

Policy Notes

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The Europe 2020 Strategy and its implications for Canada¹

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief explains the core aspects of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the European Union's ten year economic and employment plan. It will discuss the priorities of the plan, with greater focus on research and education policies, and the ideas on which these goals are based. It will also discuss the governance mechanisms and implementation of Europe 2020. After assessing the issues and implications of the Strategy for Europe, this brief will consider the implications for Canada, in terms of direct effects on relations between Canada and the EU, and in terms of opportunities for Canada to learn from Europe 2020. Finally, this policy brief has three recommendations for the Canadian federal government: to establish a national institutional presence in the realm of higher education; to increase funding for social science and humanities research; and to elucidate a clear and coherent vision for the Canadian economy.

At Issue

There are a number of questions this policy brief seeks to address:

What is the Europe 2020 Strategy? What is its significance for research, innovation

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and higher education policies in Europe?

Are the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy – particularly those pertaining to the new education and innovation policy initiatives – compatible with Canadian research and education priorities?

How will these policy initiatives affect EU-Canada relations?

What can Canada learn from the EU experience of trying to coordinate education and innovation policy at the European level? What can be learned from the governance mechanisms proscribed by the Strategy? What can be learned from the legitimacy issues surrounding the Strategy?

The Europe 2020 Strategy

The Europe 2020 Strategy is the ten year economic and employment plan which lays out goals and targets, as well as the means to achieve them, in an overarching mission statement for the future of the European Union. The blueprint for this kind of policy statement was the Lisbon Agenda; an economic plan from the 2000 European Council meeting that was executed (and reformed) by the European Commission. With the Lisbon Agenda expiring in 2010, and in the context of a highly uncertain global financial environment in the late 2000s, the EU established new goals and governance structures for the period 2010 until 2020. Europe 2020 is this new plan, ostensibly balancing economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. However, the core idea behind Europe 2020 – here referred to as 'neo-schumpeterianism' – has remained consistent since the Lisbon Agenda.

Neo-schumpeterians advocate for endogenous economic growth that is open to market-like competition yet guided and facilitated by the state (or a state-like governance network). There are different vari-

ants, but a common thread in neo-schumpeterian economic theory is the belief that political actors can facilitate long-term development and modernization of the economy through (seed) investments in human capital, innovation and knowledge.² There is the expectation of 'value added' spillovers and positive externalities in all sectors of the economy and even many sectors of society (i.e., all policy domains become functions of economic decision-making). Exogenous factors – like international comparative advantage or external shocks – can still be influential, but domestic institutions can shelter advantaged sectors while allowing less robust or less competitive parts of the economy to fail. As a core idea behind the Europe 2020 Strategy, neo-schumpeterianism contends that innovation and human capital are the key drivers of a dynamic knowledge economy, while allowing a prominent market-making role for a governing body, in this case, the EU.

Policy Goals

The desired policy outcomes for Europe 2020 are tangible and measurable objectives. The Strategy has five 'headline' targets:

1. to raise the employment rate from the current 69% to at least 75%;
2. to have 3% of member states' GDP invested in research and development (R&D);
3. to reduce the share of early school leavers from the current 15% to 10% plus increase the share of the population aged 30–34 having completed

² The degree to which an innovative economy should be sheltered or facilitated delineates different schools of thought in neo-schumpeterian macro-economic theory. Aghion and Howitt (1992) caution against too much (or too little) market-shaping investment in innovation, whereas Freeman and Louça (2001) suggest that state actors must be aware of long-term innovation cycles and capitalize on them with large investments at critical moments.

tertiary education from 31% to at least 40%;

4. a 25% reduction in those living below national poverty lines;

5. to implement the 'Europe 20/20/20' strategy aimed at significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions (i.e., to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20% compared to 1990 levels, to increase to 20% the share of renewable energy in overall energy consumption, and to increase energy efficiency by 20%).

Like the Lisbon Agenda, the indicators for Europe 2020 remain quantitative and focused on GDP. Yet the Commission would also like to construct more nuanced and qualitative indicators for some targets. For example, the Commission would like to see a significant portion of R&D investment contributed by the private sector, and in light of this they are developing an indicator for innovation intensity; to track not only the amount but also the quality, source, and destination of R&D investment. Furthermore, these targets seem to signal a departure from the previous Lisbon Agenda in that social and environmental targets are better incorporated. However, a social agenda (and eventually a rather nominal environmental agenda) were part of the Lisbon Agenda as well, only to be subordinated to employment and growth when Member State economies continued to struggle in the early 2000s.

Governance and Implementation

The governance structure of the Strategy is based on an architecture of two 'pillars': a 'thematic approach' and 'country reporting'. The country reporting pillar is a feedback mechanism between Member States and the EU, which would allow Member States to develop country-specific growth strategies with guidance and coordination from the Commission – who would also keep the larger pan-European vision in

mind. This pillar is adapted from the primary governance mechanism of the Lisbon Agenda: the open method of coordination (OMC). The OMC is an intergovernmental governance tool which relies on voluntary communication between governments along with limited Commission guidance (through mechanisms such as stocktaking, benchmarking, peer review, and implicit naming-and-shaming) in order to affect a 'soft' coordination of national policy outputs rather than a 'hard' regulatory policy framework legislated from the EU. The country reporting pillar stiffens up elements of the OMC by making communication mandatory (and not just between states) and by giving the Commission a stronger coordinating role in terms of issuing policy 'recommendations' as well as warnings if Member States do not comply (although the penalty for non-compliance has yet to be determined). The basic Europe 2020 architecture has then been incorporated into a larger process – the European Semester – which coordinates general economic policy with the fiscal surveillance mandate of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP). All reporting and evaluation for both Europe 2020 targets and SGP responsibilities are to be done simultaneously to best coordinate the aims and means of each, while keeping their instruments and procedures legally separate. The intent of the new governance architecture is to build on the strength of already existing coordination instruments, like the OMC, and incorporate new decision-making procedures from the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon in order to instil greater ownership of the Europe 2020 Strategy for all actors involved.

The thematic approach combines the five targets mentioned above with more specific priorities and initiatives, which require action at both the EU and Member State level. This is meant to reflect an increased EU dimension in the interdependent Member State economies. The five targets are

implemented via seven flagship initiatives: 'Innovation Union', 'Youth on the move', 'A Digital Agenda for Europe'; 'Resource efficient Europe'; 'An industrial policy for the globalisation era'; 'An agenda for new skills and jobs'; and a 'European platform against poverty'. Although all seven action plans are inter-related, this brief will focus on the first two, because they are the core elements of the 'smart growth' pillar. The Innovation Union corresponds to the EU target on R&D investment, aiming to boost funding and re-focus innovation to tackle challenges facing European societies, such as climate change, energy and resource efficiency, health and demographic change. 'Youth on the move' corresponds to the target of increasing enrollment in higher education institutions, in order to increase the quality of human capital in Europe by enhancing the performance and international attractiveness of European higher education institutions, promoting student and instructor mobility, and facilitating youth employment. These thematic approaches intend to build up capacity for endogenous supply and demand of the 'products' of the new knowledge economies: skilled human capital plugged into technologically-innovative industries.

Innovation Union

The Innovation Union is the European Commission's response to causal beliefs about the importance of innovation and R&D as drivers of economic growth. Increasingly concerned about the lack of R&D spending in Europe (less than 2% of GDP, compared to 2.6% GDP in the United States and 3.4% GDP in Japan), the Commission wanted to improve conditions for private sector investment in terms of absolute amounts as well as the impact and composition of research spending. The Innovation Union implements a number of strategies that will link the public and private sectors, and facilitate partnerships

between industry and public institutions. The Commission's strategies include:

- A single EU Patent and improved intellectual property protection to protect business innovation, especially small-to-medium- enterprises;
- Fostering innovation at all levels of government through public procurement and 'European Innovation Partnerships';
- Subsidizing innovation which commercializes new technology, through the European Investment Bank and with increased use of structural funds under EU cohesion policy (some of which will be redirected from the Common Agricultural Policy fund);
- Strengthening the 'knowledge triangle' (of research, education and innovation) vis-à-vis the Young Innovative Companies programme, and the development of the European Institute of Technology, (modelled after the Massachusetts Institute of Technology),³
- Coordinating Member States to ensure a sufficient supply of science, maths and engineering graduates with entrepreneurial skills;
- Prioritizing knowledge expenditures through public spending and tax incentives for private R&D investments;
- Reforming national and regional R&D and innovation systems by way of 'smart specialization'. This refers to the clustering of research and innovation to achieve a critical mass for a national or regional comparative advantage in particular technologies ('RIS3 Strategies');
- Establishing a European Research Area by 2104, a kind of single market for the mobility of knowledge.
- Beyond 2014 the Innovation Union will be funded by 'Horizon 2020', a new financial instrument with an €80 billion budget. This replaces the Seventh

³ This reflects a wider move to emulate the American system of higher education where research activities are concentrated into less than 10% of HEIs.

Framework Programme for Research (FP7) expiring in 2013.

These strategies reflect not only a push towards the Europeanization of innovation and the modernization of research and development systems, it is also an effort to create demand across European economies. This flagship initiative is not exclusively demand-driven, because supply of innovative technology is critical to the EU's external/international dimension. However, within the European 'single market' for labour and capital, innovative technologies could be conceived as the demand-side of an EU knowledge economy. Creating this internal demand is a key aspect of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and the Innovation Union does this by emphasizing entrepreneurship, competition, and endogenous economic growth.

Youth on the move

'Youth on the move' is a response to causal beliefs about skilled human capital as an essential component to knowledge economies. The EU has focused on data that shows the comparative deficiency of European education and training systems. In Europe, 31% of those aged 25-34 have a university degree, compared to 40% in the US and over 50% in Japan. At a systemic level, only two European universities are in the world's top 20 of research universities according to the Shanghai index. Thus, the Commission has set a headline target of reducing the primary/secondary drop-out rate to just 10%, while increasing the share of the population aged 30-34 who have completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40% by 2020. The 'Youth on the move' flagship initiative hopes to improve human capital formation by investing in education and training that is directed towards better labour market integration. The Commission's strategies include:

- Enhancing the mobility of students and instructors via EU programmes like

Erasmus, but also by supporting the European Higher Education Area created by the Bologna Process;

- Modernizing the curricula, governance and financing of higher education systems (already underway via the Bologna Process);
- Promoting student entrepreneurialism through competitive funding mechanisms;
- Promoting the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (Life Long Learning);
- Facilitating youth employment through the Youth employment framework and the 'EURES job' scheme;
- Motivating the Member States to invest in education and training systems at all levels, in order to improve educational outcomes and enhance the openness and relevance of education systems. The focus is on educational outputs rather than inputs, and is achieved by way of national qualification frameworks which emphasize learning outcomes geared towards labour market needs.

These strategies reflect a heuristic that is relatively constrained by economic ideas about education and training as a functional necessity for participating in the labour market of the new knowledge economies. Key concepts are the knowledge triangle, human capital, 'flexicurity', global competitiveness, and mobility across the single market (introducing a so called 'fifth freedom' in the single market – free movement of knowledge). With education and training perceived as an investment in human capital, the 'Youth on the move' initiative comes to represent the supply-side of European knowledge economies.

Issues and Implications for Europe

In the following section, the implications of the Europe 2020 Strategy are divided between normative and practical issues,

which are loosely correlated to policy goals on the one hand, and governance mechanisms and implementation on the other. This is an artificial division because goals and governance overlap and there can be normative and practical concerns for both, yet for analytical clarity this distinction is useful.

Legitimizing Priorities and Goals

The fundamental idea behind the Strategy is a causal belief about how to manage economies, not societies or ecological systems. Because the Council is comprised of the heads of government from the EU Member States, economic goals and priorities are of primary concern to both EU executive institutions and Member State governments. Thus the 'buy-in' sought by the Commission from Member State governments tends to be one of proper implementation, not goal-setting, because it is presumed that national governments are supportive of goals they set themselves in the Council. For civil society, however, the issue of value congruence in goal-setting is paramount. Even if final priorities do not fully reflect their own values, civil society groups argue that state actors should consult them in a process (democratic or otherwise) of assessing the general will. As such, 'buy-in' from civil society groups entails some agreement regarding values and goals, and the appropriate means of arriving at those goals.

The central goal behind the Europe 2020 Strategy was to make endogenous economic growth the 'engine' of the European Union, with education and innovation as inputs, higher GDP and employment as outputs, and social inclusion or environmental protection as desirable (although seemingly subsidiary) outcomes. This idea was not immediately clear during the brief consultation period that led up to the public launch of the policy platform. Initially, the Strategy was well-received by social

and environmental civil society groups, who perceived it as a kind of 'promissory note' for an increasingly reflexive view of modernity. However, civil society groups – and even political institutions within the EU – quickly realized that they were only a marginal part of the consultation process prior to the release of the policy platform (with some assurance that they would be consulted afterwards, even though all the goals and priorities would already be set). While some of the subsequent protest amounted to general critiques of capitalism by groups with priorities other than economic growth, there was also concern about a democratic deficit in setting an overarching agenda for the future of the EU. Thus, it was not merely the ideas themselves that were disputed, but also the democratic legitimacy of those ideas. Typically, arguments of this sort over-emphasize a deficit of representative democracy and underestimate the legitimacy of deliberative democracy. However, a deliberative democracy that allows a few political actors to form policy based on the ideas of an epistemic community of economists rather than broad (and time-consuming) consultation with a multitude of stakeholders, is in danger of a deficit of deliberative legitimacy. The governance process of the Lisbon Agenda marginalized the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice, ignored many civil society groups, and concentrated power with the Commission and the Member State governments (either as sovereign states or sitting in the European Council). The Council and Commission appear to be repeating this mistake with Europe 2020, hoping that – in the eyes of European publics – the Strategy's 'output legitimacy' (i.e., providing an efficient and effective revival of EU economies) will trump its 'input legitimacy' (i.e., the lack of democratic process).

Implementation and governance

Not only has the Strategy received criticism for lacking public consultation, it has been criticized for being too broad and ambitious to implement effectively. Even if neoschumpeterian ideas are widely accepted, the practical implications of implementing Europe 2020 leave Member States in a difficult position. On one hand, the Commission has issued integrated guidelines that reference the 2009 Lisbon Treaty (TFEU), which instruct Member States how to better achieve the headline targets for Europe 2020. These integrated guidelines reflect the Commission's perception of what innovation and education are really for: the innovation target is subsumed under Article 121 (economic policy) and the education target under Article 148 (employment policy). The Commission has made it clear that Member States are obliged to achieve these targets because of their commitment to the Lisbon Treaty. Yet on the other hand, the European Semester governance structure brings into question the coherence of Europe 2020 when faced with the recent Eurozone crisis. While Europe 2020 emphasizes macro-economic growth, the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) prioritizes fiscal responsibility and austerity. Under the current governance structure, the Commission tries to coordinate the aims and means of each, but keeps their instruments and procedures legally separate to maintain the integrity of the SGP. This is likely to privilege the SGP at the national level, and stifle spending on growth initiatives. Even if powerful political actors, like the Commission, are able to reconcile growth and austerity in a single mental model, it does not mean others will share that schema, or have the political will to enact it as national policy. As Commission President Barroso has readily admitted, "we have to be quite honest with you, there are 27 member states and if they don't want to play ball nothing will happen" (Willis, 2010).

Issues and Implications for Canada

What effect will the Europe 2020 Strategy, and especially its innovation and education policy, have on Canada? The direct effects of the Strategy on Canada will likely be mediated by its predominantly inward focus, whether this is in terms of international relations between governments or transnational relationships between institutions. There is potential for indirect effects, in terms of learning opportunities about policy-making. The following section assesses the direct effects and learning opportunities presented by the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Direct Effects

The Europe 2020 Strategy will have some effect on the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), an international treaty still under negotiation between Canada and the EU. However, this will be limited to the periphery, because much of CETA pertains to freedom of trade in goods and services (education excluded), foreign direct investment (rather than domestic investment in R&D), and procurement of non-innovative government services. There are areas under the remit of CETA negotiations that are pertinent for EU innovation policy, including biotechnology and intellectual property law. For the former, much of the adjustment will be on the part of the EU as they nurture and protect a fledgling biotech sector from technologically superior Canadian companies, although any such policy adjustments would be further mitigated by European consumers' continued resistance to genetically modified organisms. The latter issue, intellectual property rights, could prove thorny for Canada. In the interest of protecting its cultural heritage, the EU has demanded that Canada extend the duration of copyright protection, and ban devices that circumvent copyright. The EU has also required Canada to comply with European trademark law and an inter-

national Patent Treaty in order to stiffen regulation in policy domains that the EU would like to protect, such as R&D for pharmaceuticals. Yet, in spite of these links between innovative industries and CETA, the Strategy is not a major touchstone for international trade relations between Canada and the EU. The Europe 2020 Strategy is primarily concerned with innovation that drives endogenous economic growth, and as such, it provides incentives for internal investment rather than protection from foreign markets.

The Europe 2020 Strategy is more pertinent to transnational collaborations which involve multiple stakeholders in civil society, although the degree to which the highest political levels can support particular collaborations is contingent on the jurisdictional purview of each government. In the realm of higher education, the Commission has carved out a political space through its Erasmus mobility scheme (now part of the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013) and through involvement with the Bologna Process, yet the Canadian federal government has no 'equivalent' ministry of education. Therefore there is little communication between the EU and the Canadian federal government, and agreements regarding student mobility are worked out on an ad-hoc basis at the institutional or provincial level. For research and innovation, collaboration is better coordinated under 'ERA-Can'. This has an institutional infrastructure dating back to the 1996 EU-Canada Scientific and Technological Agreement, and closely involves DFAIT and the Commission Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. However, cooperation continues to be hampered by a lack of focus, and by insufficient knowledge of each other's research and higher education systems. Therefore, many research collaborations or mobility schemes continue to be initiated by individual institu-

tions or even individual researchers, with government support offered by awarding funding to individual applications. There is some effort to change this, with emerging programmatic cooperation (especially in health-related sciences) and harmonization of standards, although the push has primarily been from the European side. For there to be a high-level strategic cooperation that directly engages Europe 2020, the Canadian government would need to be a more willing partner – especially for higher education.

Learning Opportunities

Europe 2020 presents a number of learning opportunities for Canada, both positive and negative. The Europe 2020 Strategy demonstrates what not to do in terms of agenda setting and establishing policy goals, but only if the Canadian government is concerned about widespread input legitimacy amongst civil society groups. Europe 2020 also serves as a cautionary tale about the danger of responding to economic shocks with potentially conflicting agendas, because this can render parts of an economic plan incoherent or unachievable in practical terms. However, there are positive learning opportunities to be gleaned from experimenting with new modes of governance, which might be especially relevant for Canadian federalism. In short, where the Canadian polity is similar to the European Union, such as multi-level governance, the Canadian government would do well to adapt or experiment with new European modes of governance. Where Canada has a different institutional practice or structure, like with its Westminster-style political system, it can afford to ignore lessons from the Europe 2020 experience – although at peril of being accused of democratic deficit.

The Europe 2020 Strategy has become yet another platform where the European Commission can showcase the open

method of coordination (OMC), a mode of governance that uses comparison, communication and competition between jurisdictions to try and affect a 'race-to-the-top' dynamic. The OMC is the means by which the Commission can coordinate positive outcomes yet also leave the individual Member State 'in the driver seat' of a voluntary process involving communication of best practice and competition towards achieving shared goals. Although there are fundamental differences between Canadian federalism and EU governance, both are systems with challenges which entail multi-level governance – the federal government of Canada and the European Commission face considerable resistance from other levels of government (i.e., the provinces in Canada and the Member States of the European Union). Moreover, the Canadian government and the European Commission have little or no jurisdiction and thus weak compliance mechanisms in relevant policy domains, like education. The OMC could be a viable governance mechanism for Canada, because having provinces communicate and compete with each other with only the lightest of coordination from the federal government is preferable to frequent antagonism which fails to achieve shared ends. However, the OMC has not been perfect for the EU either. In certain policy domains, the OMC was deemed too voluntary to generate appropriate legislative compliance or implementation. Because the OMC is a deliberative process that can be dominated by the Member States, the Commission can be marginalized as just another actor within a narrow epistemic community (to be consulted as needed), and citizens – or student, researchers, and so on – can easily be excluded from the deliberation. Furthermore, experiences with the OMC have shown that subordinate aims and indicators can have a considerable influence on discrete policy evaluations, focusing attention on finan-

cial inputs and leading to demands for the recommodification of social or environmental policies. That said, the OMC is a powerful tool if implemented in a transparent and coherent way by an actor widely regarded as legitimate (what Jan Zielonka has called a 'model power' to contrast the idea of a 'super-power'). If the Canadian government can re-establish itself as a model power with a coherent and cohesive vision of Canadian society, it will have greater success with an OMC process adopted from the Europe 2020 Strategy.

The goals of the Europe 2020 are compatible with Canadian priorities, as both polities have long been moving towards knowledge economies, cultivating a supply of human capital and a demand for it through innovative and high-tech industries. However, the two polities emphasize different aspects depending on their factor endowments and political systems. European countries are comparatively reliant on foreign natural resources (especially energy) and have been reticent to supply its labour market needs via immigration. So advocating for a single market of knowledge, and prioritizing 'domestic' supply and demand for the knowledge economy, is cohesive as long as the EU can garner the support of a wide variety of state and non-state actors. The EU is a multilateral actor meant to represent states and civil societies, so Europe 2020 could be perceived either as a vision that has cohered around a broad congruence of values, or else as a means to galvanize a broad array of actors (including the public) after the fact. Judging by the uneven 'buy-in' by civil society groups, it seems to have been the latter. Canada's economy generally pursues capital-intensive R&D related to resource extraction, and can meet a sizeable portion of its high-skilled labour market needs through immigration. Economic plans or visions of society tend to be 'majoritarian' because Canada is a Westminster-style system which frequently allows the gov-

erning party to enact its will – especially if it has a majority in Parliament. Therefore, it is not necessary to get 'buy-in' from civil society because there are fewer veto players or access points in the Canadian polity with which to block reforms or lobby for interests. Moreover, as recent events have demonstrated, it is not even necessary to elucidate a plan or vision for Canada because significant reforms can be bundled together into a federal budget with little explanation as to their coherence. Canada need only learn from European mistakes regarding the cohesiveness and coherence of Europe 2020 if the governing party seeks greater democratic legitimacy of the sort not imparted by a federal election. However, as things stand today in the Canadian political system, winning a majority in Parliament is often considered legitimacy enough.

Recommendations

The Europe 2020 Strategy does not require a response from Canadian governments or Canadian research and education institutions. There are, however, policies and institutions that could be better developed to prepare Canada for engaging with the EU and its Europe 2020 Strategy. There are three things that the Canadian federal government might do as a result of the learning opportunities generated by Europe 2020. First, Canada lacks a federal institution that could coordinate provincial ministries of higher education and speak with an equivalent counterpart in the European Union. The provinces will not surrender any jurisdiction over education policy, nor would that be necessary, if the federal government were to establish an institutional presence in higher education which utilized some variant of the OMC. One way to do this would be to re-engage with The Council of the Federation, which already has a post-secondary education initiative underway. Second, Canada does have institutions at the federal level which

form national research strategies and communicate these priorities internationally. As a counterpoint to a short-sighted aspect of Europe 2020, Canada should not make the mistake of overemphasizing 'hard' sciences and 'high' technology to the detriment of social sciences and the humanities. Increasing funding envelopes for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada will pre-empt the narrowing of knowledge and innovation in fields like economics or sociology, which are important because new ideas in these disciplines are as critical to the success of societal plans as any 'high-tech' solution. Finally, the federal government of Canada should take the time to consult broadly with different levels of government and with non-state actors, and out of that consultation they should disseminate a coherent vision for the Canadian economy. Although the Canadian political system does not compel them to do this, having a vision for Canada allows the federal government to perhaps garner increased 'buy-in' at all levels of society. Having a clear plan is no guarantee of widespread agreement or value congruence – such is politics – but it is a way to avoid constant resistance and possibly even civil disobedience by groups who feel they have been excluded from the decision-making process.