



Event	Better Regulation Workshop 2006
Author	Victoria Parkin and Hannah Branston
Date and place	05 December 2006 Social Platform Annual Conference, Building Flagey, Place Sainte Croix
Organised by	EPHA
Notes	

On 5 December, EPHA organised a workshop entitled “Protecting Social Values through Better Regulation?” as part of the Social Platform's annual conference, “Social Values and Democracy; Renewing the Guiding Principles of the European Union”.

The workshop was designed to give NGOs an understanding of the Better Regulation process and how it might effect their work.

Tamsin Rose and Florence Berteletti-Kemp, EPHA Vice-President gave a joint presentation, which was followed by an interactive workshop. The event started with a brainstorm on participant's perceptions of “Better Regulation” (BR) which highlighted the complexity of the term and concept of BR. Interestingly, monitoring of legislative implementation and compliance were not mentioned.

The presentation outlined the history and evolution of the current discourse on BR in the EU; key aspects of BR; the role of the NGO sector; and differing viewpoints on the effectiveness of the BR process. Better Regulation emerged as a result of the Lisbon Agenda in 2000 to make “the EU the world's most dynamic, competitive knowledge-based economy by 2010”. Better Regulation has therefore tended to mean focusing on cutting red-tape and bureaucracy in order to accelerate economic growth. A Commission communication (2001) committed to a 25% reduction of EU regulation as measured based on number of printed pages. This approach has resulted in social and environmental factors receiving less weight in the EU policy arena.

Workshop participants shared their experience of BR from a number of European countries. As social NGOs active at national level, many people had been involved in the Open Method of Coordination and had therefore been integrated into policy-making processes. Despite

these positive developments, concerns were raised about lack of transparency in government decision-making, difficulties in access to political authorities and deficiencies in consultation.

The workshop continued by asking the questions 'what do we need in order to better engage with BR?' and 'how do we ensure that BR protects our values and interests?'. The following outcomes were developed and presented to the "Ideas Cafe" for all conference participants.

- Capacity building is needed to increase knowledge of BR mechanisms, for example, the right to access documents.
- NGOs should exercise their right to access documents to increase transparency – if documents are not made available in 15 working days, record and complain.

Website address to access more information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/registre.cfm?CL=en>

- Change culture of BR by asking questions - "how do you collect your data"
- The 3rd Sector is the 7th largest economy in the world - NGOs need to recognise themselves as consumers, producers and employers and therefore need to be much stronger in taking their place in the internal market.
- There are ways to overcome the cost of accessing data and information:
 - DG Internal Market created a small budget line for consumer groups to access information, therefore a precedent has already been set in the EC.
 - DG Research funds "Science Shops" - A network of academics who will undertake preliminary research on behalf of civil society.
- NGOs should widen their perspective and target other DGs, e.g. DG Internal Market.

Website to access information about science shops:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/page_en.cfm?id=3206

The workshop was attended by 30 delegates and the discussions were very lively. Many participants commented that they had learnt a lot about a new topic and were inspired to go back to their organisations and build awareness of BR among their colleagues and members.