features of success (and failure).....	46
9.9	After the Peer Review: après nous le deluge?.....	47
9.10	Homines dum docent, discunt: reaching the stated aims after all?.....	47
	ANNEX 1. OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDIES AND EXPERTS INVOLVED.....	49
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	50

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGE	European Older People's Platform
AIM	International Association of Mutual Benefits Societies
CEE	Central and Eastern European
DG	Directorate General
DIS	Droit à l'Intégration Sociale / Right to Social Integration (Belgium)
DIVOSA	Dutch National Association of Managers with Municipal Services in the Fields of Work, Income and Social Solidarity
EAPN	European Anti-Poverty Network
EC	European Commission
ENAR	European Network Against Racism
ERIO	European Roma Information Office
EU	European Union
FEANTSA	European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INBAS	Institut für Berufliche Bildung, Arbeitsmarkt und Sozialpolitik
LTC	Long-term Care
NAV	Labour and Welfare Administration (Norway)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSR/SPSI	National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
OPCD	Multi-Regional Operational Programme to Combat Discriminations (Spain)
ÖSB	ÖSB Consulting GmbH
OSE	European Social Observatory
OSI	Office for Social Inclusion (Ireland)
PR	Peer Review
PPMI	Public Policy and Management Institute
PROGRESS	Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity
QuP	Qualification Programme (Norway)
SIF	Social Inclusion Forum (Ireland)
SSCC	Sure Start Children Centres Programme (UK)
SSLP	Sure Start Local Programme (UK)
Social OMC	Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion
SPC	Social Protection Committee
VVOS	Flemish Union of Cities and Municipalities (Belgium)

INTRODUCTION: ONCE UPON A PEER REVIEW ASSESSMENT

This Synthesis Report is part of a collaborative research project ⁽¹⁾ carried out by a consortium between the Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI) and the European Social Observatory (OSE). It deals with the Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. The study examines the role played by the PROGRESS Peer Review Programme in stimulating innovation in social inclusion and social protection policies across the EU, particularly through mutual learning.

The specific **objectives** of the research project are as follows:

1. To provide an **overview and mapping of the Peer Reviews** that have been organized so far (Task 1). This deliverable was submitted by the PPMI to the European Commission in July 2011.
2. To examine **the contribution of the Peer Reviews to ‘consensus framing’** within the Social OMC through an in depth analysis of the messages that have come out of the Peer Review process (Task 2). This deliverable was submitted by the PPMI in July 2011.
3. To follow up **a selection of ten Peer Reviews** on a particular policy or project in the *host country* and examine **factors of success and failure** (Task 3). This is the subject of the present Synthesis Report prepared by the OSE.
4. To examine to what **extent, under which circumstances, from whom and by whom learning has taken place** as a result of *peer countries’* participation in ten selected Peer Reviews; and in that process identify elements conducive to such mutual learning (Task 4). This deliverable was submitted by the OSE in May 2012.
5. Based on the project’s findings, to propose a set of **recommendations** that could help the European Commission and the Member States to further improve the Peer Review process (Task 5). This deliverable was submitted by the OSE in May 2012.

The authors of the present deliverable - Sebastiano Sabato and Bart Vanhercke (OSE) ⁽²⁾ - are grateful for having been able to **draw extensively on ten case studies produced by some 15 OSE, PPMI, and external experts** (see bibliography and Annex 1 for more details), who also commented on earlier drafts of this Synthesis Report. We also benefited from different rounds of comments and feedback from the European Commission officials who followed the project along the way. The authors are, of course, solely responsible for any remaining errors.

This Synthesis Report is structured as follows: *section 1* briefly outlines the scope of the assignment, as well as the research methodology. *Section 2* provides a snapshot overview of the contextual features of the host countries of select Peer Reviews, as well as of the selected practices under review. *Section 3* describes the evolution of the reviewed national practices in the months and years following the Peer Review meetings. *Section 4* discusses the key “drivers” (motivations) behind Peer Review hosting, and examines a variety of usages of this OMC tool. *Section 5* elaborates on the participants and the organisational features of the Peer Reviews. *Section 6* analyses the depth and tenor of Peer Review discussions, as well as the nuances of the

-
1. Service Order No. VC/2011/0108 “Analysis and follow-up of mutual learning in the context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme”, financed under the PROGRESS Programme.
 2. Ivan Dumka from the University of Victoria helped improve the English in our report, and we are grateful for his editorial comments, which clearly went beyond mere language issues. His assistance represents the cherry on the cake of a successful internship at the OSE.

“learner” and “tutor” perspectives. *Section 7* traces the mutual influence of the EU and national contexts, while *section 8* examines the impact of PROGRESS Peer Reviews at the national level. *Section 9* concludes.

1. SCOPE OF THE ASSIGNMENT AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: AN OVERVIEW

Having examined ‘**consensus framing**’ within the Social OMC, Task 2 of this project confirmed that the Peer Review programme has been delivering on at least one of its objectives. Specifically, it has contributed to a better understanding of Member States’ policies, as laid down in their National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NSR/SPSI). The question remained however, whether the Peer Reviews are also delivering on another key objective, namely *to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the policies and the strategies for social inclusion, pensions, healthcare, and long term-care in present and future Member States, and at EU level, by learning from the experiences of these Member States.*

The aim of Task 3 of this project is therefore to assess the specific policies or programmes that were examined during **10 PROGRESS Peer Reviews**. The selection of these particular Peer Reviews for the in-depth analysis was done in three steps.

We first pooled all the Peer Reviews that examined country-specific policies or projects in the host country (and not general or EU-level policy problems). Second, we selected cases that met the following four criteria:

- The selected Peer Reviews, taken together, cover a variety of key themes. Higher priority was given though to more popular themes such as “quality and accessibility of social services” or “promoting active inclusion”.
- Selected Peer Reviews cover both “new” and “old” Member States as the host countries of the meetings. In addition, we selected Peer Reviews that have been held in the different “worlds of welfare capitalism”, i.e. the Anglo-Saxon, Nordic, Continental, Southern and Eastern European “worlds”.
- Selected Peer Reviews cover older, as well as more recent cases. Obviously, with Peer Review meetings that took place longer ago, the impacts of the Peer Review (if any) were more easily observed, although we did meet with the fallibility of human memory. By contrast, with more recent meetings, information and respondents were more easily accessible, but in some of these Peer Reviews, it seemed too early for tangible effects to have materialised.
- In our selection, we tried to reflect a diversity of Peer Reviews as regards their success in terms of mutual learning. The assessment of success was based on the immediate and impact evaluations of Peer Reviews. The rationale for the inclusion of not very successful cases is that we may also learn a lot from “failed” Peer Reviews, especially on the prerequisites of mutual learning.

Third, from the shortlist of Peer Reviews that fulfil the criteria above, ten cases were selected, taking into account the results of Task 1 and Task 2, as well as suggestions made by the European Commission. The final list of selected case studies is shown in Table 1 below (see also Annex 1 for more details).

For every one of the selected Peer Reviews, we examined how the discussed policies or projects *developed over time in the host country*, how they were *adapted* (responding to changes in circumstances and obstacles encountered), and most importantly, whether the discussion during the Peer Reviews and the comments and experiences of the peer countries *influenced in any way* the development of these policies and projects in the host country.

Host Country (year)	Topic	Abbreviation in text
United Kingdom (2004)	The Rough Sleepers Unit (England)	UK 2004
Czech Republic (2005)	Field Social Work Programmes in Neighbourhoods Threatened by Social Exclusion	CZ 2005
Belgium (2005)	Minimum incomes and social integration institutional arrangements	BE 2005
United Kingdom (2006)	The UK government's Sure Start programme	UK 2006
Sweden (2007)	Freedom of choice and dignity for the elderly	SE 2007
Spain (2007)	Multi-Regional Operational Programme to Combat Discrimination	ES 2007
Ireland (2007)	The NAPInclusion Social Inclusion Forum	IE 2007
Slovakia (2008)	Social impact assessment	SK 2008
Norway (2009)	Developing well-targeted tools for the active inclusion of vulnerable people	NO 2009
Germany (2010)	Achieving quality long-term care in residential facilities	DE 2010

Table 1. Overview of Assessed PROGRESS Peer Reviews

Meeting the core goal of the Peer Review assessment, namely to trace 'policy learning' effects, was in itself quite challenging, as in some cases interviewees make bold claims about the alleged "impact" of a given Peer Review. In other Peer Reviews we found the opposite, i.e. that interviewees suggested that no policy learning had taken place, and that the PROGRESS seminar had had no influence upon domestic policy. In both extreme cases, the coordination team (through the Case Study Guidelines for Experts: OSE and PPMI, 2011) has pushed the authors of the case studies, to conduct more detailed **process tracing** to ensure that:

- The "impact" claims of the Peer Review are empirically plausible, i.e. there is an observed link between the persons who participated in the Peer Review and the people in charge of a reform that would have been inspired by the Peer Review; and that they are in a position to enact such changes;
- That strong denials of (any) effects tied to the Peer Review are corroborated by a variety of interviewees, as some interviewees may have an interest in denying any form of "outside influence", especially from the EU.

The empirical challenge of making plausible claims has been addressed in the ten case studies through a careful triangulation of several sources of information:

- First of all, a thorough review of the relevant primary and secondary sources was undertaken for each Peer Review. This involved analysing, firstly, the key documents produced for the

Peer Review meetings ⁽³⁾; secondly, national evaluation reports, National Strategy Reports and assessments, if available; thirdly, academic literature; and finally, key documents of the Social OMC such as the Joint Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

- The findings of this documentary analysis were then supplemented, for each of the ten case studies, with interview data. **In total, 106 semi-structured interviews ⁽⁴⁾ were carried out between August 2011 and March 2012** (see last column of Annex 1). Interviewees included Peer Review participants (national and EU representatives, stakeholders), as well as experts who did not participate in the meetings themselves. These interviews prioritized respondents from the host country, but wherever possible Peer Review managers, Commission officials and thematic experts were interviewed as well. Most interviews were conducted through Skype or telephone, although some interviews were conducted face-to-face or (exceptionally) by e-mail.
- In some cases, additional information (e.g. press coverage) has been drawn from the internet.

It should be noted that reaching Peer Review participants was a challenge in most of the case studies. This part of the research has been particularly difficult in some case studies, particularly the Peer Reviews in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In these cases it was not possible to arrive at our target of at least 10 interviews for each case study, in spite of intense efforts on the part of the researchers and the coordination team ⁽⁵⁾. The following challenges were especially salient: participants of Peer Reviews moved to a different administration, institutions dissolved or were merged, people retired, resigned or moved abroad. Even when we reached them, participants were sometimes hesitant to take part in this research, as the topic of the Peer Review was sometimes politically sensitive, or because potential interviewees were overburdened, especially during election time, had difficulties speaking English or French ⁽⁶⁾, felt we were assessing their work, and/or were involved in the organisation of a new Peer Review.

However, through the extensive use of primary and secondary written sources, and by conducting additional interviews with participants from peer countries (for Task 4), these ten case studies are sufficiently credible to allow for a sound horizontal analysis. We turn to these case studies in the next section. In the remainder of this report **we will refer to the ten case studies** (which have been submitted as separate Deliverables to the European Commission) **using the abbreviations as in the last column of Table 1 above** (see the bibliography for the complete case study references).

3. Discussion papers, Comments papers, Synthesis reports, Minutes, Short reports.

4. In the Case Study Guidelines for Experts (OSE and PPMI, 2011) the coordination team provided an “Interview Guide” to support the authors in their task of conducting semi-structured interviews with different categories of respondents. These questions needed to be adapted (by the expert in charge of each case study) to the specific topic and the respondent (hence the “semi”-structured nature).

5. The latter included retrieving contact details of participants through their still active colleagues (which works well in some administrations, but is inconceivable in other administrative cultures), tracing former Peer Review participants through professional networking sites like LinkedIn, sending e-mails in the respondent’s native language and mails for the Project coordinator.

6. In several cases experts therefore sent e-mails in the respondent’s native language. Since the prospect of conducting an interview in English over the phone was sometimes a deterrent to interviewees, several few interviews have been conducted in respondent’s native language (in SE, ES, SK, CZ, etc.).

2. THE HOST COUNTRIES: CONTEXTUAL FEATURES AND SELECTED PRACTICES

2.1 Contextual features of the host countries

This Synthesis Report relies on a sample of 10 Peer Review meetings hosted by 9 countries between 2004 and 2010 (the UK hosted 2 of the assessed meetings). Our sample includes six unitary states (Czech Republic, Ireland, Slovakia, Sweden, Norway and the United Kingdom) and three federal ones (Belgium, Germany and – in practice – Spain). However, it is important to note that on the topics selected for the Peer Review, even in the unitary states, competences are generally shared, albeit to a varying extent, between central and sub-national levels of government.

In terms of their population, the sample includes small states (Ireland, Slovakia, Sweden and Norway, with populations below 10 million inhabitants), medium size states (Belgium and the Czech Republic, both with slightly more than 10 million inhabitants) and large states (Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom, all with a population above 40 million inhabitants). One of these host countries, Norway, is not a member of the EU, but it is an active participant in the PROGRESS programme. Peer Reviews that took place in “EU 15” Member States are clearly the most common in our sample (six out of eight EU countries), although two of the assessed Peer Reviews were hosted by countries that joined the EU in 2004 (the Czech Republic and Slovakia). This predominance of Peer Reviews hosted by “EU-15” Members in our sample reflects the fact that in the period 2004-2010, “EU 15” countries have been far more active than “EU 12” countries as Peer Review hosts (PPMI and OSE, 2011a: 9-10).

The sample is composed of countries belonging to the different welfare regimes as identified by Esping-Andersen (1990; 1996) and Ferrera (1996) (7): the Corporatist or Continental regime (Belgium and Germany), the Liberal or Anglo-Saxon regime (Ireland and the UK), the Social-Democratic or Nordic regime (Norway and Sweden), the Southern European regime (Spain), and the Transitional or Eastern European regime (8) (Czech Republic and Slovakia).

-
7. Esping-Andersen, G. (1990), *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Cambridge: Polity Press; Esping-Andersen, G. (1996) (ed.), *Welfare States in Transition. National Adaptations in Global Economies*, London: Sage; Ferrera, M. (1996), ‘The “Southern” Model of Welfare in Social Europe’, *Journal of European Social Policy*, 6 (1), pp. 17-37.
 8. On CEE countries’ welfare regimes, see: Cerami, A. and Vanhuysse, P. (2009) (eds.), *Post-Communist Welfare Pathways: Theorizing Social Policy Transformations in Central and Eastern Europe*, Palgrave MacMillan; Esping-Andersen, G. (1996) (ed.), *Welfare States in Transition. National Adaptations in Global Economies*, London: Sage; Fenger, H. J.M. (2007), ‘Welfare Regimes in Central and Eastern Europe: Incorporating post-communist countries in a welfare regime typology’, *Contemporary Issues and Ideas in Social Sciences*, CISS August 2007, pp. 1-30; Guillén, A.M. and Palier, B. (2004), ‘Introduction: does Europe matter? Accession to EU and Social Policy developments in recent and new Member States’, *Journal of European Social Policy*, 14 (3), pp. 203-209; Schubert, K., Hegelich, S. and Bazant, U. (2009), ‘European Welfare Systems. Current state of research and some theoretical considerations’, in K. Schubert, S. Hegelich. and U. Bazant (eds.), *The Handbook of European Welfare Systems*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 3-28. Looking at this literature, we can say that it is disputed whether CEE countries actually represent a distinct welfare regime. Indeed some argue that, considering the differences among them, each of them should be ascribed to different existing welfare regimes, or be considered as ‘transitional welfare states’ evolving towards more mature arrangements, more or less similar to existing western welfare state regimes. For the purpose of this study, we will consider CEE countries as ‘transitional welfare states’ (see Kazepov, Y. And Sabatinelli, S. (2005), *Minimum Income and Social Integration Institutional Arrangements*, Thematic expert’s

Finally, our sample covers Peer Reviews from the years 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010.

2.2 Selected practices: key features and variation

The larger share of our sample includes Peer Reviews that are linked to the Social Inclusion strand of the Social OMC (8 out of 10 case studies) ⁽⁹⁾. This is the case for the Peer Reviews hosted by the United Kingdom in 2004 and 2006, by the Czech Republic and Belgium in 2005, by Spain and Ireland in 2007, by Slovakia in 2008, and Norway in 2009. Only one case study is exclusively linked to objectives related to the Healthcare and Long-Term Care strand (Germany 2010), while the practice proposed by Sweden in 2007 can be considered a mixed one, predominantly pertaining to the Healthcare and Long-Term Care strand of the Social OMC, but also containing some elements linked to the Social Inclusion strand. None of the selected Peer Review meetings focused exclusively on the Pensions strand of the Social OMC, but the practices reviewed during the SE (2007) and DE (2010) Peer Reviews are substantively linked to the key theme 'Ageing and providing adequate and sustainable pensions'. The overrepresentation of meetings relating to social inclusion in our sample is mainly due to the fact that it is a central theme in most Peer Review meetings organised from 2004 to 2010 ⁽¹⁰⁾. It should also be acknowledged that, Peer Review meetings in the Healthcare and Long-term Care (LTC) and Pensions strand of the Social OMC have been held only from 2006 onwards.

All Peer Reviews are devoted to one or several of the 10 key themes that have been identified in the context of the Social OMC ⁽¹¹⁾. Half of the meetings in our sample concerned more than one key theme, while the other half was devoted to a single one ⁽¹²⁾.

Looking at the kind of practices that have been reviewed during the selected Peer Review meetings, we can roughly distinguish among 4 **different types of practices**: a) specific programmes; b) policy approaches; c) evaluation methodologies; d) policy reforms. However, when one looks at the issues that were actually addressed during the meetings, the focus of discussions is always 'mixed'. Indeed, these discussions typically include policy approaches, specific programmes and implementation devices, evaluation and monitoring tools.

Half of the meetings in our sample were mainly devoted to the **review of a specific programme**:

- UK 2004 on 'The Rough Sleepers Unit', a body created by the UK government as part of its strategy for eradicating street homelessness;
- CZ 2005 on 'Field Social Work Programmes in Neighbourhoods Threatened by Social Exclusion', a programme run by a national NGO;
- UK 2006 on 'The UK government's Sure Start Programme', a programme targeting young children in families living in the most deprived areas;
- ES 2007 on 'The Multi-Regional Programme to Combat Discrimination', a national programme for coping with discrimination, run in Spain from 2000 to 2006;

Discussion paper for the Belgian Peer Review on "Minimum income and social integration institutional arrangements", Brussels, 7th and 8th November 2005).

9. See PPMI and OSE (2011a) maps 6a and 6b (pp. 35-36).

10. See PPMI and OSE (2011a), particularly Figure 5 (p. 11).

11. The 10 key themes are: Integration of ethnic minorities and immigrants; Quality and accessibility of social services; Homeless and housing exclusion; Children and families; Promoting active inclusion; Over-indebtedness and financial exclusion; Ageing and providing adequate and sustainable pensions; Healthcare and long-term care; Interaction of social, economic and employment policies; Governance.

12. See Annex 1 and PPMI and OSE (2011a), Map 1, p. 23.

- NO 2009 on ‘developing well-targeted tools for the active inclusion of vulnerable groups’, a meeting during which the Norwegian ‘Qualification Programme’ was discussed.

Two meetings were mainly aimed at discussing a **policy approach**:

- IE 2007 on the ‘NAPInclusion Social Inclusion Forum’ (SIF) as part of the Irish social inclusion policy development and implementation process, with particular focus on the representation of stakeholders in the policymaking cycle.
- SE 2007 on ‘freedom of choice and dignity for the elderly’, whose main aim was to present and discuss the key elements of the approach of the new Swedish government on long-term care for the elderly.

One meeting was concerned primarily with an **evaluation methodology**: SK 2008 on ‘Social Impact Assessment’, in which the Slovakian ‘Joint Methodology for Impact Assessment’ (and a pilot study on that methodology) served as starting point for discussions.

Finally, discussions in two Peer Reviews focussed on **policy reforms**:

- BE 2005 on ‘Minimum Income and Social Integration Institutional Arrangements’. The topic of the Peer Review was the Belgian Act of 26 May 2002 on the ‘Right to Social Integration’, the law which regulates Belgium’s minimum-income guarantee scheme.
- DE 2010 on ‘Achieving quality long-term care in residential facilities’ focused on discussions around specific elements of the German reform of the long-term insurance branch passed in 2008, notably the concept of ‘quality in long-term care’ (and its measurement).

Looking at the levels government responsible for the implementation of the practices submitted for the Peer Reviews, seven Reviews were concerned with country-wide practices, implemented nationally or at sub-national levels (BE 2005; IE 2007, SE 2007; ES 2007; SK 2008, NO 2009 ⁽¹³⁾; DE2010), while 3 were practices concerning specific territories and implemented at the local level (UK 2004 and 2006; CZ 2005).

All the practices in our sample represent **some degree of innovation**, as compared with the national traditions in the respective policy domains. The most prominent examples include:

- The Czech programme ‘Field Social Work Programmes in Neighbourhoods Threatened by Social Exclusion’ (CZ 2005) was deemed an innovation in the Czech context because of its rationale (awareness of the specificity of socially excluded communities; aimed not only at providing services, but also at awareness raising) and practical approach (allowing flexible and individualised social work with the client; professionalization of the field work personnel).
- The Belgian ‘Droit à l’intégration sociale/Right to social integration’ (BE 2005) has been labelled as a decisive step in moving the Belgian welfare model towards the so-called ‘Active Social State’.
- The ‘UK government’s Sure Start programme’ (UK 2006), mainly relying on ‘Anglo-American’ thinking and examples, represented an important innovation compared to existing policies in England and the European Union concerning children.
- The Spanish ‘Multi-Regional Programme to Combat Discrimination’ (ES 2007) implied an important innovation concerning the involvement of Spanish NGOs in Operational Programmes financed by Structural Funds, in that while Spanish NGOs have always been *recipients* of Structural Funds, in this case they were appointed to act as *management* and intermediary organisations.

13. At the time of the Peer Review, the Norwegian Qualification Programme was at an early stage, although it had already been implemented in most Norwegian municipalities.

- The 2008 reform of the long-term care insurance, which was discussed during the German Peer Review on 'Achieving quality long-term care in residential facilities' (DE 2010), represented a fundamental reform of the previously existing system introduced in 1995.

An important degree of variation can also be found with regard to the '**level of maturity**' of the practices in our sample, which is to say the number of years the practice has been in operation before being submitted to a European Peer Review. On average, the meetings we analysed dealt with practices that had been in force for almost four years⁽¹⁴⁾. For the purpose of this analysis, we consider practices in force between 1 and 3 years as relatively recent ones and practices in force for more than 3 years as relatively mature. The first group (recent practices) includes six Peer Review meetings: SE 2007 and SK 2008 (1y); NO 2009 and DE 2010 (2y); and BE 2005 and IE 2007 (3y). Relatively mature practices were discussed in 4 Peer Review meetings: UK 2004 (5y), CZ 2005 (6y), UK 2006 (8y), and ES 2007 (7y).

Finally, the selected practices differ according to the availability, at the time of the Peer Review, of evaluation results and monitoring data⁽¹⁵⁾. Clearly, this is also linked to the different 'levels of maturity' of the reviewed practices. In this respect, we distinguish between two groups of Peer Review:

- Meetings discussing practices for which a large amount of evaluation results exists (UK 2004 and 2006; SE 2007);
- Meetings discussing practices for which only preliminary data from the first evaluation and monitoring exercises were available (CZ 2005; BE 2005; IE 2007, ES 2007; SK 2008; NO 2009; DE 2010)⁽¹⁶⁾.

In sum, looking at the features of the host countries, our sample of case studies presents a large degree of variation in terms of institutional architecture, size, duration of EU membership, welfare regime and year of the Peer Review (between 2004 and 2010). While the larger share of studied practices is linked to the topic of social inclusion, the topics of health care and long-term care as well as ageing are equally covered. We covered four types of practices in our assessment (specific programmes, policy approaches, evaluation methodologies and policy reforms), which have been implemented at different levels of government (national, regional, local). All reviewed practices presented some degree of policy innovation, as compared with national traditions at the time of the Peer Review, while they differed in term of maturity (six more recent practices and four more established ones), which implied a great deal of variation in terms of the availability of evaluation results.

-
14. Since the Swedish Peer Review on 'freedom of choice and dignity for the elderly' (SE 2007) can be considered as aimed at discussing the new Swedish government's approach to the topic, we consider 2006 (year in which the new centre-right government took office) as starting year.
 15. Here, we refer to the availability and to the amount of existing data and not to their quality or completeness. As we will see below, data quality and completeness was an important issue in many Peer Review meetings.
 16. In CZ 2005 (as underlined during the meeting) only some quantitative information was available at the time of the Peer Review, while qualitative evaluations (considered highly useful given the topic under review) did not exist. No independent evaluation of the SIF had taken place at the time of the Peer Review in Ireland (IE 2007), where prior to 2007 there had only been internal evaluations of SIF, through forms distributed to the SIF participants. In SK (2008), only some preliminary data from the Pilot study launched for testing the 'Unified Methodology for Legislative Impact Assessment' were available. In the Norwegian case (NO 2009), at the time of the Peer Review, an initial evaluation of the implementation of the Norwegian Qualification programme had already been conducted. However, no data about the impact of the programme was available. Noteworthy as well is the fact that the evaluator of the programme attended the meeting.

3. THE EVOLUTION OF REVIEWED PRACTICES

With a view to understanding the policy learning effects of the PROGRESS Peer Reviews, it is important to have an idea of how the reviewed practices evolved in the months and years *after* the Peer Review meeting.

First of all, at the time of the Peer Review on **'The Rough Sleepers Unit'** (UK 2004), it was accepted that the government had already reached the target set when the Unit was created in 1999, which was to reduce the number of rough sleepers in England by at least two-thirds by 2002. Nonetheless, in the period following the Peer Review meeting, some changes intervened in the policy targeting homelessness in England: first of all, it was deemed necessary to consider homelessness as a wider issue than rough sleeping; second, local strategies to deal with homelessness were developed; third, legislation on homelessness was reformed. According to some observers (17), the new strategy differs significantly from the previous one, since it makes greater use of coercive policies, empowerment of homeless people, and of positive activities such as education, employment and training. As part of this new approach, the Labour government launched several new programmes and initiatives. For example:

- A large amount of money was invested in improvements to hostels for single homeless people ('Places for Change' programme, launched in 2005);
- The 'Homelessness Department' was drawn into closer collaboration with the 'Anti-Social Behaviour Unit' (since 2005, the 'Respect Task Force');
- In November 2008 the Government announced the goal of ending rough sleeping by 2012 and an action plan entitled 'No One Left Out: Communities Ending Rough Sleeping' was issued;
- In December 2010, the mayor of London announced funding for the 'No Second Night Out' project, a homeless outreach scheme to ensure that no-one is forced to sleep in London's streets for more than one night.

In Belgium, the Law of 26 May 2002 on the **'Right to Social Integration'** (DIS law), which was the topic of the Belgian Peer Review (BE 2005), underwent only marginal changes following the Review. These were aimed at providing a better integration of homeless people (2006) and at establishing a well-defined time span (3 months) for claimants' appeals against the absence of decisions concerning their dossiers.

Similarly, the practice presented during the Czech Peer Review (CZ 2005), the **'Field Social Works Programmes in Neighbourhoods Threatened by Social Exclusion'**, underwent only minor changes in the period after the meeting. These changes mainly concerned with adding evaluation tools to the programme, which previously were insufficiently developed. This practice provided a model for a nation-wide programme for neighbourhoods confronted with social exclusion.

At the time of the Peer Review on **'Sure Start Local Programmes'** (SSLPs) in the UK (2006), the programme was in the process of being expanded into a universal programme covering all English local authorities. Specifically, the SSLPs were to be replaced with the 'Sure Start Children Centres programme' (SSCC). One of the main purposes of this change was to involve local authorities more closely, and by 2008 all the 150 local authorities in England had been involved in

17. Jones and Johnsen (2009), 'Street Homelessness', in S. Fitzpatrick, D. Quilgars, N. Pleace, *Homelessness in the UK. Problems and Solutions*, Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing, pp. 38-52.

the new programme. Compared to SSLPs, the newly established Sure Start Children Centres differed in several important respects:

- They had a narrower focus, and were to provide a 'core service offer' centred on childcare and education, on outreach work for making contacts with the most disadvantaged families, and on the employability of parents;
- They became a responsibility of local authorities, although at the same time, the regulatory and planning framework became more top-down, entailing more standardisation and less autonomy and freedom to meet local needs;
- The upper age range of children targeted by the programme was raised from 4 to 5.

In Sweden, the aim of the Peer Review (SE 2007) was to present and discuss the main elements of the approach of the new Swedish government (in office for one year at the time of the Peer Review) towards **long-term care for the elderly**. Thus, the principles of *freedom of choice* and *dignity* in the care for the elderly became one of the flagship themes. As a model of its new approach, the Swedish government drew upon the case of the Nacka municipality, the first municipality in Sweden to have introduced the system of 'customer choice' into the provision of social services. In the following years, several key legislative initiatives were undertaken by the government as part of this approach, including:

- User surveys, open comparisons and quality indicators, which were further developed;
- A new law which provided legal foundations to the customer choice model: the idea is to provide service recipients with a choice of the service provider. The 'Law on systems of choice in the public sector' was adopted in January 2009 using as a blueprint the model of the Nacka municipality;
- Some provisions for introducing dignity-based care for the elderly (meaning that social services' elderly care should focus on allowing older people to live in dignity and with a sense of well-being) were introduced, such as the 2007 'Commission on the dignity guarantee', the 'Government Bill 2009/10:116 on dignity of the elderly', and two provisions added to the 'Social Services Act' in January 2011;
- Some measures for increasing the recognition of informal care, which were passed through amendments to the 1989 'Care Leave Act' and to the 'Social Services Act';
- A special 'elderly care coordinator', intended to help address deficiencies in healthcare and other services the country provides its elderly, was appointed;
- Two 'Research and Development centres', one focusing on family care and support to care and another focusing on care for patients with dementia, which were established in 2008;
- Some provisions for regulating minimum training requirements for LTC services, which are currently under study.

After the Peer Review in Spain (ES 2007), the Spanish '**Multi-Regional Operational Programme to Combat Discrimination**' (OPCD) was renewed for the period 2007-2013. The new programme (already approved before the meeting) was merely a continuation of the previous one, with minor changes in terms of NGOs involved and amount of funds.

Following the Peer Review in Ireland (IE 2007) some (admittedly limited) changes were implemented in the structure of the next '**NAPInclusion Social Inclusion forum**', which took place in 2008. First, as regards its organisational features, opening speeches were minimised so as to have more time for workshops and discussions. Secondly, more feedback was provided about what had been done with the deliberations at the past SIF. Far more importantly, the institutional framework for the NAPInclusion in Ireland was significantly re-structured in the past four years. Indeed, the economic crisis and consequent public sector budget cuts have had a further impact on the resources available for the voluntary sector, as well as for preparing and organising the SIF, which has since been reduced from a full-day to a half-day event.

During the Peer Review in Slovakia (SK 2008), the Slovakian '**Unified Methodology for Legislative Impact Assessment**' (launched in 2007) served as a starting point for a more general discussion on social impact assessment in EU Member States. In 2008, after the Peer Review, the results of a pilot study testing the methodology were published. Following the feedbacks from the national ministries concerned, the 'Unified Methodology' was finally approved in 2010, with minor changes compared to the 2007 version.

At the time of the Peer Review in Norway (NO 2009), the '**Qualification Programme**' (QuP) was still at an early stage. Although the implementation of the programme started in 2007, only in February 2009 was the programme available in most of the Norwegian municipalities. Some important developments took place after the Norwegian Peer Review, specifically:

- From January 2010, the programme was available in all the municipalities.
- From January 2011, it functioned as a regular programme, funded through general purpose grant schemes, rather than earmarked grants. This change of funding gave more freedom to the municipalities, now able to use part of those funds for other sectors experiencing shortcomings.
- In April 2011, the second evaluation report was issued: its results showed some improvements of the programme compared to the first period of implementation (more emphasis on the 'employment objectives' of the programme and a more systematic recruitment of the participants).

The German Peer Review (DE 2010) focused on discussions around specific elements of the German reform of the long-term insurance branch. These reforms had been passed in 2008, and discussions centred upon the concept of '**quality in long-term care**' and its measurement. Although these reforms were implemented recently, the Ministry of Health is currently preparing a new reform. To that end, since December 2010 four 'Long-Term Care Summits' have taken place, to which representatives of issue-related associations and research institute were invited. However, the general reform of the sector is stalling, and issues like the definition of care need, financial sustainability and unmet staffing demands seem to be considered as more pressing issues than quality management ⁽¹⁸⁾.

In sum, when reviewing the changes that occurred in the studied practices, a rather mixed picture emerges. Indeed, while some practices underwent only minor modifications following the Peer Review (BE 2005; CZ 2005; ES 2007; SK 2008; DE 2010), in other cases the changes were more significant (UK 2004; UK 2006; SE 2007; IE 2007; NO 2009). Whether any of the observed changes can be plausibly linked to the Peer Reviews will be discussed in sections 7 and 8 below. It seems quite striking that for most of these Peer Reviews there was a conspicuous absence of evaluation and monitoring data in the period *after* the PR. Indeed, only in the NO (2009) case did we find that a thorough follow-up evaluation has been conducted on the subject of the Peer Review. This obviously has important consequences for the dissemination of the results of the Reviews, which is difficult if there is no data on the longer-term effects of the practices under study.

18. The reform was passed a few weeks before the finalisation of the present Synthesis report. It does not include changes in the quality management system, the topic of the German Peer Review held in 2010.

4. THE DRIVERS BEHIND PEER REVIEW HOSTING: DIFFERENT USAGES

4.1 Hosting a Peer Review: about ‘ideal’ and real motivations

The choice to host a Peer Review meeting, as well as to attend it, is a voluntary choice of the Member States. Each year, the European Commission produces a paper indicating the key priority issues to be discussed in the context of the Social OMC. Member States are invited to comment on it as well as to put forward proposals for hosting Peer Reviews on specific subjects. Following that, a first list of possible meetings is drafted, and Member States express their interest in attending specific meetings. On the basis of Members’ preferences, the European Commission decides upon a final list of Peer Review meetings to be held during the year.

The “ideal” reason why Member States propose a national practice for a Peer Review would probably be their willingness to promote mutual learning. Indeed, Peer Review meetings represent a unique opportunity to gain a better understanding of one’s own policies and practices by comparing strengths and weaknesses with those of other Member States. This holds the promise of possible gains in efficiency and effectiveness. Nonetheless, some observers are more critical, and claim that the “real” reason for participating in the Peer Reviews is to ‘showcase’ national policies. Interestingly, as we will see below, the ‘showcasing’ approach can sometimes provoke critical reactions from Peers and thereby lead to an in-depth and productive Peer Review. In other words, ‘showcasing’ and ‘learning’ are by no means mutually exclusive.

4.2 Hosting a Peer Review: a variety of motivations

Although decisions about hosting and attending Peer Review meetings are taken autonomously by Member States, the synergies between Member States’ and the European Commission’s agendas play a role, both for the motivation to host a Peer Review and its actual content. One element that is sometimes overlooked in this context is the clear and present pressure and lobbying from European NGOs. Especially in years when the interest of the SPC members in the Peer Review programme was not very high, suggestions from NGOs were more likely to be picked up. Sometimes European NGOs (like EAPN or FEANTSA) teamed up with the European Commission to exert pressure on certain Member States to pick up a specific theme (impact assessment for instance). Some concrete examples drawn from our case studies illustrate these points.

The two Peer Reviews hosted by the United Kingdom in 2004 and in 2006 are among the meetings for which the **ambition to “show off”** to peer countries is evident. Both of the policies presented, ‘The Rough Sleepers Unit’ (UK 2004) and the ‘Sure Start’ programme (UK 2006), were indeed considered as innovative flagship initiatives of the UK Labour government. Drawing on abundant evaluation results, they were presented as best practices. The reports on those PR meetings suggest that in both cases, the official UK representatives perceived themselves as mere “tutors”, and that this attitude was quite evident during the meeting. In both of these cases, the host country did not seem interested in a genuine review of the practice, and had not considered the possibility of changing the practice in the light of the results of the review.

Similar findings emerge from the analysis of the Peer Review on ‘Multi-Regional Operational Programme to Combat Discrimination’ hosted by Spain in 2007 (ES 2007). As in the UK, the main reason behind Spain’s decision to host the Peer Review was the **desire to ‘showcase’** to the EU and to the other Member States a national programme considered as a good practice. Unlike in

the UK Reviews, however, the selected practice concerned the Spanish legislation on equal opportunities and anti-discrimination, a domain which was *increasingly attracting criticism* from the EU. In fact, only a few months before the Peer Review, the Commission formally put Spain on notice for failing to correctly transpose the Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC) and the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC).

A desire to **show and promote a national policy approach** to the EU level seems to have been one of the key motivations behind the Swedish Peer Review on ‘freedom of choice and dignity for the elderly’ (SE 2007). The policy approach under review was considered as a key element of the programme of the Swedish government in matters linked to healthcare and long-term care. At the time of the Peer Review, a centre-right coalition had been in office for only one year, and so the meeting seemed a good occasion to present and discuss with the EU partners the key points of the Swedish policy approach. However, Sweden seemed to have at least one other motivation for organising this Peer Review. Indeed, the site visit (held in a city governed by the same coalition in which the policy approach based on ‘freedom of choice’ had already been implemented) served not only to provide peer country delegations with an opportunity to look at the functioning of the policy ‘on the ground’ but also to **legitimate choices being made by the national government** (19).

The Czech Peer Review on ‘Field Social Work Programmes in Neighbourhoods Threatened with Social Exclusion’ (CZ 2005) is a rather different case. It provides a good example of an event mainly driven by the **perceived need to answer to EU pressure**. The problem of the social integration of the most disadvantaged groups (and in particular of the Roma community) represented a major social problem for the Czech Republic at the time of the Peer Review. By 2005, a number of legislative initiatives for coping with that problem had been passed but, mainly due to sluggishness and reluctance over implementation at the local level, their effectiveness had been questioned. Over time, this situation provoked growing criticism from the EU and other international organisations. Organising a Peer Review meeting on a programme aimed at the integration of the most disadvantaged group was thus largely a reaction to EU pressure. By showing off their good practice, the Czech authorities signalled that the problem was being addressed and that innovative policies were being developed. Moreover, as a new EU member, the Czech government had a strong incentive to present the country as a “good pupil” by actively participating in various EU-level processes.

In three of our case studies (BE 2005; SE 2007; SK 2008) an important driver for hosting a Peer Review has been the **attempt to upload a domestic political agenda to the European level**. However, some differences among the three cases emerge. Indeed, while in the Belgian and Swedish cases the uploading attempt was that of the respective host country officials, i.e. the national government, in the Slovakian case it was the European Commission that sought to upload the topic of social impact assessments onto the European agenda. According to the analysis carried out in the Belgian case, the Belgian Peer Review on ‘Minimum Income and Social Integration Arrangements’ was part of a rather coherent and continuing strategy of the Belgian authorities for uploading the themes of minimum income guarantee and social activation measures onto the European agenda. This was done by promoting discussions with other EU countries and NGOs, such as the EAPN, and, in parallel, by promoting the value of the Belgian approach to the issue. Although the decision to propose the Peer Review was an autonomous choice by the Belgian government, it was particularly welcomed by the European Commission. Interestingly, around the time of the Peer Review it launched its consultation process that led to the 2008 Recommendation on Active Inclusion.

19. It has to be noted that other municipalities run by social-democratic majorities were choosing *not* to implement measures based on this policy approach.

The Peer Review on 'Social Impact Assessment' hosted by Slovakia in 2008 (SK 2008) seems to have been intrinsically linked to the European agenda and to the attempt to **garner the attention of the Member States for a topic** that was increasingly important to the European Commission's (DG EMPL) agenda. Unlike in the Belgian Peer Review, it is clear that in the Slovakian case, the European Commission played a very proactive role in encouraging the host country to organise the meeting on this topic. This comes in spite of the fact that the new Slovakian 'Social Impact Methodology' was considered incomplete at the time, even by the host country (20). On the Slovakian side, hosting a Peer Review on a governance topic (which in their view was rather neutral, non-conflictual and progressive) represented a good occasion for showing their commitment to the Social OMC. Finally, given that Social Impact Assessment was a rather new instrument in many Member States, the topic seemed a good case for promoting genuine mutual learning among participating countries.

The Peer Review hosted by Germany in 2010 on 'Achieving quality long-term care in residential facilities' (DE 2010) represents an interesting case of a European meeting whose aim, at least in part, was to **settle internal differences**. The formal aim of this Peer Review was to exchange experiences on how to define, monitor, evaluate and assure service quality in long-term care facilities. Organising the Peer Review meeting represented, for the Federal government, a way of promoting mutual learning on a complex topic that had also been part of a more comprehensive reform undertaken in 2008. However, the topic of the Peer Review was proposed by the Bavarian Region, which was highly critical of the content and approach of the 2008 reform. With this in mind, it seems that the German delegation wanted to discuss and assess those differences between the Federal and Bavarian governments through an exchange of views with their European partners. Thus, the German Peer Review represented an opportunity for addressing internal differences through mutual learning.

The motivation for the Peer Reviews in Norway (NO 2009) and Ireland (IE 2007) seems to have been twofold. On the one hand, the willingness of the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and the Irish Department of Social and Family Affairs, respectively to shed light on initiatives considered as good practices, i.e. the Norwegian QuP and the Irish SIF, respectively. On the other hand, there was a **strong interest**, being well aware of some of the shortcomings of these initiatives, **in an "outside" - and thereby seen as more "objective" - assessment by European peers**. In other words, the key motivation behind these Peer Reviews was, more evidently than in the other meetings in our sample, the "ideal" ambition of promoting mutual learning among the participating countries.

Finally it should be noted that the abovementioned 'showcasing attitude' was stronger in the earlier Peer Reviews. Indeed, it seems that in the first years of the Peer Review exercise, Member States were more explicitly asked to present their 'best practices' to other countries, thus emphasising their 'tutor position' with regard to the peer countries. In more recent years, however, the opportunity to learn from other participants has been a more common motivation for host countries.

20. First of all, at the time of the Peer Review, the pilot study on the Slovakian 'Joint Methodology for Impact Assessment' was still in progress, and data for evaluating the methodology were still lacking. At the occasion of the "Seminar on Consultation Practices within the Process of Public Policies - Bucharest 14 October 2008", the OECD identified many weak links in the 'Uniform Methodology' for the ex-ante impact assessment process in Slovakia. **Still** before the Peer Review, some of the participants, among whom the EC representative, deemed that the Slovakian practice lacked several of the requirements for a 'sound' social impact assessment. This impression was confirmed by discussions held during the meeting, which was mainly devoted at identifying and discussing the elements that should characterise such a methodology.

In sum, our case studies point out that there are a variety of motivations for Member States to host a PROGRESS Peer Review, and they are not limited to the two ‘extremes’ of either showcasing or promoting mutual learning. These drivers include attempts to answer to EU pressures, strategies for settling internal divergences, legitimating political choice, and attempts to upload domestic agendas to the EU level. As became clear from the examples, it is not always possible to identify “the” key motivation for hosting a Peer Review: often several drivers are simultaneously at work. In other words, these are by no means mutually exclusive. Thus, although a certain degree of ‘showcasing’ (which was stronger in the earlier Peer Reviews) can be observed in eight of our ten case studies, this does not imply that “showing off” was the only reason for hosting the Peer Review, nor even that it was the most important one. Finally, note that there are also illustrations of Peer Reviews where countries use the occasion to get an EU thematic stream of action underway (e.g. to start more elaborate or permanent transnational work on a particular issues going), as has been the case with quite a few homelessness Peer Reviews.

5. THE PEER REVIEW MEETINGS: PARTICIPANTS, ORGANISATION AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 A variety of participants, or a closed shop after all?

The average number of countries attending the Peer Review meetings in our sample was 8, including the host country. The highest number of countries participated in the German Peer Review in 2010, with 9 peer countries plus the host, while only 5 peer countries attended the Swedish meeting organised in 2007. It is important to note that each Peer Review was attended by countries belonging to different welfare regimes.

Looking at the individual participants attending the meetings, their number was typically between 30 and 40. The most 'crowded' meetings in our sample had been the Spanish one held in 2007, and the Belgian one held in 2005 (respectively, 46 and 40 participants), while the 2006 UK Peer Review was attended by some 25 persons. It is noteworthy that a **limited number of participants is generally appreciated** because it allows for more in-depth discussions, as was the case for the UK 2006 Peer Review. In the case of the Spanish Peer Review (2007) participants voiced doubts about the agenda and the quality of discussions, as well as difficulties with the organisation and the timing of working group sessions, lack of time for question and answer sessions, and scheduled sessions in the programme that were skipped in the actual meeting. Also, in the case of the Belgian Peer Review (2005), it was noted that the high number of participants and the venue chosen for the meeting (a big auditorium) did not facilitate the discussions. However, this difficulty was overcome with a good organisation of working group sessions.

Peer Review meetings are normally attended by a variety of actors, including host and peer country government representatives, national experts from the host and the peer countries, thematic experts, national experts from the Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion, European Commission representatives, and Peer Review managers (consultants). They also include EU-level, and more exceptionally, national NGO representatives. Generally, host country delegations are numerous and often include high-level officials and officials directly involved in the management and the implementation of the practice under review. By contrast, some **doubts have been expressed about peer country official representatives**, more particularly on their roles in the national administrations and their capacity to influence national policy-making by exploiting that information for improving national practices or at least disseminating information acquired during the meeting.

As regards the experts taking part in the meeting, both thematic and national experts were generally considered to have lived up to their (often difficult) tasks. Nonetheless, several thematic experts have explained that **time for writing the Discussion Paper was too short, and that the task was rather badly paid**. Indeed, the actual time investment would in some cases be as high as twice the time being paid for by the consultant. Certainly, there were some other advantages involved for the thematic expert, such as networking, access to documents etc., but this is an issue that could be addressed in future PRs. Generally, one independent host country expert attends the meeting. An exception is the German Peer Review of 2010. On that occasion, three national experts were invited to take part in the meeting: one from ÖSB, and the other two from the national organisers, representing the Federal Ministry of Health and the Bavarian Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Family Affairs, Women and Health. This was most likely due to the peculiar aim of the German Peer Review, which was to discuss the differences between the

Federal and Bavarian approaches (see section 4.2 above) ⁽²¹⁾. Finally, concerning the stakeholders, it is notable that while EU-level stakeholder representatives were always invited to the meetings we analysed, this is not always the case for national stakeholders, representatives of whom were only invited systematically to the Czech (2005), Irish (2007), Spanish (2007), Swedish (2007) and Norwegian (2009) Peer Reviews ⁽²²⁾.

5.2 Organisational features

In general, all ten Peer Reviews in our sample have been evaluated as good quality meetings as far as their organisation was concerned. With the notable exception of the Spanish and Slovak Peer Reviews, the preparatory phase of the meetings was considered satisfactory. Specifically, information about the aims of the meeting and the roles of the participants were provided in advance to the participants, as well as the background documents produced before the meeting. Generally, the communication between the contractors, host country staff responsible for the organisation of the meeting, and the thematic experts goes smoothly. Often, meetings for exchanging information were organised prior to the Peer Review (which was deemed essential by our interviewees).

This was, for example, the case of the Belgian and Irish Peer Reviews. Preparatory meetings, organised in Brussels and Dublin respectively, with strongly committed national officials, as well as the Peer Review managers were considered very useful by the respective thematic experts. They found this sort of preparatory work particularly helpful when preparing the draft Discussion Paper. Indeed, in the Irish case, the thematic expert had only a limited knowledge of the SIF before the PR.

The Spanish Peer Review held in 2007 represents the opposite case, but it is an exception among the cases analysed. Indeed, the selected thematic expert complained that he received unclear guidelines from the Peer Review manager, that he had a very short time for writing his paper and that he never received the Host Country Paper. Moreover, he did not feel completely free to express his opinions in the Paper. The thematic expert ultimately resigned from the assignment, which implied that the Spanish Peer Review was held without the presence of the thematic expert and with an incomplete Discussion Paper.

The Spanish case aside, **the overall quality of the documents produced prior to the meetings was considered to be very good.** This was especially true for the thematic experts' Discussion

-
21. In fact, one of the experts invited had carried out an evaluation of the Federal system, while another advised the Bavarian Ministry in setting up its regional quality assessment system.
 22. During the Irish Peer Review (IE 2007), government officials from every Member State (host and peer countries alike) were accompanied by an "independent" (often non-governmental) expert. It should be mentioned that in the Czech and Spanish cases, NGOs were involved in the implementation of the practice under review, so their participation in the meeting was to a certain extent guaranteed. Representatives from national stakeholders (the 'Swedish National Pensioners Organisation' and the 'Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions') attended the Swedish Peer Review (SE 2007). In the Norwegian case, two representatives from a national NGO attended the meeting. Being persons who experienced poverty, they were perceived by participants as 'grass-root persons' and their contribution was judged as very useful. However, they complained about the scarce time they had during the discussions. A representative from the 'Service for the Fight against Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion' was invited to take part in the Belgian (2005) Peer Review. Although that service works very closely with national NGOs, it is a federal body. Noteworthy as well about the Belgian Peer Review was the fact that the representative of one of the EU stakeholders invited to the meeting (EAPN) was also a key person in the Belgian branch of the same organisation. It also has to be noted that in the case of the Slovakian Peer Review (2008) some participants deemed that the absence of national NGO representatives represented a bias for the discussion, while according to the EC representative their presence was not really essential.

Papers and the Host Country Papers. However, in several cases (in particular BE 2005, ES 2007, IE 2007 and NO 2009) **regular complaints have been raised about the variation in the quality of peer countries' Comment Papers**. Some of them were very short, while others were quite superficial and not really related to the discussion points of the PR. In addition, they were sometimes submitted late, or never submitted at all ⁽²³⁾. Requesting revisions of those Comment Papers falls outside the reach of the Peer Review managers, a practice that should be changed in future Peer Reviews (see OSE and PPMI, 2012b). This is especially so in view of the fact that many respondents complained about the fact that too much time was spent during Peer Reviews on providing basic information which should have been reflected in the Comment Papers.

Turning to the actual developments of the meetings, it is clear that the scheduled agendas were quite similar for all the considered Peer Reviews. Generally, the meetings included:

- A general session devoted to the presentation of the national practice under review and of the European framework in the policy domain.
- Plenary sessions devoted to peer country and stakeholder representatives' interventions.
- A site visit (in all but two of our case studies).
- More in depth discussions with the participants grouped in different working groups.
- Plenary sessions devoted to feedback from working group discussions and discussions on the potential of transferability of the practice under review.

However, despite these commonalities in the respective agendas, there were significant differences between Peer Reviews concerning the actual importance given to each of those components. Similarly, the actual roles played by different actors present at the meetings varied considerably (see the section 6). Notable as well is the fact that the "flow" of the Peer Review in Slovakia (2008) was quite peculiar compared to the others in our sample, mainly because of the relatively little attention paid to the practice under review (the Slovakian SIA, which- as it emerges from the interviews to the participants - was not considered as a good practice). In this case, far more attention was indeed devoted to discussions about the peer countries' situation, and to the possibility of developing impact assessment methodologies. Each of the Member States' arrangements was presented during the meeting and each peer country Comment Paper was discussed by the thematic expert, while the entire second day was devoted to the analysis of key issues related to the development of impact assessment methodologies.

As already mentioned, in all but two our case studies (SK 2008 and DE 2010) ⁽²⁴⁾, site visits to institutions, organisations or events illustrating the practice under review were organised. It is important to note that in all but one of those cases (UK 2004), **the site visits have been highly valued by Peer Review participants**. According to many interviewees, site visits really did offer the opportunity to see the functioning of the practice 'on the ground', thereby producing a better and more critical understanding of it. In several cases impressions from the site visits influenced subsequent debates, and sometimes had a considerable impact on the follow-up discussions. Some participants emphasized the need to further improve the organisation of the site visits to allow for discussions with the staff charged with policy implementation, as well as with the recipients. However, there seems to be a trade-off between the time to be spent on site visits and the time for the actual Peer Review meeting, which is regularly deemed too short.

Concerning organisational aspects, our case studies confirm that the agenda for the meeting plays an important role for its success. Agendas that are too dense, as in UK 2004 and ES 2007, for instance, do not favour high quality discussion among the participants and crucially, do not support informal networking. It is clearly important to schedule **sufficient informal moments**,

23. Thus, Comment papers were missing for Belgium and Slovakia in IE 2007.

24. In those cases, the topic under review was deemed too theoretical to allow a site visit.

which facilitate exchanges and networking ⁽²⁵⁾. Another aspect often underlined in the case studies (in particular, BE 2005; ES 2007, IE 2007 and SE 2007) concerns the language used for discussions, where often it is English (sometimes host country representatives can speak their own language and a translation to English is provided). Considering that not all participants will have mastered the English language, the **absence of translation in participants' languages can limit discussions** by impeding high quality interactions from all the participants. As will be shown below, the **language issue also affects dissemination activities** after the Peer Review.

In sum, some features have been highlighted in this section that can be seen as 'factors of success' of the PROGRESS Peer Reviews. A relatively limited number (around thirty) of carefully selected participants (i.e. close to decision-making) is generally appreciated. At the same time, room should be given to national and EU stakeholders, both for their contribution to discussions, and in view of their capacity to disseminate the PR outputs (see sections 7 and 8 below). While the overall quality of the Peer Review documents is rather highly valued, the time available for writing the Discussion Papers is often tight, and the pay that thematic experts receive for this work could be improved. There seems to be a real issue with the quality of the Comment Papers, over which the Peer Review managers currently have very limited influence. Well-organised site visits which still allow enough time for discussion in the PR itself, as well as informal exchanges, can be considered as the most important factors behind the success of several Peer Reviews.

25. This was very much the case for the German Peer Review (2010). According to the German case study, networking and contact among participants were facilitated by the choice of a small city as the venue for the meeting. During the Irish PR (IE 2007) informal moments were especially important for deepening exchanges between the Irish and UK delegations.

6. PEER REVIEW DISCUSSIONS: DEPTH, TENOR, LEARNERS AND TUTORS

6.1 Depth and tenor of the discussions

Turning to the substantive features of the Peer Review meetings, our first general finding is that, irrespective of the type of practice under scrutiny ⁽²⁶⁾, a ‘mix’ of issues are being discussed during the meetings. Thus, issues dealt with in Peer Reviews on specific programmes (UK 2004; CZ 2005; UK 2006; ES 2007; NO 2009) were not limited to the description of the specific features of the programme, such as the legislative background, governance and implementation arrangements; financial arrangements, evaluation and monitoring. Indeed, discussions also addressed the wider policy approaches and intervention philosophies on which the programme relied. In the same way, discussions held in Peer Reviews mainly dealing with policy reforms (like BE 2005) or policy approaches (IE 2007 and SE 2007) were not limited to the values and the rationale on which those reforms and approaches were based, but provided illustrations and discussions on their practical implementation. Indeed, in the Belgian, Irish and Swedish cases, ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical’ discussions were balanced, and the site visits, which were highly appreciated by participants, contributed greatly to this balance. With this in mind, the Synthesis Report of the Irish PR even concludes that this particular Peer Review “had taken the concept of the site visit to a higher level” (IE 2007).

When looking at the most frequently discussed issues, it is striking that the issue of evaluation and monitoring of policies and programmes leads to in-depth discussions in virtually all the meetings under scrutiny. What is more, such discussions generated ‘mirror effects’. Consider, for example, the UK 2004 Peer Review, which was conceived as a showcase, where one of the aspects underlined by the host country was the success of the programme, and where this was certified by numerous monitoring and evaluation data. However, during discussions, the way of measuring and evaluating the issue of homeless and rough sleepers was questioned by experts and peer countries alike. Similarly, the lack of an independent evaluation of the Social Inclusion Forum (notably in its impact on social inclusion policy developments) was one of the strong conclusions of the IE (2007) PR.

Looking more closely at the tenor of discussions during the meetings, it seems that general discussions held during the Peer Reviews were quite open and frank. For obvious reasons these meetings followed a sort of ‘logic of appropriateness’. That is to say, ‘frontal attacks’ on other countries’ policies were avoided, as can be expected in an unconstrained intergovernmental setting. Much of the discussions can be seen as ‘constructively’ critical in the majority of cases ⁽²⁷⁾, and stakeholders were an important part in this (see next paragraph and section 5.1).

26. We distinguished between specific programmes, policy approaches, evaluation methodologies, and policy reforms.

27. Quoting from the case studies: the 2004 British Peer Review (UK 2004) was characterised by “intensity of dialogue”, while the 2006 one has been presented as “lively and with a good participation”. The Belgian (BE 2005) and Irish (IE 2007) Peer Reviews have been characterised by “open, constructively critical discussions”, while in the Swedish one there was “an atmosphere for an open discussion where everybody could contribute and be critical to the presented Swedish case and present different perspectives”. The same can be said of the Slovakian Peer Review, held in 2008, where “debates were intense and brought to light the strength and weakness of each Peer Country”. In the Norwegian (NO 2009) Peer Review, the debate has been defined as “good, open, honest and fruitful”, and this was facilitated by the attitude of the host countries’ officials who knew well what the critical issues were and openly explained what needed to be improved. Only in three cases some

Unsurprisingly, differences can be found with regards to the **degree of openness of discussions** *between* the meetings. For example the UK 2004 Peer Review Report mentions that according to one of the participants, the host country delegation only highlighted the positive aspects of the programme while underplaying problems, contradictions, and negative results (however, this is not the opinion expressed by the majority of the participants to this Peer Review, while even if there was such an attempt by the host country, this did not prevent shortcomings of the programme in England from surfacing during the actual discussions). According to the Report on the Spanish Peer Review (ES 2007), the Spanish delegation tried to avoid the issue of discrimination, a topic on which, as mentioned in section 4.2, Spain was firmly criticised by the EU. Indeed, in this Review, the host tried to put the positive features of its governance of the programme in the spotlight. During the German Peer Review (DE 2010), considered as a meeting characterised by open and frank discussion, the European Commission representative tried to introduce the issue of a voluntary 'Common European quality framework for social services' (adopted by the SPC on 6 October 2010). He was quickly stopped by the host country, which was not convinced of the appropriateness of this kind of EU-level framework.

Interestingly, the **nature of discussion has often changed during the same Peer Review**. In the Irish case, for example, (IE 2007) the host country's independent expert noted a significant shift in the attitude of most participants. Indeed, whereas host country officials seemed to have been mostly on the defensive during the first day, justifying their cause, so to speak, they became more open to feedback during the second day. At the same time, European peers were more at ease putting a position on the table during day two, but also showed a more positive attitude towards the SIF, having had the opportunity to attend it. All of this seems plausible as participants grew more comfortable with each other, especially after having had an informal dinner together.

When one looks at the **most critical remarks** being made about the host countries' practices, it emerges from our analysis that they are **often made by stakeholder representatives**. This was, for example, the case in:

- CZ 2005. Representatives from ERIO (European Roma Information Office), singled out - already in the comment paper produced before the meeting - the absence of a systematic evaluation tool as one of the most problematic aspects of the national practice under review.
- BE 2005. EU-level stakeholders expressed some doubts about important features of the Belgian 'Right to Social Integration', such as:
 - The particular attention devoted to recipients under 25, where the age targeting was deemed arbitrary, mainly due to budget constraints, and potentially discriminatory).
 - The imbalance of power between the parties which agree to the contract (social workers and recipients), especially as far as information on recipients' rights and duties is concerned.
 - The quality of the jobs provided, as well as the unconvincing results in terms of recipients' presence in the labour market.
- ES 2007. Both in its Comment paper and during the meeting, the representative from ENAR (European Network Against Racism) insisted on discussing the issue of discrimination. In particular, according to him, while the Spanish programme rightly recognised the link

'tensions' have been reported. During the Spanish (ES 2007) Peer Review some discussions arose inside the Spanish delegation, where Spanish Autonomous Communities were very critical of the choice to make the OPCD a nationwide programme and to choose NGOs as managing entities. A short argument, referred to as "discussion with emotions", between a Norwegian official and a stakeholder representative (who, however, maintained very good relations after the meeting) (NO 2009). In the Irish PR (IE 2007), an NGO representative reported back about an incident she had experienced with an Irish official during the SIF, which raised the temperature during the PR.

between non-discrimination and social inclusion and the need to develop a broad programme to take concrete action, it was not clear how far this went beyond employment aspects and whether it ensured policy coherence between social inclusion, integration, immigration, and anti-discrimination strategies. Moreover, in the opinion of the ENAR representative, the programme failed to answer a fundamental question, i.e. whether issues of discrimination were successfully brought into the political, administrative and training system. As mentioned above, these sensitive questions were not picked up by the host country delegation.

- IE 2007. The strongest criticism during this PR clearly came from the representative from ATD Fourth World, who was of the opinion that the civil servants working for the Irish government did not really have a participatory approach and that some of them were even looking down on people experiencing poverty (other peers did not – at all – agree with this interpretation).
- NO 2009. In this case, the importance of the contribution of both EU and national-level stakeholders has been recognised by many participants. They questioned some features of the Norwegian programme, such as the adequacy of the monetary support received by recipients (an issue linked to a broader debate on minimum income guarantee, which was going on in Norway at the time of the Peer Review) and the drop-out rate of the programme, which was deemed quite high.

As mentioned above, **sometimes national stakeholders were not invited to attend the meetings**. In two cases (SK 2008 and DE 2010), this choice was linked to the specifics of the meetings. For example, in the 2008 Slovakian Peer Review, the presence of Slovakian stakeholders was not deemed necessary to meet the overall goals of the debate, i.e. discussing Member States' situations in relation to social impact assessments and identifying the features of a 'good' social impact assessment methodology ⁽²⁸⁾. In the German case, the rationale behind the choice not to invite 'interest representatives', such as care providers, labour unions, or long-term care insurance companies, was the intention to keep discussions free of any 'ideological' agenda. Indeed, that meeting was more conceived as a brain-storming session, characterised by 'technical' and complex discussions.

6.2 About tutors and learners

Some of the differences between the assessed Peer Reviews regarding the 'openness' of the discussions can be related to the 'tutor' and 'learner' roles that were being assumed by the respective participants, and in particular by the host country. Some examples from the case studies may illustrate this.

As suggested above, the UK 2006 Peer Review on 'Sure Start' can be seen a "textbook" division of labour between **host country representatives, who perceived themselves as a 'tutors', and the other countries as 'learners'**. The fact that all participating countries but France were new Member States was an issue emphasized by the interviewees. In particular, they referred to the very different welfare state models in place and to differences in their level of development and history as compared with the host country, as a consequence of which policy learning was seen as complicated.

At first sight, the UK 2004 Peer Review focusing on the Rough Sleepers Unit has very similar features. The practice chosen for the Peer Review was a flagship initiative of the British government and, relying on evaluation results, it was considered a successful one. As a result, and as in the UK 2006 Peer Review, the host country representatives were not particularly interested

28. This was the opinion of the EC representative. However, other participants deemed that the absence of national NGOs represented a bias for the discussion.

in learning from peer countries. To a certain extent, this attitude was reflected in the agenda of the meeting, since many interviewees, including the UK national expert, judged that the time given to the peer countries for presenting their policies was insufficient. Nonetheless, at least in one respect this UK 2004 meeting was rather different than the one organised in 2006. Indeed, some peer countries, notably Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway, had their own homeless strategies in place, or were in the process of implementing programmes. As a result, **some of the controversial issues of the English programme surfaced during the meeting**, notably with regard to the appropriateness of the selected quantitative targets for measuring the achievements of the programme, the relationship between human rights of homeless people and a policy which uses coercive measures to get rough sleepers off the street (the most controversial theme of the meeting), and the role of users' participation in the implementation of the programme (considered as a missing element in the English example). Concerning the issues that emerged during the Peer Review, the host country can be considered as a 'learner'.

For the Peer Review in the Czech Republic in 2005 on 'Field social work programmes', it is difficult to clearly identify 'tutors' and 'learners'. On the one hand, the host country selected the topic of the Peer Review deeming it a good and innovative practice in a challenging policy domain. The peer countries can be divided into two groups: a group of countries like Spain and the UK with a longer experience in dealing with excluded communities, and a group of Eastern European countries which had started to confront the issue only recently. While the former countries were already familiar with some aspects of the Czech practice, for the latter it appeared novel ⁽²⁹⁾. What is interesting about this Peer Review is that, as a consequence of the debate, **the role of the host country changed during the meeting**. The reviewed programme was presented by the host country as a good practice, however, while recognising its value, some of the participants, among whom were EU stakeholders, highlighted the lack of systematic evaluation tools, as quantitative data were scarce, while qualitative information was totally absent. Consequently, a large amount of the discussion was devoted to the issue of the evaluation of the programme and some very useful suggestions were proposed by the participants, which effectively put the host country in the position of 'learner', at least for this aspect.

A similar scenario developed during the Belgian Peer Review (BE 2005), where a mixed situation prevailed, and some countries perceived themselves as 'tutors' and others as 'learners'. Clearly the host country primarily perceived itself as a tutor, insofar that it was presenting a policy, the 'Right to social integration' law, that it considered a good practice, with some ambition to influence European discourse. However, besides Belgium, two other participating countries, The Netherlands and Luxembourg, had significant experience on the topic of the Peer Review, and equally perceived themselves as tutors. By contrast, Eastern European peers, engaged in reforms of their social assistance policies, perceived themselves, and were perceived as learners. However, also in this case, discussions during the meeting changed these 'tutor and learner' perceptions, at least to a certain extent. For example, **the Belgian representatives became learners**, when some critical points of their practices were raised by the participants, especially the European NGOs. Similarly, representatives of the Netherlands and Luxembourg, especially the national experts, recognised the usefulness of some specific elements of the Belgian practice for their national contexts.

The Belgian Peer Review is also relevant to tease out the key roles of two other Peer Review actors: the **host country national expert and the thematic expert**, both of which were highly appreciated by the participants to this meeting. Importantly, their **written contributions and interventions were well coordinated**, allowing participants to gain an in-depth knowledge of

29. In this case, the mix of countries with different situations and experiences did not represent a problem. However, some peculiarities of the characteristic of the Roma community in the Czech Republic were not so clear to the participants before the Peer Review. Consequently, a lot of time was spent for illustrating that point.

both the Belgian practice and the EU-wide framework concerning the topic of the Peer Review. The European Commission representatives had a major contribution contextualizing the Belgian take on this issue and demonstrated a noticed activism during the meeting. In general, the role of experts has been highly appreciated in virtually all the Peer Reviews analysed. For example, the contribution of the three experts who attended the meeting (the thematic expert and two national experts) was deemed as extremely useful also in the case of the German Peer Review on 'Achieving quality long-term care in residential facilities' (2010): in this case, experts played an important role in introducing and illustrating issues for further discussions among the participants.

In the same way, the interplay between the thematic expert and the Dutch peer country expert during the Swedish (2007) Peer Review was deemed by the participants as 'astonishing'. This expert played an important role in pinpointing the main issues of the practice under review and identifying weaknesses of the Swedish example. Since the new Swedish government was strongly persuaded of the value of its approach towards long-term cares for the elderly, the host country representatives perceived themselves mainly as tutors. As far as the peer countries are concerned, the Dutch and Portuguese representatives and the stakeholders were most active. It is **important to note how two countries that are so dissimilar**, and in the case of Portugal, also very different from the host country, **were able to provide such an important contribution** to the Peer Review. Swedish representatives were especially interested in the Dutch policy's 'personal budget' for the elderly, which **turned Swedish representatives from tutors into learners**. On the other hand, Portuguese interventions in the debate were also judged as highly valuable. Coming from a tradition radically different from the Swedish one, the Portuguese delegation **introduced issues into the discussion**, such as the relationships between formal and informal care and the respective roles of family and state, **that otherwise would have been overlooked**. Clearly, this was a possible cause of the 'openness' in the Swedish Peer Review. Indeed, as underlined by several interviewees, *"there was an atmosphere for an open discussion where everybody could contribute and be critical to the presented Swedish case and present different perspectives when it comes to the care of the elderly"* (SE 2007).

As suggested above, the roles assumed by countries' representatives during the Peer Review in Slovakia (2008) represented a particular scenario. First of all, the host country was not considered as a tutor by its peers, and it was known that the practice under review (the pilot Social Impact Assessment scheme) had important shortcomings. Concerning the other participating countries, the situation was quite mixed, as some countries with a longer experience on the topic, Ireland and Austria, seemed to assume the position of tutors, although it was not possible to say that one among the participating countries had the "best solution". Other countries, such as Germany and Bulgaria, were more interested in learning from the discussions. According to our assessment this variety in starting positions was reflected in the fact that the meeting's participants started it off with diverging expectations. In fact, it seems that **the goals of this Peer Review were not made very explicit, to the frustration of some participants**. In this case, the thematic expert and the European Commission representative played a key role in keeping the meeting on track. The former was particularly active in managing and orienting the debate, while the latter exemplified the possible ways in which the EC could aid Member States in developing their own impact assessment methodologies.

In the case of the Peer Review in Norway (2009), the presented 'Qualification Programme' was considered a good practice. However, the Norwegian representatives **did not simply conceive of themselves as tutors**, but were seen as very 'open' towards opinions coming from other participants. Indeed, *'one of the main factors that made the discussions fruitful was that the host country officials knew well what the critical issues are and openly explained what needs to be improved'* (NO 2009). This was reflected in the fact that the host country chose as national expert a person involved in the evaluation of the programme, asking her to highlight both its positive *and* negative sides, which was highly appreciated by participants. Another element likely to have enhanced the usefulness of this Peer Review was **the quality of the contributions by the**

European stakeholders and the activism of the national stakeholders, especially during the site visit.

A similar storyline applies to the Iris case study (IE 2007). While the Irish host clearly proposed the SIF as a good practice (for some even to be considered as “something unique and pioneering”) the Ministry of Family Affairs was well aware, after having organized three earlier SIF meetings, of some of its shortcomings. As a result, most (Irish and peer countries) interviewees confirm that the general attitude of the Irish delegation was that of a **“teacher, being prepared to learn”**. This was facilitated by the fact that this PR brought together eight Member States which represented a **good mix of welfare models and**, most importantly from a learning perspective, a **considerable variation in terms of national experiences** with stakeholder involvement in social inclusion policies. To be precise, apart from the host there were a few countries, specifically Belgium, UK and France, with well-developed practices from which the host could indeed learn.

The peculiarity of the Peer Review meeting in Germany (2010) was that, given the complexity of the topic, notably how to define, monitor, evaluate and assure quality in long-term care facilities, it was construed as a highly technical ‘brainstorming’ session. All participants were invited to reflect on the issues, being aware that none of them possessed the ‘right’ solution or the ‘best’ practice. In this situation, it is **impossible to identify ‘tutors’ and ‘learners’**, as all the countries that attended the meeting had the expectation that they would learn something. This also applies to the host country, which proposed a discussion on the different models applied by the Federal and the Bavarian authorities. Given the complexity of the issue, an important role was played by the experts, discussing the strengths and weakness of the different models, while the European Commission representative also played an active role by asking and clarifying questions, or commenting about what the EU could offer, i.e. assisting in building a EU-wide framework for quality standard or providing ESF money to assist with training staff.

All in all, based on our small sample, one could tentatively conclude that PROGRESS Peer Reviews are developing from meetings focussed on discussing host countries' good practice over “defining the issues” seminars to, more recently, a new style of “brainstorming” peer review, where participants search for effective solutions without anyone pretending to have the ‘magic recipe’. This apparent ‘growing up’ of the Peer Review process should be further explored in future research.

In sum, we found that irrespective of the type of practice under scrutiny, a ‘mix’ of practical and theoretical issues were being discussed during the PR meetings, which often included the issue of evaluation and monitoring of policies and programs. Peer Review discussions were in general open and frank, while peer reviewers were (surprisingly) critical towards the host country, even if the latter considered itself to have a good practice on offer. Obviously, ‘frontal attacks’ were avoided. Stakeholder representatives often took the lead in raising critical (and sensitive) issues, and their input was generally appreciated for this reason. In some cases, host country delegations strongly perceived themselves as ‘tutors’, primarily engaged in illustrating their good practices to the other participants. In other cases, host countries’ attitude was more open towards the possibility of learning with and from the others. In general, the expectation that the host countries will simply be a ‘tutor’ was often not observed during the Peer Review. Indeed, particular issues on which they could learn from the other participants always emerged, and consequently, **situations in which a clear divide between ‘tutors’ and ‘learners’ (having the magic recipe) can be detected are rare**. It would seem that we are witnessing a **‘growing up’ of the PROGRESS Peer Review process** in this respect.

7. MUTUAL INFLUENCE BETWEEN EU AND NATIONAL CONTEXTS

7.1 Relevance of the topics of the Peer Review in the context of the Social OMC

Concerning the choice of the topics and the timing for proposing them, it should not come as a great surprise that **all of the meetings in our sample are in tune with the key activities and debates** developed in the broader framework of the Social OMC. A few examples illustrate this:

- The UK Peer Review on ‘The Rough Sleepers Unit’ was held in 2004, in a period characterised by increasing (although, to a certain extent, incoherent) EU attention to the problem of homelessness. Indeed, the Joint Report for 2003 (adopted in March 2004) called for integrated strategies for coping with homelessness, while in 2004, the same year as the English Peer Review, Eurostat published a European Report on how to collect data on the profile and number of homeless people.
- The topic of the Czech Peer Review on ‘Field Social Work Programmes in Neighbourhoods threatened with Social Exclusion’ (2005) coincides with increasing interest by the EU in the integration of Roma people (Council of Europe Recommendation; revised Lisbon Strategy; Social Agenda 2005), and was held in the same year in which the ‘Decade for Roma Inclusion 2005-2015’ was launched.
- The practice reviewed in the Belgian Peer Review in 2005, the Belgian ‘Right to Social Integration’ law, with its focus on the concept of ‘active social inclusion’ was in tune with messages emerging from the revised Lisbon Strategy. In the year preceding the Peer Review, the Dutch presidency of the EU emphasised that activating recipients of social benefits was a good practice to be shared. This issue was also placed in a central position at the European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion held during the Dutch Presidency (October 2004). Furthermore, a consultation was launched on a possible Commission Recommendation in this area.
- The Spanish Peer Review on ‘The Multi-Regional Programme to Combat Discrimination’ (2007) was held in the ‘Year of Equal Opportunities for All’, and characterised by a series of European, as well as national initiatives and events against discrimination.
- The Slovak Peer Review on ‘Social Impact Assessment’ (2008) was held in the same year that the EC launched a ‘Study on Social Impact Assessment as a tool for mainstreaming social inclusion and social protection concerns in public policy in EU Member States’. In the period prior to the Peer Review, the European Commission signalled that although a Social Impact assessment was deemed a potentially useful tool by the Member States, little actual progress was being made by the Member States.
- The Norwegian Peer Review on ‘developing well-targeted tools for the active inclusion of vulnerable groups’ was held immediately after the publication of the Commission Recommendation on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market (2008/867/EC).
- The Irish PR (IE 2007) took place at a time when it was made very clear that quality stakeholder participation is of great importance under the Social OMC. Evidence of this was found in the (2006) Common Objectives and the 2007 Joint Report (Key Messages and Country fiches). Furthermore, the European Commission had actively been promoting the development of a “Social OMC Community”, by providing significant funding for EU stakeholder networks and launching calls for proposals for projects on social protection and social inclusion issues (through which partnerships are encouraged). It also regularly brought together a range of actors through earlier PROGRESS Peer Reviews on the topic of

stakeholder participation as well as in the context of EU-funded conferences and seminars, such as the annual European Round Table on Poverty and the annual meetings of People experiencing Poverty.

- The German Peer Review on 'Achieving quality long-term residential facilities' followed the 2007 EC Communication on 'Services of general interest' which underlined the necessity and the usefulness of an EU-wide approach for addressing quality control in long-term care. Following that Communication, the SPC was working on the development of a non-binding European Quality Framework for social services. This Framework was finally adopted on 6 October 2010, a few days before the German meeting. Moreover, in 2008 the Social Platform, an EU-wide platform which brings together more than 40 European non-governmental organisations, federations and networks, published a position paper entitled '9 Principles to Achieve Quality Social and Health Services'. This paper was intended as a starting point for the development of a common quality framework.

Knowing that the topics of the Peer Reviews were clearly prominent among European concerns at the time they were held, the question then is: *did the European context draw upon these Peer Reviews?*

7.2 Dissemination of information produced during the Peer Review across Europe

In spite of the relevance of the topics discussed during the Peer Review meetings, the high quality of the produced output, and a lot of effort by the European Commission and the consultants on the reporting of the PR discussions⁽³⁰⁾, references to these meetings in key OMC documents (Joint Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, National Strategy Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, SPC documents, etc.) were, until recently, very rare.

However, the link with the Irish Peer Review (IE 2007) is explicitly made in the European Commission's "Guidance Note for Preparing National Strategy Reports on SPSI 2008-2010", which was sent to the Member States early 2008. In the section about "good governance", the Commission explains in a footnote that in "considering how to reinforce arrangements for stakeholder involvement, Member States may find useful the conclusions of one of the 2007 Peer Reviews which focused on this subject", followed by the link to the Irish Peer Review. The European Commission again referred to the Irish PR when it published, in November 2008, its "Strategic Framework Document" for preparing the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in 2010. Indeed, the National Implementing Bodies were asked to "take inspiration from the 'actor involvement variables' set up during a peer review on 'The NAP Social Inclusion Forum' held in Ireland in November 2007". The link to the Synthesis report of the Irish PR was added in a footnote to the Framework Document. Finally note that the "actor involvement variables" proposed by the thematic expert at the IE (2007) Peer Review again appeared in July 2010, when INBAS and Engender published their ambitious study (on behalf of the European Commission) on Stakeholders' Involvement in the Implementation of Social OMC⁽³¹⁾. In this case, the variables are used to frame the research.

Some references are made to our Peer Reviews in other, arguably less strategic, EU documents. The UK Peer Review on the 'Rough Sleepers Unit' is mentioned in a footnote in the report of the European Commission (2007) summarizing the update and implementation reports of the

30. In order to compensate for the closed PR setting, a very rich website is available that contains expert papers, short and synthesis report, and – quite exceptional in a European context - minutes of every Peer Review meetings: <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews>

31. <http://www.stakeholders-socialinclusion.eu/site/en>

different countries ⁽³²⁾. The Swedish Peer Review on ‘freedom of choice and dignity for the elderly’ (2007) is mentioned as a good practice in the Commission Report on ‘long-term care in the European Union’ (2008). The German Peer Review (DE 2010) is described in the German ASISP ⁽³³⁾ annual report (2011) on ‘Pensions, Health Care and Long-term Care’, co-authored by a Peer Review participant. Most importantly perhaps, after the Peer Review, the Norwegian ‘Qualification Programme’ was presented at an SPC meeting.

Moreover, some references to specific meetings can be found in documents related to the Peer Review process, such as reports produced by experts from the ‘Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion’. This is, for example, the case with the Belgian Peer Review held in 2005, which was mentioned in the Belgian Network expert report on ‘Minimum Income Schemes’ published in 2008. It was also the case with the Spanish Peer Review organised in 2007, which was cited in the Spanish Network expert report “Trends, Recent Developments, ‘Feeding in’ and ‘Feeding out’, an Assessment of National Policies”, published in 2007 ⁽³⁴⁾. However, those references are often very synthetic, sometimes limited to a few lines, including in footnotes. More recently, the results of Peer Reviews have been reported through the Social Protection Committee’s 2011 report on “The social dimension of the Europe 2020 strategy” ⁽³⁵⁾, which summarized the results of the Social OMC activities in 2010, including a text box on the results of the Peer Review on reference budgets (CEC, 2011: 23). The same is true for the SPC’s third crisis monitoring report of 2012, which contains several one page “Learning from Peer Reviews” boxes, which refer readers to the Peer Review website for further information ⁽³⁶⁾.

Another pertinent question concerns the extent to which knowledge is being accumulated *between* PROGRESS Peer Reviews. After all, the meetings in our sample of ten case studies are clearly linked to a series of earlier, as well as subsequent Peer Reviews on related topics. However, in spite of the occasional overlap of the countries or experts between one meeting and the next, the **knowledge developed during Progress PRs is not systematically transmitted between related meetings**. That is to say, explicit references to earlier Peer Reviews are not the general rule. Some examples illustrate this point.

After the Czech Peer Review (2005), several Peer Reviews have been organised on the topic of social exclusion and Roma: in Spain, on the ‘Municipal programme of shanty towns eradication in Aviles, Asturias’ (2006) and on the ‘Multi-Regional Operational Programme to Combat Discrimination’ (2007); in Greece, on the ‘Integrated programme for the social inclusion of Roma’ (2009); in France, on ‘Measuring the impact of active inclusion and other policies to combat poverty and social exclusion’ (2009). In none of those meetings were references to the 2005 Czech Peer Review found. Significantly, some of the countries that attended the Czech Peer Review in 2005, notably Spain, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, and Slovakia, also attended the Spanish (2006) meeting. However, official representatives and experts were not the same as in the 2005 PR, and there was no mention of the Czech meeting during the Spanish Peer Review.

Considering the 12 meetings held under the priority theme ‘Promoting active inclusion’ in the period subsequent to the Belgian Peer Review of 2005, the latter has been mentioned once,

32. Up-date and implementation report of the ‘old’ Member States’ NAPs for 2003-2005 and the update reports for the 2004-2006 NAPs of “new” member states.

33. ‘Analytical Support on the Social Economic Impact of Social Protection Reforms’.

34. The Belgian network expert attended the Belgian Peer Review as a Belgian expert; the Spanish network expert attended the Spanish Peer Review.

35. CEC (2011), ‘The social dimension of the Europe 2020 strategy. A report of the Social Protection Committee’, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, p. 55.

36. Box 1. Learning from Peer reviews: Building the tools to fight in-work poverty (p. 22); Box 2. Learning from the peer reviews: Developing effective ex-ante social impact Assessment (p. 42) (Source: The social impact of the economic crisis and on-going fiscal consolidation: third Report of the Social protection Committee (2011). Full report. Brussels, 1 February 2012, Doc 5858/12, SOC 64, ECOFI 76, p. 135.

accounting for six lines of the Discussion paper written by the thematic expert of the Peer Review held in Belgium in 2008 on ‘The Social economy from the perspective of active inclusion’. Similarly, the Swedish 2007 Peer Review on ‘freedom of choice and dignity for the elderly’ held in 2007 is not mentioned in a subsequent Peer Review on ‘long-term care’ hosted by Sweden (2011). Finally, the Slovakian Peer Review on ‘Social Impact Assessment’ (2008) is directly linked to a Peer Review meeting held in Belgium in 2011. Belgium, which was among the peer countries in the 2008 meeting, unsuccessfully invited Slovakia to attend the 2011 meeting.

However, **there are several examples** where knowledge produced during a Peer Review **was indeed transmitted to subsequent meetings**. For example, there were some links between the UK 2006 Peer Review and later Peer Reviews. Notably, the links with one Peer Review held the following year in Malta on ‘ACCESS: the Cottonera Community Resource Centre’ were especially strong. Specifically, a presentation on ‘Sure Start’ was made at that Peer Review, the same thematic expert attended both meetings and there was some overlap in the countries represented, with Hungary, Lithuania, the UK, and Malta at both. In his Discussion Paper, prepared for the Belgian Peer Review on “The Social economy from the perspective of active Inclusion” (Brussels, June 2008), the thematic expert referred to the Spanish meeting of 2007 on ‘Multi-Regional Operational Programme to Combat Discrimination’ when providing examples of social economy organisations playing an important role. Similarly, the Discussion Paper in IE (2007) draws upon earlier PROGRESS Peer Reviews, and one held in Paris in particular, which involved the same thematic expert ⁽³⁷⁾, where the issue of mobilizing all relevant bodies and stakeholder involvement played an important role in the debates.

Similarly, ties are evident between the 2009 Norwegian Peer Review and subsequent PRs. Indeed, the Norwegian Qualification Programme, at the centre of the NO 2009 Peer Review, was described in the thematic expert’s Discussion Paper for the Spanish Peer Review on ‘Modernising and Activating Measures for Work Incapacity’ (2010). Norway did not attend that meeting but the thematic expert was Norwegian and came from the same institution which was carrying out the evaluation of the Norwegian ‘Qualification Programme’. In addition, the thematic expert in the Norwegian Peer Review of 2009 had been responsible for drafting the Discussion Paper for a Swedish Peer Review on rehabilitation services held in 2006. He used the Swedish case as a comparable “rehabilitation model” in his Discussion Paper for the Norwegian Peer Review ⁽³⁸⁾. The ‘Qualification Programme’ was also mentioned several times in a subsequent Peer Review on ‘Making a success of integrating immigrants into the labour market’ held in Norway in 2010.

Having established that the Peer Reviews were irregularly cited in EU documents, albeit more frequently in more recent years, and that there is no systematic accumulation of knowledge between Peer Reviews, notwithstanding some strong examples where this did happen, the question then is: *did this in any way influence EU policymaking?*

7.3 Consequences at the European level

Even though it would be difficult to claim that the individual Peer Reviews we assessed produced any “exclusive and direct impact” on EU policymaking, we still found **three types of effects that can be plausibly linked to these meetings: networking, feeding EU debates, and pushing topics on the EU agenda**, which we discuss in turn.

37. The 2006 Peer Review “Document de politique transversale”, Paris 29-30 June 2006.

38. Many countries overlapped in the Swedish (2006), Spanish (2010) and Norwegian (2009) Peer Reviews. Furthermore, one of the representatives from the United Kingdom (Neil McIvor) attended both the Norwegian (2009) and the Spanish peer reviews (2009), while a representative from Poland was present in Norwegian (2009) and Swedish (2006) peer reviews.

7.3.1 Development of networks among participants and follow-up activities in Member States

The most evident EU-level impact of each of the Peer Reviews in our sample is the strengthening of existent networks, and sometimes the creation of new ones among Peer Review participants. This takes two different forms. Firstly, **official representatives** (mostly civil servants) considered these Peer Reviews to be useful for knowing who in the participating countries deals with the topic and can be contacted “just in case they need it”. In practice, regular contact among these government representatives seems to be limited, although there are **several examples of contact on an ad-hoc basis**, in the form of invitations to conferences, for example. Similarly, participating experts were contacted by peer countries’ administrations and asked to provide specific feedback about the PR meeting or the topic discussed during the meeting. In some cases these requests come from countries that have not been involved in the Peer Review meeting. Secondly, networking is by no means limited to government representatives. We found that in some cases, since the Peer Reviews, **more regular collaborations between stakeholder organisations or participating experts have been launched or reinforced**. Some examples illustrate these ‘variations in networking’.

According to the national report, the majority of the participants in the UK Peer Review of 2004 were already part of EU-wide networks on homeless issues and already knew each other. However, for at least one of the peer countries’ government representatives, the meeting was the occasion for “*creating a whole new homelessness network*” (UK 2004). FEANTSA seems to have creatively used the range of homelessness Peer Reviews to develop its network (to include satellite networks such as the Informal Ministries Forum on Homelessness⁽³⁹⁾ and HABITACT⁽⁴⁰⁾) and to extend these networks beyond NGOs and researchers (namely to public authorities).

Even if the networking effect of the Belgian Peer Review (2005) was quite limited, it helped reinforce an already existent network in one specific case. According to the Dutch expert who attended the meeting: “*after the Peer Review, reflecting upon the discussions held, I developed the idea to promote a stronger collaboration between my organisation and the organisation representing Flemish Public Centres for Social Action [the VVOS⁽⁴¹⁾], in order to promote exchanges of information on topics of common interest*”. Indeed, the interview with a VVOS representative confirmed that, in the period following the Peer Review, the collaboration among the two organisations was particularly fruitful, involving a strong exchange of information and experiences through the organisation of conferences, as well as the production of some publications⁽⁴²⁾.

The two EU stakeholders present at the Czech Peer Review (CZ 2005), EAPN and ERIO, strengthened their collaboration in the immediate aftermath of the meeting. EIRO has helped EAPN to mainstream Roma issues into its policy positions, while EAPN representatives spoke at a number of ERIO events intended to further their understanding of the OMC. The two organisations collaborated on the thematic priority network on Roma under trans-national exchanges in the Structural Funds. This contributed to the emergence of a Roma coalition at the European level which is still operating.

39. <http://feantsa.horus.be/code/EN/pg.asp>

40. European Exchange Forum on Local Homeless Strategies, <http://www.habitact.eu>

41. The Dutch national expert was a representative from DIVOSA, the ‘Dutch National Association of Managers with Municipal Services in the Fields of Work, Income and Social Solidarity’. His reference is to the VVOS (the Flemish Union of Cities and Municipalities).

42. It should be noted that even if some contacts between DIVOSA and VVOS developed already in the period preceding the Belgian Peer Review, our interviewees strongly insisted on the fact that the Belgian Peer Review played an important role in reinforcing this network.

The Norwegian Peer Review (NO 2009) did *not* lead to bilateral contacts among the administrations of the involved countries. However, the Dutch authorities became aware of the Norwegian programme *after* the PR meeting and asked the thematic expert to give a presentation about the Norwegian Peer Review. Furthermore, later he was asked by the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment to study the scope of the problem in Netherlands, which resulted in a report on people with multiple disadvantages. This case is particularly interesting because the Netherlands were not among the participants to the Norwegian Peer Review. This indicates that the PR output spread outside the limited circle of participants. In addition, the Peer Review also contributed to building up some professional ties between the researchers working in the same field, for example, when the independent expert approached some of peer review participants for a different EU project.

The Swedish (2007) Peer Review was a particularly favourable one for the development of networks among participants. According to the Swedish Report, some of the participants viewed the Peer Reviews as a networking opportunity, as well as an occasion for understanding how to use the OMC in practice. According to a peer country government representative, *“for me [the] OMC means to cooperate with European colleagues and the Peer Review is a natural way...to implement the OMC in practice. You can talk about the OMC but this is acting upon the OMC”* (SE 2007). Networks developed during the meeting were seen as the starting point for further cooperation. Indeed, the networks developed on that occasion allowed for further forms of cooperation involving all different kinds of actors involved in the meeting. First of all, it contributed to the development of cooperation and exchanges between the host country and the Netherlands, one of the participating countries. According to the Swedish report, the host country’s representatives showed a particular interest in a feature of the Dutch policy, the ‘personal budget for the elderly’. As a consequence, a Dutch Peer Review participant later received a Swedish delegation interested in learning more about the ‘personal budget’, and in 2009, Sweden participated in a Peer Review on a similar topic hosted by the Netherlands. Moreover, the two countries cooperated in a conference on long-term care organised during the Swedish Presidency in the first half of 2009, and in 2011, one of the Dutch participants used the contacts acquired during the Peer Review to organise a site visit in Nacka, the same municipality visited during the 2007 meeting.

Moreover, at this same Swedish Peer Review (2007), networking and further collaboration were not limited to government representatives. The representative of the AIM ⁽⁴³⁾, the EU-level stakeholder organisation which attended the Swedish Peer Review, claimed that contacts at the peer review led to cooperation between him, the thematic expert, and the Dutch expert. In fact, he invited them as key speakers to conferences during Slovenia’s and Sweden’ EU Presidencies in the first half of 2008 and 2009 respectively.

After the Irish Peer Review (IE 2007), the Director at the Irish Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) was invited by one of the Bulgarian participants to the Peer Review to speak at a “Social Protection and Social Inclusion Day” of the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (Sofia, May 2008). Similarly, the then Assistant Principal at OSI was invited to a poverty and social inclusion conference in Madrid by a Spanish participant.

Finally, the participants from the German Peer Review (2010) saw the meeting as a good occasion for networking. They exchanged business cards and followed-up emails and phone calls afterwards. Moreover, the Austrian government representative encouraged an Austrian institute for staff training to contact one of the German national experts, and a meeting was organised shortly after the Peer Review. Significantly, this expert was the Bavarian one as the Austrian representatives were more interested in the Bavarian approach to quality management than the

43. ‘International Association of Mutual Benefits Societies’.

Federal one (see OSE and PPMI, 2012a, for more details). Indeed, no further contacts developed between the Austrian and the German federal governments.

7.3.2 Feeding debates at the EU level by stakeholders and experts

Sometimes the results of specific Peer Review meetings are used and diffused by European stakeholders in their EU-wide initiatives and campaign. This was the case with FEANTSA, who decided that its annual theme, with an accompanying European Conference and a European Report, should be 'street homelessness'. Arguably, FEANTSA's involvement in the UK 2004 PR influenced this decision. The Annual Conference took place in France, and helped to further promote some of the conclusions of the Peer Review in French policy on homelessness. Similarly, the messages that emerged from the Belgian 2005 Peer Review were subsequently used by EAPN in its campaign for a minimum income in Europe. According to representatives of the European stakeholder organisation which attended the Swedish 2007 Peer Review (AIM), discussions about dignity and human-rights approaches held during the meeting would appear to have helped initiate the topic on the 'European Charter of Rights for People in Need of Long-Term Care and Assistance'. This Charter was finally adopted by the AGE Platform on 10 May 2010.

Another example of European stakeholders creatively using the output of a PROGRESS Peer Review is to be found in the Irish case study. Indeed, in February 2009, eight organisations of the Platform of European Social NGOs sent a letter to the EU Ministers of Employment and Social Affairs and the Members of the Social Protection Committee regarding the need to ensure strong participation and visibility during the EU Year against Poverty. Policymakers were urged to build on the "actor involvement variables" discussed during the IE 2007 PR. These variables were annexed to the letter, together with the reference to the PR's Synthesis Report. The case of the 2009 Norwegian Peer Review also appears significant. A mention of the Synthesis Report of the meeting was found on the internet site of ASTRI (the consultancy of the thematic expert) and a reference to the Norwegian Qualification Programme was found in the report of the EAPN conference entitled "Minimum Income Schemes", held on 24 September 2010. One of the experts who attended the German 2010 Peer Review explained that he informed Georgia's "Home Care Coalition", which utilised the Peer Review intensely for its conference organised on this topic.

Finally, it should be mentioned that often, for example in BE 2005, IE 2007 and SE 2007, experts involved in Peer Review meetings exploit that experience for their academic work, especially for publishing articles or other reports. For example, after the 2005 Belgian Peer Review, the thematic expert wrote a working paper on the topic for the International Labour Organisation (ILO). In 2006, that paper became a chapter in a book published by the ILO itself. Moreover, an academic article was published by the Austrian expert who attended the Belgian meeting. Similarly, the Dutch expert who took part to the 2007 Swedish Peer Review published a paper in Dutch about the main conclusions and examples from the Swedish case, and both the European stakeholders present at the meeting distributed the paper among their member organisation and working groups focusing on long-term care. Clearly, this is an important avenue for diffusing messages emerging from the Peer Review outside the circle of directly involved actors.

7.3.3 Promoting topics on the EU agenda and keeping attention high

Some of the assessed Peer Review meetings served, often together with other activities and initiatives, to promote some themes on the European agenda or to keep attention at the EU level high.

One of the key drivers behind the choice of Belgium to host the 2005 Peer Review was to push the themes of minimum income guarantees and social activation onto the EU agenda by showcasing

the Belgian model. According to interviews conducted on the Belgian case, the meeting, together with other EU initiatives undertaken, especially under the Belgian Presidency, indeed contributed to the launch of an EU-wide dialogue on the topic. This created a degree of consensus and legitimacy that allowed the European Commission to publish its 2008 Recommendation on active Inclusion. The latter proposes to support people excluded from the labour market by combining adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services.

To a certain extent, the same can be said for the Peer Review on ‘Social Impact Assessment’ held in Slovakia in 2008. This event represented a way to initiate an EU-wide dialogue on a complex and debated topic like social impact assessment methodologies. This was possible as the Peer Review was able to build on the first results of a study, launched by the European Commission in the same year of the Peer Review, on ‘Social Impact Assessment as a Tool for mainstreaming and social protection concerns in public policies in EU Member States’. Note that the European Commission invited the contractor for the study to participate to the Peer Review meeting in SK 2008.

The Irish Peer Review (IE 2007) provided legitimation to further increase efforts as regards the EU’s involvement in the area of stakeholder involvement. The ‘stakeholder variables’ developed by the thematic expert and discussed at the PR were particularly effective in this view: they were picked up by several key domestic and EU actors, some of whom participated themselves in the PR. As a result, these variables inspired Member States when writing their NSR/SPSI 2008-2010, the National Implementing Bodies (NIBs) of the European Year for Combating Poverty and an EC-funded INBAS and Engender study on stakeholder involvement. Together, these developments contributed to creating the necessary consensus to first launch and later start operationalizing the concept of “quality” of stakeholder involvement. Thus, the 2007 SIF Peer Review became an **important stepping stone that helped take EU involvement in stakeholder involvement in social inclusion policies to the next level**. The latter included prudently introducing the debate about guidelines and indicators in the policymaking process.

As suggested above, we found evidence that the 2004 UK Peer Review, which was the first of a series of meetings on the issue of homelessness⁽⁴⁴⁾, may have contributed, together with other activities, to keep homelessness on the EU agenda, to increase the amount of information available, while emphasizing that some learning is possible in through transnational encounters. More recently, the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2010 acknowledged that “*Integrated strategies to address housing exclusion and homelessness have an important role to play in post-crisis policies*”⁽⁴⁵⁾, while two Peer Reviews on the same topic following suit in the same year⁽⁴⁶⁾.

In sum, we began this section with the (unsurprising) finding that the topics of the assessed Peer Reviews were clearly at the heart of European concerns at the time they were held, but that the Peer Review outcomes were only irregularly picked up in EU documents, even if this has improved in more recent years. Also, we found that there is no systematic accumulation of knowledge between Peer Reviews, although there were some important instances where this did happen. In other words, the **diffusion of information about the Peer Review meetings** through the Social OMC instruments **is limited and unsystematic**. As a result, it is difficult to claim that any of the individual Peer Reviews we assessed produced any “exclusive and direct impact” on EU policymaking. However, **we found three types of effects that can indeed be plausibly linked**

44. Beside the British Peer Review held in 2004, seven Peer reviews on the topic have been organised by 2010. See also PPMI and OSE (2011a), Figure 8, p. 13.

45. Draft Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2010, Brussels, 15 February 2010, doc. 6500/10, p. 3.

46. ‘Building a Comprehensive and Participative Strategy on Homelessness’ (Portugal, November 2010); ‘The Finnish National Programme to Reduce Long-Term Homelessness’ (Finland, December 2010).

to these meetings. Firstly, networking on an ad-hoc basis between administrations, and more regular contact between stakeholder organisations and participating experts was evident. Secondly, the Reviews in our sample helped feed EU debates, where European stakeholders successfully use PR results in their EU-wide initiatives and campaigns. Thirdly, Peer Reviews are used as an important stepping stone to building European consensus on a topic, and to placing these topics on the EU agenda.

It now has become clear that the observed “impact” of the PR meetings is often a consequence of **creative usages of Peer Review outcomes by the actors involved.** The actors who are most effective at disseminating and using PR output are not the “usual suspects” in the Peer Reviews, i.e. Member States and the European Commission. Instead, **two types of actors which tend to be overlooked prove crucial in this context: independent,** or rather non-governmental **expert networks** on the one hand, **and civil society stakeholder networks** on the other. Together, they ensure that PR outcomes are circulated outside the limited circle of people directly involved in the meetings.

8. CONSEQUENCES AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

8.1 Dissemination of information about meetings and follow-up activities in the host countries

While section 7 concluded that **diffusion of information about the Peer Review meetings** in the wider context of the Social OMC is rather limited and unsystematic through the Social OMC instruments, **the picture is even gloomier at the national level**, at least when one looks at the *host countries* (the scope of this Synthesis Report). Generally (in BE 2005; IE 2007, UK 2006; SE 2007; NO 2009; DE 2010), host countries' government representatives claim that they disseminated information about the meeting and its results inside their organisations (both at the level of public administrations and political decision makers). This was often done through drafting reports, diffusing the material produced during the meeting (sometimes by publicising the web site of the Peer Review programme), providing summaries in Newsletters and, very often, through informal contacts. However, we found no evidence of **strategies for disseminating this information in a systematic way**. Consequently, instances where information was used by national actors for developing debates or follow-up activities at the national level have been rare. However, some significant exceptions do exist.

In the period after the Czech Peer Review (2005), the Czech government mainstreamed the practice under review as an instrument for dealing with socially excluded groups in the Czech Republic. Before doing so, a series of events were organised. These included debates, roundtables and policy consultations between representatives of 'People in Need' (the national NGO implementing the programme), experts and government representatives. Although it has been difficult to assess how much the discussions held during the Peer Review were actually used and diffused, it seems likely that the PR was as important stepping stone in the series of events which led to the mainstreaming of the 'Field Social Work Programme' as a policy instrument.

The active use of the PR outcomes was very striking in the Irish case. Indeed, even in the years following the IE 2007 Peer Review, domestic actors actively tried to use it to pursue their goals. Thus, when EAPN Ireland published its Shadow Report on Ireland's NAP Inclusion 2008-2010, it referred to the 2007 PR to argue that the meeting had recommended that the Social Inclusion Forum should not be a stand-alone event, but be part of a wider process for monitoring and evaluating the NAP Inclusion (including engagement with and resourcing of people experiencing poverty and their organisations). Similarly, different authors of EAPN Ireland's 20th anniversary publication in 2010 refer to the 2007 SIF Peer Review to plead for a strong community infrastructure, sufficient resources and systematic feedback about SIF results.

According to the report on the Spanish (2007) Peer Review, national NGO representatives claimed that they diffused the results of the meeting outside their organisations through documents uploaded on their internet sites and electronic and printed journals. The German Peer Review (2010) was the only one mentioned in a newspaper article. However, it was a local newspaper with a very limited diffusion.

After the Norwegian Peer review, the outcomes were circulated (to some extent) in the Labour ministry, but the interviewees agreed that there was no particular dissemination strategy. However, the representatives of the Labour Ministry had the impression that other participants probably disseminated that information in NAV and among NGOs. Moreover, a Norwegian stakeholder mentioned a hearing organised by the Labour Ministry on the Qualification Programme in which the meeting was mentioned. The Norwegian case is also interesting because the PR is referred to by a political representative. Indeed, according to the national report (NO

2009), the Norwegian Minister of Labour Hanne Bjurstrøm mentioned the Norwegian Peer Review in a speech during the “International Day of the Welfare Alliance/EAPN Norway”. Similarly, the Irish Minister of Social and Family Affairs saw the very fact that the SIF had been subject to a European Peer Review as proof that it was considered by many in the EU as a good practice (IE 2007).

8.2 Consequences in the host countries: (modest) improved efficiency, mirror effects and legitimation

8.2.1 Improving efficiency and effectiveness?

One of the stated aims of PROGRESS Peer Review meetings is that they should *improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the reviewed policies*. Considering the Peer Reviews in our sample, there is **only thin evidence of direct “impact” of these meetings on host countries’ national practices**. However, there are two examples, albeit very modest ones, where the PR can be plausibly linked to concrete policy changes.

First, seems that at least some of the recommendations of the 2007 PR in Ireland (IE 2007) were considered in planning the next Social Inclusion Forum and have been integrated into the structure of the event. Firstly, the organisers minimised the opening speeches so as to create more time for workshops and discussions. Secondly, more feedback was provided about what has been done with the participants’ input in the previous SIF. This was in part linked to the insistence at the PR that the Irish government should be clearer about the objectives of the SIF. This is also reflected in the structure of the 2008 SIF Report, where section II of the Report, usually dedicated to the opening speeches, deals with the policy implications of the issues raised by the Social Inclusion Forum. As explained in section 3, the institutional framework for the NAPInclusion in Ireland, including the SIF, was significantly re-structured in more recent years (for reasons clearly unrelated to the PR).

According to a national official, the Peer Review in Norway (2009) helped draw attention to some aspects of the ‘Qualification Programme’ that were previously overlooked. The attention drawn to drops-out from the programme and the follow-up of programme participants is a prime example.

However, the lack of a direct impact on peer countries’ policies does not imply that Peer Reviews were inconsequential for the host countries (47). On the contrary, we found that in many cases **they caused ‘mirror effects’ and ‘legitimising effects’ to which we turn now**.

8.2.2 Mirror effects: reflexive learning

In all the Peer Review meetings we considered bar two, the discussed topic was a practice considered by the host countries as an example of good practice. However, as discussed above, these were never considered as “best” practices, as in every single Peer Review meeting shortcomings, contradictions and possible ways for improving the practice under review emerged. This is obviously easier in a Peer Review characterised by a more open atmosphere in which the host country itself acknowledges the existence of some problems, and expresses the wish to discuss them with its peers, as in IE 2007 and NO 2009. Perhaps more surprising is that the flaws of these “good practices” have also been brought forward as a result of in-depth discussions during Peer Reviews, even where the host country is less open to discussing their shortcomings. A few examples illustrate this aptly:

47. Note that the (tangible) effects of the PR meetings on the peer countries are discussed in Deliverable 4/Task 4 (OSE and PPMI, 2012a) of this research project.

In the UK 2004 Peer Review, it was emerged that the government's aim of reducing rough sleepers was too narrow. According to peer comments, England should have developed more diverse and longer-term targets, as well as appropriate result indicators (relating to health, housing, work and maintaining high quality services). Moreover, a systematic means for following-up and seeking feedback (e.g. about what happened concretely as a result of the principle that rough sleepers should be sent back to their home-town) was suggested. During the Czech Peer Review (2005), discussions highlighted the inadequacy of existing evaluation data, specifically the incompleteness of quantitative data and the total lack of qualitative data. Consequently, given that the results of the programme had not been measured against its aims, some doubts about the effectiveness of the Czech practice were expressed and some possible solutions for improving the evaluation phase were suggested.

Similarly during the 2007 Swedish Peer Review, host country officials explained that discussions allowed them to be more reflexive about some aspects of their own practices, and pushed them to give attention to other experiences. In this respect, the 'personal budget' highlighted by the Dutch reviewer is an important example.

The PR in Ireland (IE 2007) also created a "mirror effect" for the host country. With this in mind, a host country official explained that even during the PR's preparation "we had to think why we are doing this, why is this of interest for other countries...that helps you to adopt a more strategic approach". The mirror effect was probably most important as regards the involvement of people experiencing poverty in the SIF, whereby "Member States questioned the extent to which the involvement of the people experiencing poverty was just a token involvement". Furthermore, it is apparent that this mirror effect affected not just government representatives, but stakeholders as well. Indeed, "the EAPN and the other NGO's, I think when they heard from the other Member States in the Peer Review... they realized that Ireland made some kind of progress... and maybe there was some kind of appreciation that things are not so bad", as a result of having explained one's own practices to others.

In the case of the Peer Review in Norway (2009), the representatives of the Ministry of Labour found the meeting a useful learning exercise, and emphasized that the meeting highlighted two previously overlooked issues. First, the meeting encouraged them to think more about the drop-outs, considering, for example, why did participants drop out, what happened to them afterwards, and where did they go next. Second, they became more aware of the need to continue to follow-up with participants once they started work. The German Peer Review (2010) was seen by the host country participants as an opportunity to critically reflect on their own system, relying on critics and observations made by experts and peers. In the German case, the discussions held during the meeting led to a '*sharpening of thinking*'.

8.2.3 Legitimising effects

Even if they are critical about certain aspects of the policies or initiatives under review, participants to PROGRESS Peer Reviews often recognise and appreciate other features of these practices. This has the effect, for host country officials and stakeholders alike, of strengthening the belief that they are 'on the right track', and thereby gives legitimacy to the reviewed practice.

The strongest example of legitimizing effects comes from the CZ 2005 Peer Review. It is quite likely that the Peer Review, by bringing together experts from various countries and promising an open debate on the Roma issue, sent a clear signal to both local and national authorities that the Roma situation must be considered a priority. In other words, the Peer Review signalled to the authorities that their actions were being watched by the EU. To some extent **this legitimised**

actions taken by the central government, which had often been blocked by local officials with delays and unwillingness to implement policies promoting Roma inclusion.

One of the high-level Irish officials explained that the IE 2007 Peer Review provided the **additional legitimacy to begin work on the Irish 'Code of Practice** to Support the Engagement of People Experiencing Poverty'. A draft of this Code was presented at the 2010 Social Inclusion Forum, and the final draft Code was submitted early March 2011. Even more importantly, Irish politicians, officials and researchers alike, saw the fact that the SIF was the subject of a PR was "proof" that this Forum was seen throughout Europe as a model of good practice for consultations with civil society. One high-level Irish official explains the mechanism of this legitimising effect: "we would have said, you know, look our Forum is so good [that] we have experts from Europe who come to see it and learn it... Sometimes you can believe your own publicity in the end" (INT HCOR 2, 2011). According to some, the legitimisation provided by the 2007 PR **helped to convince some of the Irish actors who had doubts about the SIF to get on board.**

The overall positive judgements of the national practice by reviewers also conferred a legitimising effect in the Peer Reviews hosted by the United Kingdom in 2004 and 2006, by Belgium in 2005 and Norway in 2009. A Norwegian official explicitly underlined that it was important to them to get a positive feedback from the participants, stating that "*it confirmed that we are on the right track*" (NO 2009). Another interviewee added that it was important for those who work directly with the programme to know that other countries "*think that it is worth looking into*". On the issue of legitimising effects, the German Peer Review (2010) represents a particularly interesting case. On that occasion, two different and contrasting approaches to the topic under review were discussed, i.e. the Federal and the Bavarian ones. Upon examining the strengths and weakness of those two approaches as well as of approaches adopted in other EU countries, participants agreed that no 'best' practices could be identified. However, some of the participants demonstrated a clear interest in the Bavarian approach. This helped legitimise the Bavarian approach, even if it was not in line with that of the Federal government and the other Länder.

In sum, we found that the diffusion of information about the Peer Review meetings was very modest at the national level. We found no evidence of strategies for disseminating this information in a systematic way. However, we did find some significant examples of domestic actors using the PR results to pursue their own goals. By contrast, there is only thin evidence of any direct "impact" of individual Peer Review meetings on host countries' national practices. We only came across two very modest examples where the PR could be said to have improved the efficiency and effectiveness of the reviewed practice in Ireland and Norway. Nonetheless, we found that in many cases Peer Reviews entailed important 'mirror effects' for host country officials and stakeholders alike, as a result of having to explain one's own practice to others. Just as importantly, Peer Reviews often gave policymakers the impression of being 'on the right track' and thereby conferred legitimacy upon the reviewed practice.

9. WRAPPING THINGS UP

Providing a synthesis of 10 empirically rich case studies of some 20 pages each (see bibliography) that cover a range of countries, policy domains, practices and topics is quite a challenge. Wrapping up this synthesis in a few concluding points is even more challenging. We do so by contrasting the key findings of this PROGRESS Peer Review Assessment against some of the existing findings in the academic literature about the Social OMC.

9.1 Motivations for hosting Peer reviews: going beyond showcasing

At least part of the academic literature about the Social OMC in general and about Peer Reviews more specifically seems to agree that organising a Peer Review is mostly about “showing off”. Indeed, this assessment has found several instances where the initial objective of the host country was, sometimes quite explicitly, to showcase a good practice. In other Peer Reviews however, Member States were genuinely looking for feedback and ideas from their peers, in spite of their strong belief that they had a good practice already. Finally, we had some (admittedly exceptional) cases in our sample where the host country was very well aware that the policy or practice under review was not considered a good practice by peers, or by the European Commission.

The reason for such variation is that Member States have a **variety of motivations, amongst which window dressing is only one, to host a Peer Review**. Other motivations include discussing internal differences with European peers, uploading an issue to the EU agenda, getting transnational work on a particular issues going, signalling that the ‘EU is watching’ on a certain topic, and responding to EU pressure. Hosting a Peer Review can also be inspired by the desire to come across as a ‘good European pupil’ by actively engaging in the Social OMC, or even by the genuine desire to learn from other participants’ successes and failures.

9.2 Between window dressing and critical discussions

The motivations behind a country’s decision to host a Peer Review have an unavoidable impact on the quality of the discussions. For example, discussion may suffer because the host country uses a large share of the available time to present the good practice, or because the host is not really enthusiastic about hosting the PR at all (in this case EU or stakeholder pressure led them to host). As a result, in some Peer Reviews even the most glaring problems with the host country’s programme were not openly addressed. More important however is that **even in those instances where the Peer Review was initially conceived as a ‘showcase’, the discussions during the PR were often rather frank and openly critical**, even if ‘frontal attacks’ on the host country are rare. As a result, these talks often proved to be a good learning experience after all, for peers and host alike, obviously provided it is well organised, with quality papers prepared, room for critical feedback, and the like.

Stakeholders often took the lead in bringing critical issues forward during debates, which is highly valued by the other participants. In several instances PR discussions led to considerable “surprises” for the host country, in that its representatives discovered that their “best practice” was perhaps not as good as they had assumed. In many cases, the site visits, which were organised in all but two of our ten case studies, provided exactly such a “reality check” for PR participants. Indeed, oftentimes the site visit sparked new questions and discussions at brought to the PR table.

In all, the discussions during PROGRESS Peer Reviews seem to have achieved a degree of “depth”, with high quality documents written and a range of topics being discussed in considerable detail. This finding is at odds with the stylised picture of how EU Peer Reviews are portrayed in the OMC literature. In fact, much of the criticism in the literature of ‘OMC Peer Reviews’ seems to refer to the early Peer Reviews, organized before EU enlargement in 2004, on national social inclusion strategies. These early Reviews tended to lead to endless and tedious meetings where the full national strategies of all Member States are reviewed one after the other with nearly no time for discussion. We believe that the **new academic literature on the topic should take into account the more recent experiences with PROGRESS Peer Reviews** and incorporate their dynamics into a theoretical framework which better explains the process and which is able to more accurately predict their impact.

9.3 Participation in Peer Reviews: more than “non-accountable bureaucrats”

Our case studies illustrated that the results of specific Peer Review meetings are regularly used and diffused by European stakeholders in their EU-wide initiatives and campaigns. While there is clear evidence that elements from these Peer Reviews are being **picked up and used** by such actors to pursue their goals, this more often happens “behind closed doors”, without explicit reference to the Peer Review. In addition, nongovernmental experts and EU stakeholder networks sometimes have a strong influence on Member States’ preference to host a Peer Reviews on a certain topic (e.g. social impact assessment, homelessness). Through exchanges with other network members and their participation in drawing up EU comparative analyses, such as benchmarking exercises and development of scoreboards, experts and stakeholders acquire cross country knowledge and become part of what could be called the “Social OMC Community”, of which the PROGRESS Peer Reviews are part and parcel.

In the context of the Social OMC, these stakeholders thereby contribute to “capillary effects”, in that **Peer Review as a governance tool is increasingly being promoted outside the formal OMC inner circle**, i.e. governments and Commission officials. Indeed, we have found examples of Peer Reviews being organised in different countries at national, regional and even local level. That said, the fact remains that in many cases only European stakeholder organisations take part in the Peer Review. A notable exception, however, is the Irish case study in our sample, which had national stakeholders for every one of the peer countries.

9.4 Reflexive learning: when tutors become learners and vice versa

The notions of “tutors” and “learners” are regularly referred to in the scholarly literature about the OMC. Which is more: these notions are regularly referred to by the Peer Review participants themselves as a way to situate themselves in the meeting. The standard assumption is that of the host country presenting a good practice and acting as a tutor/teacher vis-à-vis other participants, while the peer countries act as learners. This assessment has found that this assumption is of limited value-added in the real world of EU Peer Reviews. Indeed, in some of our cases the Host country more or less clearly defines itself as a learner, while some of the Peer countries and the European Commission in practice act as tutors. But there is more: even in those Peer Reviews where there seems to have been little or no interest from the host to “learn” from the other countries, the host-tutor often became learner after all, once other participants start raising critical points about the practice analysed. This points to an important finding of our research suggests, namely that **tutor/learner roles change during the course of the Peer Reviews, which suggests that genuine** (and perhaps surprising) **reflexive learning is taking place** in at least some PROGRESS Peer Review sessions.

9.5 Learning from difference: opening up perspectives

In the OMC literature it is sometimes suggested that the Peer Review's impact could be enhanced by organising sessions between more 'similar' countries (e.g. in terms of welfare regime or policy practice). Our assessment indeed confirms that the problems associated with *policy transfer* are very important, especially so between countries belonging to different welfare models, or having very different concrete policies on certain issues (see Task/Deliverable 4 (OSE and PPMI, 2012a) for a more detailed discussion). Thus, a Peer Review with a host country belonging to one model and a large majority of peer countries belonging to a second model does not work very well.

On the other hand, there are some clear examples of *policy learning* between countries belonging to very *different* welfare models (or with different practices on precise issues), a point which will be analysed in more detail in Task/Deliverable 4 (OSE and PPMI, 2012a). Quite a few of the more than 100 respondents we interviewed for the ten case studies experienced this *learning from difference* as an important 'opening up' of perspectives, even if it does not lead to immediate policy transfer. It seems that in the end, **having a good "mix of welfare models/reviewed practices" is an absolutely key factor for the success of PROGRESS Peer Reviews.**

9.6 Tracing domestic impact: mirror effects and legitimising practices

This assessment began with the assumption that looking for "**impact**" of the Peer Reviews at the domestic level would be like looking for a needle in a haystack, especially in view of the fact that host countries rarely engage in meaningful follow-up impact assessments after EU peer reviews.

This assessment indeed found that **there is only limited evidence of any direct "impact" of individual Peer Review meetings on host countries' national practices.** Indeed, we only found two examples where the PR could be said to have improved the efficiency and effectiveness of the reviewed practice. This occurred in Ireland with the organisation features of the SIF and in Norway in raising attention for some aspects of the 'Qualification Programme' that had previously been underemphasized. In both cases, the impact was very modest.

Nonetheless, we found that in many cases **Peer Reviews entailed important 'mirror effects' for both host country officials and stakeholders.** As such, as a result of having explained one's own practice to others, actors sometimes revise their opinion about these practices. Peer Reviews can challenge people's beliefs in yet another way: by putting issues in the EU spotlight, they signal that Europe is paying attention, and that as a consequence Member States cannot simply "do as they like". Perhaps surprisingly, several of our interviewees indeed referred to the **genuine pressure that can be exerted through a PR (it feels 'harder' than one would expect)**, and saw it as way for the European Commission to develop a **'supportive monitoring function'** that signals that "we are interested in what you are doing, but we are also watching over your shoulder".

We also found that Peer Reviews sometimes confirm pre-established ideas, i.e. by giving the impression of being 'on the right track', and thereby provide outside **legitimation for the reviewed national, regional, or local programme.**

It is often difficult, if not impossible to attribute these effects *exclusively* to the PROGRESS Peer Reviews. However, it is true that many of our interviewees referred to the dynamic of having an "outside" - and thereby more "objective" - assessment by their European peers. While a PR sometimes highlights issues or problems that some people already acknowledge, the fact that people "from the outside" raise them makes them easier to accept. Or as our respondents put it, PR helps to "crystallise people's concerns", "articulate issues in different ways" and "open up the horizon". It seems plausible that by so doing, the **lessons learned at PROGRESS Peer Reviews,**

often combined with discourses and knowledge from other sources, **moved certain, and often previously known problems higher on the list of priorities to be dealt with.**

9.7 EU-level impact: weak networking but stepping stones to building European consensus

Peer Reviews help build (or reinforce pre-existing) informal networks, either on an ad-hoc basis between administrations, and more formal between stakeholder organisations and participating experts. However, the analysis found that these **networking effects were often weak, which participants blamed, in part, on the lack of follow-up events or activities** (see below).

Some Peer Reviews clearly contribute to framing and further developing an issue the EU level. This was the case with the Peer Review on ‘Social Impact Assessment’ (SK 2008), minimum income (BE 2005), activation (NO 2009) and stakeholder involvement (IE 2007). Crucially, in these cases the Peer Reviews were seen, and in fact engineered by the European Commission, to be a **stepping stone in a longer process of building European consensus on a topic** (and thereby influencing the European policy agenda). Typically, a Peer Review builds on earlier work done in the context of EU expert networks. It also provides legitimacy for funding subsequent EU studies, resulting in an EU seminar, a Commission Communication, ultimately followed by a new Peer Review on the same (or similar) topic, which then squares the virtuous circle. In some cases, however, this did not always work out as planned. For example, in the DE 2010 Peer Review, the European Commission tried to bring in the issue of EU-wide quality guidelines on care for the elderly, but this was blocked by the host country.

9.8 Organising Peer Reviews: features of success (and failure)

By and large, the **organisation** and the quality of the Peer Reviews in our study are highly valued across the entire period (2004-2010), and this is often attributed to the quality of the Peer Review management (INBAS in earlier years, ÖSB more recently). Of course, we also found several areas where the Peer Reviews left room for improvement. The following points are highlighted as essential for a successful Peer Review ⁽⁴⁸⁾:

- The extent to which key participants, such as the Host country officials, the Peer Review Manager and the European Commission agree about the *objectives* of the Peer Review, and discuss this well before the event is crucial. In some rare cases this did not work well, and in one case the thematic expert even withdrew from the assignment (with obvious nasty consequences for the PR). In particular, the timely interplay between the thematic expert (describing the EU context and debates) and the host country expert (setting the domestic scene) is an underappreciated “key to success”.
- The occasion to participate in a well-targeted site visit that serves as reality check, even if participants often stress that a balance must be struck between the time for such a site visit (the logistics of which should be kept simple) and the time to discuss (and provide feedback on the site visits themselves).
- While the quality of the Discussion Papers and Host Country Papers is often high, doubts are regularly raised about the quality of the Comment Papers, which is often a key determinant of the quality of debates. Thus, a recurrent feature is that time is being lost on presentations which have to compensate for low quality papers.
- The occasions for informal networking, such as museum and sauna visits, lunches and coffee breaks foster bilateral exchanges, but also to build the much-needed trust between participants, which is essential for a frank and critical discussion.

48. These points are also further developed in Deliverable 5 on Policy Recommendations (OSE and PPMI, 2012b).

- Having a manageable number of participants had a significant effect upon the quality of discussion. As a rule, the Peer Reviews we discussed had some 7-8 countries participating, as well as Peer Review manager, experts, and representatives from stakeholder organisations. This results in meetings of some 25 to around 50 participants, although around 30 participants seems ideal. In crowded sessions, in depth discussions are more difficult, even if the practice of splitting into smaller working groups seems to make up for some of this and can contribute to include stakeholders whenever possible. Even more important than the number of participants is their position: they should be carefully selected and include people that are close to decision-making circles.

9.9 After the Peer Review: après nous le deluge?

It is clear from this assessment that the **result of the Peer Reviews do not easily ‘trickle down’ to a broad circle of domestic policymakers**. Indeed, often dissemination of information is largely confined to the administration of some of the Peer Review participant. Traces in the national press are extremely rare and exceptional, even in the local press. Even this depends on whether or not participants take such an initiative, e.g. to include feedback about the Peer Review in a Newsletter, or at least ‘talk about it’ with colleagues. This comes in spite of a very well-developed reporting system (Peer Review website, see first footnote under section 7.2).

As a result, Peer Review results are still largely unknown to the (obviously large) world of OMC-outsiders. But even the *dissemination of knowledge to insiders* seems problematic, and most case studies indicate that references to the Peer Reviews in other OMC documents are scarce, although that this has improved more recently. Most striking perhaps is that the knowledge base built up during a Peer Review is not systematically considered during later Peer Reviews on the same topic, even if we came across interesting examples of accumulation of knowledge. Hence, it would seem that the PROGRESS Peer Reviews are still seen as the “odd” tool of the Social OMC, rather than an integral part of the OMC toolkit. Expert and stakeholders seem to be most active as regards dissemination of PR outputs.

A recurrent feature in all of the case studies is the finding that the Peer Review is not followed-up in any way by the host country, the European Commission, or the peer review manager. In one case, the Commission unsuccessfully tried to organise such a follow-up, failing for want of Member State interest. The latter point also underlines a more general finding of this assessment, i.e. that contrary to what some expect, the PROGRESS Peer Review process is genuinely “owned” by the Member States. Indeed, while the Commission has its own agenda and tries to use the Peer Reviews if it fits that agenda, the Member States still decide on the hosting and participating, agenda setting, and the like. Ghost stories about the European Commission manipulating the Peer Reviews have not been corroborated in our study.

9.10 *Homines dum docent, discunt*: reaching the stated aims after all?

Our analysis suggests that the PROGRESS Peer Reviews do achieve at least one their overall objectives. The seminars clearly lead to a better understanding of the participating Member States’ policies, even in the event of “showcasing. The “teacher” is more often than not prepared to learn when the Peer Review raises important questions about the reviewed practice. In other words, “*homines dum docent, discunt*”⁽⁴⁹⁾ (even when they teach, men learn); this also applies to the other national and EU experts involved in the PR: many of them confirmed that they learned (a lot) about national experiences.

49. Seneca (“the Younger”) *Epistulae Morales* no. 7, sect. 8.

By contrast, we found only limited evidence that the PROGRESS PR improved the efficiency and effectiveness of the presented good practice in the host country, although a PR's impact is very difficult to establish in view of the absence of follow-up assessments by the Member States. In view of the important mirror effects, the role of the PR in **legitimizing** reviewed practices, its contribution to informal networking and, perhaps most importantly, the finding that PR constitutes a stepping stone in European consensus building on social topics, all lead us to conclude that **PROGRESS Peer Reviews have an important role to play in the future Social OMC and the Europe 2020 Strategy alike.**

ANNEX 1. OVERVIEW OF CASE STUDIES AND EXPERTS INVOLVED

PR Date	Host country (code intext)	Topic	Key theme(s)	Author(s)	N° of Interviews
05-06.05.2004	United Kingdom (UK 2004)	The Rough Sleepers Unit (England)	Quality and accessibility of social services; Homelessness and housing exclusion	Volker Busch-Geertsema and Freek Spinnewijn	12
19-20.05.2005	Czech Republic (CZ 2005)	Field Social Work Programmes in Neighbourhoods Threatened by Social Exclusion	Integration of ethnic minorities and immigrants; Quality and accessibility of social services	Romana Careja	5
7-8.11. 2005	Belgium (BE 2005)	Minimum Incomes and social integration institutional arrangements	Promoting active inclusion	Ramón Peña-Casas and Sebastiano Sabato	15
04-05.06.2006	United Kingdom (UK 2006)	The UK government's Sure Start programme	Children and families	Mary Daly	10
13-14.09.2007	Sweden (SE 2007)	Freedom of choice and dignity for the elderly	Quality and accessibility of social services; Ageing and providing adequate and sustainable pensions; Health and LTC	David Natali and Tereza Wennerholm Čáslavská	14
25-26.10.2007	Spain (ES 2007)	Multi-regional Operational Programme to Combat Discrimination	Integration of ethnic minorities and immigrants; Promoting active inclusion	Dalila Ghailani and Maria Carolina Melo	11
15-16.11.2007	Ireland (IE 2007)	The NAPInclusion Social Inclusion Forum	Governance	Bart Vanhercke, Charlotte Hick and Tereza Wennerholm Čáslavská	13
06 -07.11.2008	Slovakia (SK 2008)	Social Impact Assessment	Governance	Régine Kiasuwa	6
29-30.10.2009	Norway (NO 2009)	Developing well-targeted tools for the active inclusion of vulnerable people	Promoting active inclusion	Irma Budginaitė	11
18-19.10.2010	Germany (DE 2010)	Achieving quality long-term care in residential facilities	Ageing and providing adequate and sustainable pensions; Health and LTC	Timo Weishaupt and Claudia Göbel	9

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BE (2005), Sabato, S. and Peña-Casas, R., Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Case Study 3 – Task A. Peer Review on minimum income and social integration institutional arrangements: Belgium, 7-8 November 2005.

CZ (2005), Careja, R., Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Case Study 2 – Task A. Peer Review on Field Social Work Programmes in Neighbourhoods Threatened by Social Exclusion: Czech Republic, 19-20 May 2005.

DE (2010), Weishaupt, T. and Göbel, C., Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Case Study 10 – Task A. Peer Review on achieving quality long-term care in residential facilities: Germany, 18-19 October 2010.

ES (2007), Ghailani, D. with Melo, M., Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Case Study 6 – Task A. Peer Review on the Multi-regional Programme to Combat Discrimination: Spain, 25-26 October 2007.

IE (2007) Vanhercke, B. with Hick, C. and Wennerholm Čáslavská, T., Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Case Study 7 – Task A. Peer Review on the NAPInclusion Social Inclusion Forum: Ireland, 15th – 16th November 2007.

NO (2009) Budginaitė, I., Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Case Study 9 – Task A. Peer Review on developing well-targeted tools for the active inclusion of vulnerable people: Norway, 29-30 October 2009.

OSE and PPMI (2012a), Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Task 4/Deliverable 4. Peer Country Assessment: Synthesis Report, May 2012.

OSE and PPMI (2012b), Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Task 5/Deliverable 5. Policy Recommendations, May 2012.

OSE and PPMI (2011), Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Case Study Guidelines for Experts, 27 July 2011, 27 p.

PPMI and OSE (2011a), Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Task 1 - Deliverable 1. Mapping of the Peer Reviews, July 2011.

PPMI and OSE (2011b) Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Task 2 - Deliverable 2. Contribution of the Peer Reviews to 'Consensus' Framing, July 2011.

SE (2007), Natali, D. and Wennerholm Caslavská, T., Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Case Study 5 – Task A. Peer Review on freedom of Choice and Dignity for the elderly: Sweden, 13-14 September 2007.

SK (2008), Kiasuwa, R., Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Case Study 8 – Task A. Peer Review on Social Impact Assessment: Slovakia, 6-7 November 2008.

UK (2006), Daly, M., Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Case Study 4 – Task A. Peer Review on The UK government's Sure Start programme: United Kingdom, 04-05 May 2006.

UK (2004), Busch-Geertsema, V. with Spinnewijn, F., Analysis and Follow-up of Mutual Learning in the Context of Peer Review in the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Programme. Case Study 1 – Task A. Peer Review on street homelessness eradication strategies. The Rough Sleepers Unit in England: United Kingdom, 5-6 May 2004.