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Tracing the Social OMC from its origins to Europe 2020

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DOI

[10.1057/9781137022622.0006](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137022622.0006)

Publication date

2014

Document Version

Submitted manuscript

Published in

Assessing the open method of coordination: institutional design and national influence of EU social policy coordination

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Barcevičius, E., Weishaupt, J. T., & Zeitlin, J. (2014). Tracing the Social OMC from its origins to Europe 2020. In E. Barcevičius, T. Weishaupt, & J. Zeitlin (Eds.), *Assessing the open method of coordination: institutional design and national influence of EU social policy coordination* (pp. 16-39). (Work and welfare in Europe). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137022622.0006>

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Chapter 2. Tracing the Social OMC from its Origins to Europe 2020

Forthcoming in Egidijus Barcevičius, J. Timo Weishaupt and Jonathan Zeitlin (eds.), *Assessing the Open Method of Coordination: Institutional Design and National Influence of EU Social Policy Coordination*, Palgrave Macmillan (2014).

Draft version, June 2013

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1 The early steps: building the foundation for social coordination

The European integration process has long been described as ‘asymmetrical’, prioritizing economic over social objectives (Scharpf 1996). Although it is certainly true that market-making ‘negative integration’ has made remarkable strides, the European integration process has always had a social dimension. Already the Messina Declaration signed in 1955 laid the foundation for the European Community to regulate various social issues (including, for instance, the mobility of workers) and to provide funding for social concerns, including labour market training, through the European Social Fund (ESF). The commencement of the Social Action Programmes in 1974 was a political confirmation that the member governments perceived social aims as an integral part of European integration (Falkner 2010).¹ Only in 1989 did the European Community adopt – albeit without the UK – the Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers, which is often identified as a political ‘turning point’ for EU social policy (Pochet 2005). This Charter outlined a common labour law model (for example, the right to strike), gender equality and anti-poverty programmes, while affirming in its preamble that ‘the same importance must be attached to the social aspects as to the economic aspects, and [...] they must be developed in a balanced manner’ (cited in O’Connor 2005). Even though the Charter was subsequently not included as a ‘Social Chapter’ in the Maastricht Treaty on European Union in 1992 – due to the British veto – the other eleven Member States moved forward through the adoption of a Protocol on Social Policy (Ribhegge 2011). That same year, the Council also adopted two Recommendations, one ‘on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems’ (Council 1992a) and the other ‘on the convergence of social protection objectives and policies’ (Council 1992b). These recommendations acknowledged the importance of social policy, while also granting the Commission the right to monitor the Member States and issue Communications on the progress of enhancing national social policy regimes (Ferrera, Matsaganis, and Sacchi 2002). On this basis, the Commission produced biennial reports on Social Protection in Europe (European Commission 1994a; 1995a; 1998; 2000b). While little more was formalised, some observers nevertheless view the recommendations as ‘a

premature version of the OMC' (de la Porte, Pochet, and Room 2001), while the Commission's reporting activities were a clear sign that 'the European level could indeed act as a platform for the exchange of experience' (Vanhercke 2012, 8).

For a variety of interrelated reasons, this dynamic toward the development of a 'Social Europe' intensified during the latter half of the 1990s (Leibfried and Pierson 1995). First, given the rapid developments toward full Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), Member State governments increasingly worried about the effects of large-scale unemployment on the credibility of the EU's new 'hard currency' paradigm. These concerns certainly contributed to the 1994 Essen Council's decision to coordinate national employment policies, an important precursor of the European Employment Strategy and thus the OMC (Goetschy 2003).² Second, the 'economic spill-over effects' associated with the EMU process were paired with an increasingly proactive European Commission. Enabled by the Council Recommendations of 1992, the Commission published a Green and a White Paper on European Social Policy in 1993 and 1994 respectively (European Commission 1993; 1994b). Subsequent to these documents, which were produced after wide consultation among European policymakers and stakeholders, the Commission issued three Communications (European Commission 1995b; 1997; 1999), which outlined (a) a framework for the debate of European social problems, (b) proposed key steps to modernise European social policy regimes, and (c) delineated a 'concerted strategy' for action, respectively. Especially the third Communication laid the foundation for the soon-to-be launched social OMCs, outlining four broad objectives 'to guide further action' on social policy: (1) to make work pay and provide secure income; (2) to make pensions safe and pension systems sustainable; (3) to promote social inclusion; and (4) to ensure high quality and sustainability of health care. The strategy was endorsed by the Council on December 17, 1999 (Council 1999).³ Thirdly, the social NGOs began to organise at EU level more forcefully, following adverse decisions on European anti-poverty funding by the Council (1994) and the ECJ (1998) (Geyer 2001), while the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) in particular emerged as a champion of a coordinated approach to tackling social exclusion and poverty (Geyer 2001; Cullen 2005; Kröger 2008). Fourthly, the accession of Austria, Finland and especially Sweden in 1995 further strengthened

the coalition of Member States inclined to build a European social dimension that protects and enhances rather than jeopardises national welfare regimes (Weishaupt 2011). Fifth, this EU-level activism coincided with important changes in the political landscape as voters brought centre-left parties to power across much of the EU during the late 1990s, including the election of pro-European Tony Blair as the new British Prime Minister in 1997. Especially the defeat of the British Conservatives made swift progress on social issues possible.

While discussions over Treaty revision were initially dominated by concerns over EMU, with the British veto lifted, the Amsterdam Treaty integrated the Social Protocol into its main text, symbolically placed the references to a 'high level of employment and of social protection' *before* the goals of economic growth and competitiveness (Article 2, EEC), and also defined 'combat[ing] social exclusion' as a key political goal. As such, social objectives clearly received a higher political standing. Yet, the treaty refrained from making 'substantial spending commitments to new social policy areas' (Geyer 2000) and – for the time being – the Member States prioritised the coordination of employment policy, most evidently through the addition of a new Employment Title (Goetschy 2003).⁴ This formalised the legal basis for EU-level cooperation through commonly agreed guidelines in the field of employment, while institutionalising a permanent, treaty-based Employment Committee (EMCO), and an obligation to report on national progress toward reduction of unemployment in yearly National Action Plans (NAPs). The Amsterdam Treaty thus set the stage for the launch of the European Employment Strategy (EES) – on which the OMC was subsequently modelled – at the Luxembourg European Council in November 1997 (Zeitlin 2008)⁵. With coordination of employment policy initiated and EMU on track, the Council then rapidly took the next step toward the coordination of social policy by endorsing the Commission's 'concerted strategy' on social issues in December 1999, outlined in the above-mentioned Communication of July 1999. Almost immediately, the Council also established an Interim High-Level Working Group on Social Protection to operationalise the strategy (Ferrera, Matsaganis, and Sacchi 2002).

Very quickly, this High-Level Group was transformed into the (treaty-based) Social Protection Committee (SPC), the central institutional body of the Social OMC. The SPC consists of high-level

officials from the Member States and the Commission (Council 2000a), who report directly to national ministers and the Council. The SPC was mandated to monitor the development of social protection policies; to promote exchanges of information, experience and good practice; and to prepare reports and opinions, including the annual report on social protection to be submitted to the Council. The SPC currently meets about 10 times per year, while its Indicators Sub-Group (ISG), established in 2001, supports the committee with formulation, definition and production of relevant data and analytical work (on the organisational culture of the SPC see Horvath 2009).

2 The advent of three social OMCs: 2000-2005

2.1 The Lisbon Strategy: Departing from a well-trodden path

The rapid developments during the late 1990s culminated in the launch of the Lisbon Strategy at the extraordinary meeting of the European Council of 23 and 24 March 2000 in Lisbon. The Lisbon Strategy represented a double breakthrough for the development of social policy at EU level. First, it forcefully stated that the European integration process should no longer be dominated by 'negative integration'. The new way forward envisioned was to triangulate economic, employment and social policies as equally important, mutually reinforcing pillars of a novel, sustainable growth model (Armstrong 2010). Together with the Commission, the mostly Social Democratic heads of state and government promoted the idea that social policy was a 'productive factor', accelerating and increasing economic and employment growth. Coupled with this new agenda, the European Council also outlined an ambitious political aim: the EU should become the 'most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (European Council 2000a). Secondly, the Lisbon summit formally introduced a new governance instrument to achieve these ambitious goals: the OMC. As defined by the Portuguese Presidency at Lisbon and afterwards, the OMC comprised four interdependent elements closely modeled on the EES (European Council 2000a §37):

- fixing guidelines for the Union combined with specific timetables for achieving the goals which they set in the short, medium and long term;

- establishing, where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world and tailored to the needs of different Member States and sectors as a means of comparing best practices;
- translating these European guidelines into national and regional policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures, taking into account national and regional differences;
- periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes.

The Lisbon European Council authorised the application of the OMC to a wide range of policy areas, including social inclusion and the modernisation of social protection systems. The Social Agenda 2000-2005 adopted in Nice in December 2000, in turn, set a timetable for the application of the OMC in the social field (Pochet 2005).

2.2 Social Inclusion (2000)

Following the decision at Lisbon to launch an OMC in this field, the Nice European Council approved a first set of common objectives for the fight against poverty and social exclusion, and invited the Member States 'to develop their priorities in relation to these objectives' and submit national action plans covering a two-year period (European Council 2000b). The first common objectives in the field of social inclusion were: (1) to facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services; (2) to prevent the risks of exclusion; (3) to help the most vulnerable; and (4) to mobilise all relevant bodies. Already during the summer 2001, the initial two-year reporting cycle commenced when the Member States submitted their first National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAPs/SI), which often included extensive annexes, incorporating 'good practice' examples from regional and non-state actors.

The next important step in the development of the OMC/SI was taken during the Laeken European Council meeting in December 2001. Not only was the first Joint Inclusion Report⁶ adopted by the Commission and the Council (European Commission 2002a; Marlier et al. 2007, 23), but Belgian Minister for Social Affairs, Frank Vandenbroucke also asked a group of experts led by Sir

Anthony Atkinson to build on the work done in the context of the European Community Household (ECHP) and develop a series of indicators to measure social inclusion. The group quickly produced a set of 18 EU-level indicators, including 10 'primary' and 8 'secondary' indicators, which were subsequently discussed by the ISG and endorsed by the SPC as well as the Council (Atkinson et al. 2002; Marlier et al. 2007). These so-called Laeken Indicators gained widespread support, especially the at-risk-of-poverty rate (60 per cent of median equivalised income), which became the most cited and visible social indicator used in the EU (European Council 2001a; Armstrong 2010, 77–81).⁷ In 2002, the Commission also launched the Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion (2002-2006), adopted by the Council and the European Parliament, to support the OMC process. This programme was *not*, however, intended to financially support instruments developed to combat poverty (as does the European Social Fund (ESF) and other structural funds), but rather to support *exchange activities*, thus fostering the workings of the OMC (Ferrera, Matsaganis, and Sacchi 2002), including the peer reviews in social inclusion which began in 2004.⁸ As the subsequent country studies in this volume show, many of the procedural effects associated with a strengthening of the social inclusion NGOs and building a non-state support base for the OMC were supported by this Action Programme.

The Member States then prepared their next set of NAPs/SI in 2003, covering the period of 2003-5, and submitted updates in 2004, while the newly acceding Member States also completed their first NAPs/ Inclusion for 2004-6. The EU institutions responded by using these documents (and other relevant sources) for the preparation of Joint Reports in 2004, 2005 and 2006, adopted jointly by the Commission and the Council (European Commission 2004; 2005a; 2006a), and the Commission's 2005 Report on Social Inclusion (2005b). The process of producing these NAPs and Joint Reports, together with their influence on policy-making at national and EU level, is discussed in subsequent chapters.

2.2 Pensions (2001)

While the OMC/SI was launched mainly at the initiative of actors concerned with social issues, the OMC on pensions (OMC/P) was a reaction to both economic and social developments. On the one

hand, with the establishment of a Single Market, EU members began to think about promoting labour mobility through the removal of obstacles associated with social security payments and benefits, as well as fostering financial market integration with respect to private occupational and individual pension plans (Clark 2003; Vanhercke 2009, 3). Moreover, as EMU was anchored in a hard currency paradigm with clearly articulated budget requirements, containing future pension liabilities became a top concern in an era of demographic ageing. Not surprisingly, in 1999 the Member States were invited – in the context of the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines (BEPG) – to ‘review pension and health care spending in order to be able to cope with the financial burden on welfare spending of the ageing population’ (European Commission 1999). On the other hand, and partially reacting to the initiatives taken by economically oriented actors, socially oriented actors began embracing the idea of an OMC/P that would also consider the social purposes of pensions (Vanhercke 2009).

The Lisbon summit of March 2000 then offered an opportunity to formally begin discussions on an OMC/P. Most importantly, the Council gave the recently established High-Level Working Party on Social Protection a mandate to prepare ‘a study on the future evolution of social protection from a long-term point of view, giving particular attention to the sustainability of pensions systems in different time frameworks up to 2020 and beyond, where necessary’ (European Commission 2000c). The group was to take into account the work of the Economic Policy Committee (EPC),⁹ which was preparing its own report on the sustainability of European pensions systems at the time. In June 2000, the Interim High-Level Group presented its first report, which emphasised that the key challenge for pension reform was the development of a ‘clear vision’ as to how pension systems can be adapted in such a way that they continue to ‘provide people with a securely financed, adequate income after retirement, an income to replace earnings or derived income during working life. This has to be achieved while maintaining a sense of fairness and solidarity’ (Council 2000b). In November, the EPC then published its report, outlining two future pension scenarios: a current, unfavourable scenario which assumed little policy change, and a second favourable ‘Lisbon scenario’ in which several adjustments were assumed to be undertaken. Based on the findings of the Lisbon scenario, the EPC articulated specific policy recommendations, which included (a) delaying

retirement, (b) a gradual reduction of public debt, (c) a stronger link between contributions and benefit levels, and (d) an increase in the use of privately funded schemes. The Interim High Level Group then issued its own recommendations in an intermediate report published also in November 2000. The recommendations mainly focused on increasing employment levels, while stressing that issues related to the 'social sustainability' of pension reforms needed as much attention as financial issues. Hence, the involvement of the Interim High Level Group (later SPC) was seen as an important step to put forward a more balanced approach, 'reducing the hegemony of the "economic" interests' (Lodge 2007).

The Stockholm European Council in March 2001 then made challenges associated with demographic ageing a key focal point, while emphasizing that the OMC was an 'important tool for progress' (European Council 2001b). The Göteborg European Council in June, in turn, endorsed 'three broad principles for securing the long-term sustainability of pension systems', including 'safeguarding the capacity of systems to meet their social objectives, maintaining their financial sustainability and meeting changing societal needs' (European Council 2001c). These objectives were then further developed and a total of 11 specific objectives for pensions reforms jointly agreed upon in a report by the SPC and the EPC (SPC and EPC 2001). When the Laeken European Council in December 2001 then 'noted' this report (2001a), the OMC in the field of pensions was effectively launched (Marlier et al. 2007, 24).

In spring 2002, the EU Member States drafted their first National Strategy Reports (rather than action plans), which were then published in September. Based on the NSRs, the Commission and the Council then produced their first Synthesis Report in 2003, in which national strategies were evaluated and good practices identified (European Commission and Council 2003). In 2005, the Member States submitted a second round of strategy reports, which the Commission then used to produce a new Synthesis Report (European Commission 2006b).

The parallel development of key indicators proved to be difficult and took longer than expected (European Commission 2001, 9). Accordingly, the Commission used cross-country comparisons for the 2003 Joint Report on Pensions, while the work of common indicators remained

'very much in progress' (European Commission and Council 2003, 98). A major breakthrough was reached through the completion of two substantial reports by the SPC in 2004, one on the Member States' *replacement rates* (2004), which was subsequently updated and expanded by the SPC ISG (2006; 2009), and the other on *working lives*, in which the Member States' effective retirement ages were calculated and presented (SPC 2004). These reports laid a solid foundation for common indicators and, in 2005, a first set of indicators was produced jointly by the SPC and EPC (SPC and EPC 2005).¹⁰

Based on calculations by the EPC, it became clear that the public pension pillar would not be sufficient to guarantee adequate pensions in the future. Accordingly, the SPC was asked to produce a report on *privately* managed pensions, which was published in 2005 (SPC 2005) and updated in 2008 (SPC 2008b). Over time, a clear reform trajectory emerged, which included more and longer employment, a reduction of public pension liabilities (in a context of generally reducing public deficits), the encouragement of additional, occupational and private pensions, and securing access to pensions for all groups in society.

2.3 Health and long-term care (2004)

In principle, the foundations of an OMC on health and long-term care (OMC/H-LTC) were also laid down in the 'concerted strategy'. Likewise, the Göteborg Council meeting of June 2001 foresaw a rather swift launch of an OMC in the area of health and long-term care. However, despite reaching an early agreement that the long-term objectives for EU health policy coordination should include 'accessibility', 'quality' and 'financial sustainability of systems', the Member States failed to commit to an OMC/H-LTC in 2002 and again in early 2004 (Hervey and Vanhercke 2010). A breakthrough only became possible during an Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO) Council meeting in October 2004, after the Commission had successfully framed the OMC in terms of the 'ageing agenda', which was far less controversial (Hervey and Vanhercke 2010). Subsequently, the SPC ISG began to discuss which indicators to use (European Commission 2006d, 40),¹¹ while the Member States submitted their first short 'Preliminary Policy Statements' (but no reports) in 2005.¹²

A full launch of a separate OMC/H-LTC was never realised, however, due to the streamlining of the three social OMCs in 2006 (see Section 3, below).

The slow progress of the OMC/H-LTC stems from at least two mutually reinforcing factors. First, in contrast to social inclusion and pensions, health is a ‘very crowded law and policy-making space’ (Vanhercke 2010, 118), where ‘bureaucratic rivalry’ and ‘downright infighting’ characterise relationships (Greer 2011, 196). While DG EMPL organises the Social OMC – including health and long-term care – DG Health and Consumer Protection (SANCO) traditionally figures as the ‘focal point’ for EU public health issues, often with its own initiatives and ‘special groups’ (Greer 2011, 195; Schulte 2010, 285). But other DGs are also critical players, defending their interests, including DG Enterprise and Industry (given the ‘high stakes’ of the pharmaceutical companies), DG Internal Market and Services, and – of course – DG Economic and Financial Affairs. Hence, EU-level decisions are only made after long deliberation and bargaining, while it remains often unclear which DG is ‘in charge’ of setting the health agenda. Second, not only do Member States only vary greatly with respect to their national health systems, but the selection of indicators also proved extremely difficult. The quality of a health care system is very difficult to assess and often based on subjective measures when persons are asked how they feel about a service or about their health (Schulte 2010). Hence, selecting health indicators is much more (politically) sensitive than either the field of social inclusion (where Member States ‘easily’ agreed that child poverty, for instance, is undesirable) or pensions (where systems can – at least at the macro level – be compared by looking at costs, replacement rates, and risk groups). Unsurprisingly, many Member States remained ‘strongly averse to formalizing the debate about health care at the EU level’ (Hervey and Vanhercke 2010, 116).

3 A new architecture: The core features of the Social OMC 2006-10

3.1 Redirecting the Lisbon Strategy and the launch of the Social OMC

During the years 2000-2005 the EU’s flagship Lisbon Strategy was built on the premise that it is possible to achieve the strategic goal of moving towards a knowledge-based economy by combining economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion (European Council 2000a).¹³

However, the initial momentum of the Lisbon Strategy dissipated within only a few years. The High Level Group chaired by Wim Kok (former Dutch Prime Minister) established by the European Council to carry out an independent mid-term review came to a blunt conclusion: the Lisbon Strategy was insufficiently focused, as it is 'about everything and thus about nothing', and 'too many targets will be seriously missed' (Kok 2004, 11, 16). According to this report, the OMC that the Lisbon Strategy relied upon for its implementation did not fulfil expectations and needed more effective 'naming, shaming and faming' mechanisms (Kok 2004, 43).

A new Commission under the presidency of José Manuel Durão Barroso took office in 2005, in an EU enlarged to 25 members and with a majority of centre-right governments. While the new Commission rejected the Kok High-Level Group's recommendation to strengthen the Lisbon Strategy's naming, shaming, and faming instruments, it advanced – with the consent of the Member States – substantial changes in the Lisbon Strategy's overall architecture. Most importantly, the 'new' Lisbon Strategy would focus on growth and jobs (European Commission 2005c; European Council 2005), while fusing the European Employment Guidelines of the EES with the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines (BEPGs) into a single set of 24 Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs. This integration effectively ended the 'equilateral triangle' envisioned by the original Lisbon Agenda, namely giving equal weight to economic, employment, and social policy objectives. The social objectives were not included in the integrated guidelines¹⁴ and the OMCs in the social field were left outside the 'core' Lisbon policy process, although their messages were expected to inform the relevant parts of the National Reform Programmes and Commission's Annual Progress Reports (Marlier et al. 2007, 28).

The strained link to the re-launched Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs became one of the defining features of the Social OMC in the years 2006-10. Officially, the European Council repeatedly affirmed that social policies remain a key part of EU agenda; indeed a 'close interaction' with the Lisbon objectives became one of the three overarching objectives of the Social OMC. Cross-fertilization between the streamlined Social OMC and the re-launched Lisbon Strategy was to be assured through the mechanisms of 'feeding-in and feeding-out,' whereby the former 'fed in' to the growth and employment objectives, while the latter 'fed out' to advance social cohesion goals

(Zeitlin 2008, 438). Yet in practice, stakeholders and researchers found little empirical evidence of 'feeding in' or 'out' (cf. Frazer and Marlier 2008; Frazer and Marlier 2009) and many resented what they saw as the symbolic 'downgrading' of social policy in the hierarchy of EU priorities (Daly 2010).

Another defining feature of social policy coordination in 2006-10 was the 'internal' streamlining of processes in social inclusion, pensions, and health/LTC into a single Social OMC. The integrated process was launched in 2006 when the Spring European Council endorsed a Communication from the European Commission outlining the new framework of coordination (2005d).¹⁵ The main purpose was to enhance 'the quality and coherence' of 'socio-economic governance of the EU' and make the cooperation on social protection 'more efficient and less burdensome' (European Commission 2003, 4). By bringing together three social policy fields which are substantially interdependent but often treated separately in institutional terms, many hoped that synergies could be generated and the treatment of complex and multi-dimensional challenges improved. In effect, the policy discussion in 2006-10 devoted a lot attention to the questions of whether the three strands communicated with each other and decreased coordination costs, or, alternatively, whether it was just a familiar case of 'EU spin' trying to construct distinct areas as single policy (for a review of this discussion see Chapter 3, this volume).

3.2 The common objectives, indicators and the reporting cycle

With the introduction of a single Social OMC, in 2006 the Spring European Council adopted 12 new common objectives (European Council 2006; drawing on European Commission 2005d; SPC and EPC 2006), underpinning the streamlined coordination framework in the field of social protection and social inclusion and consisting of three overarching objectives and a set of three specific objectives for each of the strands. In 2008 these objectives were reconfirmed for the next coordination cycle of 2008-10 (European Commission 2008d). Thus, the overarching objectives of the Social OMC 2006-10 were:

- social cohesion, equality between men and women and equal opportunities for all through adequate, accessible, financially sustainable, adaptable and efficient social protection systems and social inclusion policies;
- effective and mutual interaction between the Lisbon objectives of greater economic growth, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and with the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy;
- good governance, transparency and the involvement of stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of policy.

In accordance with the revised common objectives, a new monitoring framework was adopted in 2006. The common indicators were comprehensively reviewed, reorganised, and several gaps filled (European Commission 2006d on the basis of work by the SPC ISG). The new monitoring framework consisted of several sets of indicators: the overarching portfolio and separate portfolios for social inclusion, pensions, and health/ long-term care. Internally each portfolio contained EU indicators (for a comparative assessment of Member States' progress), national indicators (providing key information while not allowing for a direct cross-country comparison) and context information. In defining the social inclusion indicators the monitoring framework drew on the original Laeken indicators, which were supplemented by further work of the SPC ISG. Meanwhile, in the fields of pensions and health/ long-term care a set of indicators was adopted for a first time, drawing on earlier preparatory work. The portfolio remained incomplete, however, and indicators still needed to be developed in many areas, such as material deprivation, housing, and well-being and, especially health/long-term care (European Commission 2006d, 40). Some of these gaps were subsequently filled: in 2008 the SPC adopted a new list of indicators for the monitoring of health and long-term care as well as two new health-related indicators for the overarching portfolio (European Commission 2008c), while in 2009 it adopted indicators on material deprivation and housing (European Commission 2009a).

Despite the progress on common indicators, the lack of 'official' policy targets was an important feature characterising the Social OMC before 2010 and differentiating it from economic and employment policy coordination.¹⁶ The Commission had proposed targets on decreasing the at-risk-of poverty rate and child poverty in its original contribution to the Lisbon European Council as early as 2000 but the Member States postponed the decision by stating that 'adequate targets' on eradication of poverty were to be agreed by the end of that year (European Council 2000a; Armstrong 2010, 81). No such agreement was reached by that date, but the Nice summit hinted at a 'regularly updated scoreboard' to monitor progress on European Social Agenda (European Council 2000b). There was no consensus, however, among the Member States on the need for quantitative league table comparisons within the Social OMC. In 2002 the SPC rejected the Commission's proposal for a target based on the at-risk-of-poverty rate, arguing it was inconsistent with the multidimensional approach to poverty, a fear which was at the time shared by the European Platform of Social NGOs (Armstrong 2010, 82–83). Conversely, by the second part of 2000s the social NGOs had become vocal advocates of the need for 'hard targets' (EAPN 2008) and the Commission returned to this idea, stating that setting quantitative targets would help to improve 'political commitment and visibility' of the Social OMC (European Commission 2008e, 17).

Starting in 2006, the Member States prepared reports on social inclusion (the NAPs), pensions and health/long term care as a single package under the title of National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (or National Strategy Reports – NSRs). The NSRs started with key messages and a common overview, aimed at providing an integrated approach and contextualising policy developments in a wider socio-economic context. This chapter was followed by three policy sections, one for each policy domain, and concluded by a brief annex with good practice examples. The drafting and content of the NSRs was harmonised through guidance documents, which put strict limits on the actual size of the documents (up to 42 or 65 pages) (European Commission 2006c; European Commission 2008a).¹⁷ However, in contrast to the other key economic and employment governance processes there were no formal policy guidelines.¹⁸

While in 2001-5 the Member States had to prepare some kind of report each year, in the streamlined OMC there were only two reporting cycles: 2006-8 and 2008-10. The intervening years (2007, 2009) were considered 'light' or 'thematic' years without reporting obligations. In preparation for these years the Commission circulated questionnaires on specific topics to the Member States and used their answers in producing the subsequent Joint Report. All the diverse formats of deliberation, reporting and learning under the OMC were at least partly directed at these specific topics, for example, in 2007 – reducing child poverty, promoting longer working lives, reducing inequalities in health outcomes, and in 2009 – reducing homelessness and housing exclusion, improving the effectiveness and efficiency of healthcare spending, and the implications of crisis for pension systems. Among these themes, child poverty (2007) and homelessness and housing exclusion (2009) received the most attention and visibility.

Every year starting in 2005¹⁹ the European Commission drafted Joint Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, based on the national reports as well as Eurostat statistics, studies prepared by the expert networks, peer review documents, Member States' responses to thematic questionnaires and other sources (European Commission 2005a; 2006a; 2007; 2008b; 2009b; 2010a). These reports were then discussed in the SPC, adopted by the EPSCO Council and, finally, submitted to the Spring European Council. There was in fact a larger package of documents produced – not only the Joint Report, but also a Commission staff working document (or a supporting document) providing an analytical background to the Joint Report and drawing comparisons between Member States based on national reports and Eurostat data. In addition, during the full reporting years the Commission prepared country profiles,²⁰ giving its assessment of the national reports. The EU institutions did not, however, provide formal recommendations – another important difference from the other policy processes coordinated under the aegis of the Lisbon Strategy.

3.3 Generating evidence, exchanging experience, fostering mutual learning

The OMC also had a mutual learning side, aimed at supporting the exchange of evidence and experience through peer reviews, expert networks, discussions with social NGOs, events and

conferences. The Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), which introduced the first provisions encouraging coordination of national social policies in the area of combating social exclusion emphasised specifically ‘improving knowledge, developing exchanges of information and best practices’, ‘evaluating experiences’ (Article 137, EEC). The Nice Treaty (2001) retained this provision and expanded its reach to a wider number of social policies. The various mutual learning formats were expected to provide evidence and forums for deliberation which could help policy actors to adjust their preferences so that they could work together towards shared objectives.

The concept of the peer reviews is straightforward: a meeting of knowledgeable persons sharing broadly similar status in their countries (for example, experts, policy makers, NGO representatives) to deliberate on a policy question. Several types of peer reviews took place under the umbrella of the Social OMC. Firstly, there were peer reviews within the Social Protection Committee. The key participants were SPC members, meeting usually once a year and focussed on discussing the NSRs prepared by the Member States. Secondly, thematic peer reviews (also called PROGRESS peer reviews, with a reference to their funding source²¹) began in 2004 and were organised 8-10 times a year in one of the participating countries, with representatives from 7-8 Member States attending each individual seminar. In total, about 30-40 participants took part in a thematic peer review seminar, most lower/middle-level officials and independent experts from each participating MS and a few representatives from EU-level NGO networks such as EAPN and FEANTSA. During each one-and-a-half day seminar the participants debated a policy or programme presented by the host country and (frequently) went to on-site visits. There are examples of the peer review seminars contributing to policy development at the national and EU levels and feeding into Joint Reports and other documents (see Chapter 3 of this volume; OSE and PPMI 2012). In several cases, the peer review mechanism was mainstreamed as a policy tool: to enhance learning between regions in Belgium (Hamel and Vanhercke 2009, 105) or by certain NGOs (Armstrong 2010, 184).

The Commission has also been active in initiating the development of thematic expert networks in large variety of fields.²² Their general mission was to exchange ideas, develop a knowledge base, and encourage a comparative approach. They served as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the

Commission, which regularly asked them to provide analyses of the situation in the Member States and comment on documents submitted by national governments (Vanhercke and Lelie 2012). Two expert networks were directly involved in the operation of the Social OMC in the years 2006-10: the Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion and, since 2008/2009, the Analytical Support for the Socio-Economic Impact of Social Protection Reforms (ASISP) network.²³ At the request of the Commission, these networks provided comments on the social inclusion and social protection sections of the NRSs respectively and their analysis fed directly into the country profiles prepared by the Commission as part of the Joint Report process. The Commission can also request the networks or individual experts to produce *ad hoc* reports. The Social Inclusion network made an especially visible contribution to social policy coordination through publications on child poverty, in-work poverty, synergies between economic and social policies, among other issues (Frazer and Marlier 2007; Frazer and Marlier 2008; Frazer and Marlier 2010).

Involving civil society through social NGOs and their EU-level networks is another key aspect of the mutual learning process. There was a deliberate attempt by the Commission to encourage non-governmental actors to take part in transnational exchanges, conferences and discussions. The most visible and vocal stakeholders in the social policy process were the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), FEANTSA, the European Older People's Platform (AGE), the European Women's Lobby, the European Disability Forum, Eurochild, and Eurocities. Some of these groups benefited from financial support through the PROGRESS programme aimed at bringing together national organisations and helping them to build capacity necessary for playing an active role in EU-level policy making. There are a number of examples where the contribution of the NGO networks was recognised in the Joint Report and Supporting Document (EAPN, FEANTSA, Eurochild) (PPMI 2011; Gosmé 2012) and other official documents (Dierckx and Van Herck 2010 on EAPN). These non-governmental social actors helped to put several issues on the EU agenda, such as housing and social inclusion (Gosmé 2012) and played an important role in the decision to introduce the poverty target in the Europe 2020 strategy (Copeland and Daly 2012).

4 Social policy coordination under the Europe 2020 strategy²⁴

The Lisbon Strategy was set to expire in 2010 and thus the discussion on a future EU-flagship strategy started a few years earlier. It included voices from both governmental and non-governmental social actors, such as DG EMPL, the Social Protection Committee, social partners, social NGOs, social policy experts and academics (European Commission 2008d; 2010a; SPC 2009; Social Platform 2009; EAPN 2008; Marlier, Natali, and van Dam 2010; PPMI 2011; Zeitlin 2010). The majority of participants in this discussion acknowledged that the Social OMC was useful (although not without its flaws), but argued that it also needed further consolidation and reinforcement. The specific messages were diverse, but the key points were as follows. Firstly, the new strategy needed to bring social objectives back to the core of EU policy coordination. Secondly, there was a need, in the words of the Commission, to ‘adopt some of the methods and approaches’ used by the Lisbon Strategy (European Commission 2008d, 4) and in particular – to establish quantitative social targets and adopt country-specific recommendations. Next, the social stakeholders argued for actions to increase Member States’ commitment to the process and its domestic visibility, to develop the evidence base and analytical tools, to foster mutual learning (including the peer reviews), to encourage deliberation and stakeholder involvement, and to improve interaction between social and other policies. Finally, the discussion on the new strategy was conducted in the context of ‘the most severe recession in decades’ (SPC 2009) which added pressure on EU leaders to demonstrate that the new strategy would have a meaningful social content.

Following a public consultation on the post-Lisbon Strategy launched in November 2009 (European Commission 2009c) – which triggered a rather heated debate (Vanhercke 2011; Copeland and Daly 2012) – the Commission published a Communication on the Europe 2020 Strategy in early March 2010 (European Commission 2010b). The European Council discussed the Commission’s proposal in its Spring Summit (March 25-6, 2010), endorsing the overall approach and some of the key governance proposals (European Council 2010a), while the strategy was finalised and formally adopted at the summit on June 17, 2010 (European Council 2010b). The strategy clearly makes an effort to address the key concern of the social actors by setting ‘inclusive growth’ as one of its three

‘mutually reinforcing’ priorities (the other two being ‘smart growth’ and ‘sustainable growth’). In July and October 2010 the ECOFIN and EPSCO councils adopted, respectively, the broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States and of the Union (Council 2010a) and the guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (Council 2010b), which together form the Integrated Europe 2020 guidelines. Among the 10 integrated guidelines one is explicitly devoted to social issues (Guideline 10: Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty). Although the title of the guideline refers to poverty and social inclusion, only one of the three pillars of the Social OMC in 2006-10, the actual content of the guideline also refers to the objectives of the others, notably the need to modernise ‘social protection systems, including pensions and access to healthcare’ in order to ‘ensure adequate income support and services [...] whilst remaining socially sustainable’ (Council 2010b, 6).

The European Council of 17 June 2010 also met another key demand of the social advocacy groups by adopting the headline poverty target: ‘to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion’. The target was adopted after a very intensive debate with some stakeholders pushing for a much more ambitious figure while others expressing strong doubts about its feasibility, measurability, conceptual basis and potential cost to the Member States (Copeland and Daly 2012; EurActiv 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; EUobserver 2010). As a compromise solution the target is to be measured on the basis of three indicators in order to take account of diversity of Member States’ social contexts: the at-risk-of-poverty rate, material deprivation and people living in households with very low work intensity (the Member States are allowed to set their national targets on the basis of the most appropriate indicators). Unofficially, the figure of 20 million constitutes a 16.7 per cent reduction of poverty rates across the EU over the 10 year period as under this definition around 120 million people could have been considered as living in poverty (Atkinson et al. 2010, 126).

The Europe 2020 strategy included seven flagship initiatives aimed, in the Commission’s words, ‘to catalyse progress under each priority theme’ (European Commission 2010b, 4). Among these was the European Platform against Poverty (EPAP, charged with ensuring that ‘the benefits of

growth and jobs are widely shared and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are enabled to live in dignity' (European Commission 2010b, 4)). In combination with the strategy's priorities and headline targets, the flagship initiatives were intended to promote the thematic approach which was set to become one of the two 'pillars' of the reinforced economic governance under the Europe 2020 strategy (the other pillar being the country reporting, see the following paragraph) (European Commission 2010b, 4). Although the social NGOs cautiously welcomed the EPAP (EurActiv 2010a; 2010d), this flagship initiative emerged in the Europe 2020 strategy with little prior consideration, consultation or systematic thought, and apparently surprised many key stakeholders (Frazer et al. 2010). On the positive side, the introduction of the EPAP meant the recognition on the part of the EU leaders that Europe 2020 has to include a prominent social message. On the other hand, this led to a protracted discussion as to whether the EPAP would strengthen the OMC or replace it, as well as whether its remit is broader or more focussed than the latter's (for various positions on this question see European Commission 2011d; SPC 2011a; Armstrong 2012).

Finally, implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy is based on a reporting and decision-making cycle that integrates macroeconomic and fiscal surveillance as well as thematic coordination (with poverty and social inclusion as one of the themes). The governance architecture of Europe 2020 introduces the concept of the 'European semester': the first half of each year when EU institutions together with the Member States decide on the EU's priorities and actions to be taken at European and national levels. The cycle starts with the Commission adopting the so-called Annual Growth Survey (European Commission 2011a; 2011b; 2012) identifying the key economic challenges faced by the EU and suggesting priorities for action. On the basis of this Survey, the March European Council endorses annual EU and national-level priorities, provides orientations for action and reflects on the implementation of the previous cycle. In April the Member States submit their National Reform Programmes (covering the economic and employment guidelines, including Guideline 10 on promoting social inclusion) and their Stability or Convergence Programmes (these are fiscal surveillance instruments based on the Stability and Growth Pact) which are expected to take into consideration messages from the Annual Growth Survey and the Spring European Council. In May,

the Commission assesses these programmes and proposes Country-Specific Recommendations, which are then discussed and in some cases amended by the committees preparing the work of the EPSCO and ECOFIN Councils (EMCO, SPC, EPC, and the Economic and Financial Committee [EFC]), endorsed by the European Council and finally (in late June/July) adopted formally by the Council). Although most of the recommendations focus on economic and employment reforms, an increasing proportion also address social cohesion issues, including combating poverty and social exclusion.²⁵

Under the Europe 2020 strategy the Member States are no longer formally requested to produce NSRs and national reporting on social issues is incorporated into the National Reform Programmes, which the Commission considers Member States' primary contribution to the European Semester. At its own initiative, endorsed by the EPSCO Council, the SPC decided in 2011 to 'reinvigorate' the Social OMC in the context of Europe 2020 by updating the common objectives, continuing regular strategic reporting, enhancing mutual learning, strengthening analytical capacity (including development of the common indicators), and improving stakeholders' involvement (SPC 2011a; SPC 2011c). Member States were invited to prepare regular National Social Reports, to be developed in 'close partnership' with civil society stakeholders as well as subnational authorities, and submitted alongside the NRPs. These revived NSRs provide input into the SPC annual social situation report, which in turn feeds into the Annual Growth Survey (SPC 2012b). In 2012, 21 Member States submitted National Social Reports, which varied widely in length and quality. From 2013, the NSRs will continue on a biennial basis, with Member States required to submit shorter 'Complementary Questionnaires' in off years to report on reforms carried out across the Social OMC's three policy strands (Jessoula, Agostino, and Sabato 2013, 28; SPC 2013a). The Commission also withdrew from production of the SPSI Joint Reports, but these have been replaced by the SPC's own Social Europe Report (SPC 2013b), a punchier and more reader-friendly document which includes the same core features: Key Messages, country profiles, and an in-depth analysis of social trends in the EU.

In addition to taking primary responsibility for the continuation of the Social OMC, the SPC has established itself as a significant player in monitoring, reviewing, and assessing national reforms within the European Semester, alongside the economic and employment committees. Following

EMCO's lead, the SPC not only contributes to the Europe 2020 Joint Assessment Framework (JAF) for monitoring the Employment Guidelines (European Commission 2011c),²⁶ but has also developed its own Social Protection Performance Monitor (SPPM), which includes a 'dashboard' of overarching and context indicators to monitor the social dimension of Europe 2020 across all three pillars of the Social OMC, detailed country profiles, and common 'trends to watch' (SPC Indicators Sub-Group 2012). This extended social monitoring has gone hand in hand with a significant intensification of mutual surveillance and peer review. Whereas until 2011 SPC peer reviews occurred once a year and focused on the NSRs (see Section 3.3 above and Chapter 3, Section 4 below), now mutual surveillance activities are conducted throughout the year, with in-depth thematic reviews²⁷ in the autumn and country reviews of the NRPs (focused on Member States' response to the previous year's CSRs) in the spring (SPC 2012a). The thematic reviews in particular are aimed at fostering mutual learning and stimulating multilateral discussion on promising approaches to tackling specific policy challenges by inviting countries performing weakly in a particular area according to the SPPM indicators to examine those achieving better outcomes (SPC 2013c). At the same time, the SPC has also continued to organise an extensive programme of PROGRESS peer reviews, many of them focused on core themes related to Europe 2020, such as active inclusion, child poverty, setting national poverty targets, and improving the efficiency of social protection systems (Jessoula, Agostino, and Sabato 2013, 28–9 and Annex 2).

Such intensified social monitoring, mutual surveillance, and peer review in turn forms the basis for the SPC's input into the adoption of the CSRs, the culmination of the European Semester. Whereas in 2011 the SPC perceived its involvement in decision-making process around the CSRs as 'more symbolic than influential' (SPC 2011b), in 2012 the committee conducted a multilateral examination of the Commission's draft CSRs jointly with EMCO, and successfully proposed amendments on social issues to the Council. On the key issue of pensions, however, procedural ambiguities in the process blocked the SPC's proposed amendments from reaching the EPSCO Council, leaving decisions about the CSRs in this field to be taken by the EFC and the ECOFIN Council, who focused on financial sustainability rather than social adequacy (SPC 2013a; Council 2012a; for a

more extensive account, see Vanhercke 2013). This experience, which provoked extensive mobilisation over political 'ownership' of social issues by the EPSCO Council as well as the SPC (see for example EPSCO 2012), appears to have resulted in a substantially revised procedural framework for the 2013 European Semester, based on a clearer allocation of responsibilities and cooperation in areas of overlapping competences between the various committees involved (Council 2012b). Thus the SPC reviewed the implementation of the 2012 CSRs on pensions jointly with the EPC, and was scheduled to meet with the EPC/EFC and EMCO to finalise amendments to the 2013 CSRs on pensions and health, and on social inclusion aspects of employment respectively. In each case, amendments were to be justified by the results of the multilateral surveillance reviews conducted within the committees, and supported by qualified majority voting to test the support among Member States for changes to the Commission's proposals, a step which for the SPC as for EMCO marked a significant departure from its normal consensual working methods. Since under the 'comply or explain' rules of the European Semester, the Council is obliged to provide a written explanation of its reasons for modifying the Commission's recommendations, the SPC was also expected to produce a formal report on the CSR examinations, justifying its amendments (SPC 2013d; SPC 2013e; SPC 2013f; EMCO 2013).

At the time of writing in June 2013, it thus seemed clear that the Social OMC would continue on a dual footing, operating both as an integral component of Europe 2020 and the European Semester, and as an independent process with its own agenda, working methods, tools, and outputs (cf. Vanhercke 2013). Perhaps the weakest component of this emergent architecture for EU social policy coordination was the involvement of non-governmental stakeholders within the Member States, where the continuation of voluntary NSRs did not compensate for the very limited involvement of civil society and subnational actors in the preparation of the NRPs (EAPN 2012; European Commission 2013a, 45–6). Here, too, however, there were signs of movement, as the Commission's Social Investment Package issued in February 2013 announced that 20 per cent of all ESF funding would be earmarked for 'promoting social inclusion and combating poverty', and that access to this funding would be conditional on the preparation of national poverty reduction

strategies involving civil society stakeholders and providing ‘a sufficient evidence base to monitor developments’ (European Commission 2013b, 16, 22–3; European Commission 2013a, 51).

In the spring of 2013, against the backdrop of rising unemployment and political unrest across the EU, the President of the European Council launched a far-reaching discussion of the social dimension of Economic and Monetary Union, including the question of how to limit ‘excessive social divergences’ (European Council 2013). In response, the EPSCO Council called for a strengthening of the governance role of the Social OMC, which it termed the EU’s ‘primary tool for co-ordination of social policies’, building on the guidelines, monitoring, mutual surveillance, peer review, and benchmarking instruments developed within the European Semester. These instruments in turn could be used to create a Scoreboard, equivalent to that used in the Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure, to alert ministers ‘to the danger of serious employment and social imbalances arising that could threaten the stability of the EMU’, and achieve a more balanced relationship between social, employment and economic objectives within the framework of the European Semester, including the Commission’s Annual Growth Survey and CSRs (Ministers of Employment and Social Affairs of the EPSCO Council 2013). Whatever comes of these proposals, which remains uncertain at the time of writing, they demonstrate the resilience of the Social OMC as the primary and indispensable vehicle for EU social policy governance. They likewise highlight the contemporary value, for both academics and policy practitioners, of a careful empirical assessment of the institutional design and national influence of the Social OMC in its previous incarnation before 2010, which is the focus of the subsequent chapters of this book.

Notes

¹ From 1975-1994, the European Commission funded three Poverty Programmes, which included the co-funding of pilot schemes (testing and developing new methods), research (to improve the understanding of the

nature, causes, scope and mechanics of poverty) and the exchange of good practice regarding the fight against poverty (national reports) (Vanhercke 2012, 5).

² The Essen process, in turn, built its governance ideas on the benchmarking and surveillance mechanisms developed for EMU see Armstrong (2010).

³ With the launch of the European Community Household Panel in 1994, the Commission also gained access to comparative data and was in charge of coordinating a variety of technical issue (Vanhercke 2012, 8).

⁴ Similarly, the *Social Action Programme 1998-2000* also framed social inclusion issues ‘in the light of employment policy’ (Geyer 2000, 245–261).

⁵ For a detailed account of EES governance structures and its evolution, see Weishaupt and Lack (2011).

⁶ The Joint Inclusion Report drew on the material presented in the NAPs as well as the discussions carried out during a SPC peer review.

⁷ As early as 2000 the Commission began lobbying for an agreement on specific targets for poverty reduction (European Commission 2000a; 2002b), in the same fashion as the employment rate targets were introduced in the Lisbon Strategy (European Council 2000a). These proposals, however, failed to materialise due to the lack of support in the SPC.

⁸ The Community Action Program was succeeded by PROGRESS (2007-2013), the Program for Economic and Social Solidarity.

⁹ The EPC was first set up in 1974 to assist the Council (Economic and Finance, ECOFIN) and to offer advice to both ECOFIN and the Commission. EPC members include two national representatives from each EU country as well as two Commission and two ECB representatives.

¹⁰ This report has also been updated several times thereafter, and the EU recommendation to encourage longer working lives was forcefully repeated by the Social Protection Committee (2007; 2008a). These trends were outlined in 2010, when another Joint Report on Pensions was published (EPC et al. 2010) as well as a Green Paper on adequate, safe and sustainable pensions (European Commission 2010c).

¹¹ A first list of indicators was then presented in the 2005 Guidance Notes for the preparation of the National Strategy Reports (SPC and EPC 2005).

¹² The Commission responded with Review of Preliminary National Statements, which became a part of the 2006 Joint Report (European Commission 2006a; Marlier et al. 2007).

¹³ Indeed, the Nice European Council in its endorsement of the European Social Agenda stated very forcefully: 'this Agenda constitutes a major step towards the reinforcement and modernisation of the European social model, which is characterised by the *indissoluble link* between economic performance and social progress' (European Council 2000b, emphasis by the authors).

¹⁴ However, some of the employment guidelines were of direct social relevance: (16) to implement employment policies aimed at achieving full employment, improving quality and productivity at work, and strengthening social and territorial cohesion; (18) to ensure inclusive labour markets for job-seekers and disadvantaged people.

¹⁵ This new coordination framework itself built on discussions which had started as early as 2002-3 (European Commission 2002c; European Commission 2003).

¹⁶ For example, in the area of employment, the Lisbon Strategy set the following targets to be achieved by 2010: an overall employment rate of 70 per cent; an employment rate for women of over 60 per cent, an employment rate of 50 per cent among older workers.

¹⁷ However not all the Member States adhered to these limits, while others complained that such limitations forced them to leave out important contextual information and thus made the documents less useful (see Chapter 3, this volume).

¹⁸ The common objectives were to play the role of such guidelines.

¹⁹ The first Joint Report combining social inclusion and social protection was prepared in 2005, as one of the first steps towards the streamlined OMC (European Commission 2003).

²⁰ In this exercise the Commission was helped by the expert networks financed through the PROGRESS programme.

²¹ For more information about the PROGRESS programme see its web-site at <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=327> (checked 3 March 2013).

²² Their members were usually one or two researchers, academics or practitioners from each Member State. The expert networks typically met one or several times a year and produced a number of reports.

²³ 'Analytical Support on the Socio-economic Impact of Social Protection Reforms in the EU Member States and EFTA/EEA, Candidate and Pre-candidate Countries'.

²⁴ This section draws extensively on ongoing joint research by Jonathan Zeitlin and Bart Vanhercke. For a fuller discussion of recent developments, see (Vanhercke 2013).

²⁵ In 2012, 17 CSRs addressed pensions, 5 health and long-term care, 7 poverty reduction, 3 Roma Inclusion, and 5 the effectiveness of social protection more generally, though the pension recommendations in particular were criticized for their narrow focus on financial sustainability (SPC 2012a). On poverty reduction recommendations, see also Jessoula et al. (2013, 26–7).

²⁶ The JAF involves quantitative and qualitative assessments of Member States' performance in implementing the Employment Guidelines, based on key indicators for each policy area and analysis of the NRPs, coupled with identification of key challenges, areas of good outcomes and best practices.

²⁷ In 2012 the in-depth reviews focused on pensions and active inclusion; in 2013, on three 'trends to watch' highlighted by the SPPM: rising child poverty and social exclusion; the increasing number of working poor; and increasing poverty risks for jobless households (SPC 2013c).

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