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SOCIAL AGENDA



Employment and social innovation

I focus on

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**FIGHT AGAINST
POVERTY**

*The floor to local
actors*



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ROMA INTEGRATION

Moving up a gear



EDITORIAL



“One single year of the EU budget represents more money, in today’s prices, than the whole Marshall Plan in its time”, the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, explained in his State of the Union speech on 11 September 2013. “In some regions, the EU budget is the only way to get public investment because they do not have the resources at national level”.

As the negotiations on the implementation of the EU’s 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) are drawing to an end, this issue of “Social Agenda” focuses on a small but decisive part of the new EU budgetary framework: the programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), with an overall budget of € 919.5 million for the seven coming years, directly managed by the European Commission.

Decisive it is, because EaSI explicitly promotes innovation in connection with employment and social policy. It gives clarity, substance and methodology to social policy experimentation and to the notion of properly testing new approaches, before scaling them up and replicating them in other regions and countries.

Social innovation is the key to more effective and efficient social protection and labour market policies, in these times of economic crisis and in the face of the demographic challenge which faces the EU. It is the key, therefore, to more and better jobs and active inclusion and to fostering and ensuring medium to long-term economic growth.

“Social innovation is the key”

EaSI confirms that innovation is no longer restricted to technology. It shows the way to public authorities and other stakeholders, so that they may test, for example, the youth guarantee which the EU Council of Ministers adopted in 2013, or the social protection one-stop shop advocated by the EU in the Social Investment Package, also adopted in 2013. It will also help the Member States respond to the country-specific recommendations issued at the end of each European Semester cycle of economic policy coordination.

The new programming period ensures that the European Social Fund will promote social innovation, scaling up successful social policy experiments carried out under EaSI. Like the EU budget as a whole, EaSI must be considered in terms of leverage. It is a means to set new energies and approaches into motion, taking full advantage of the synergies that can be achieved in a European Union of over 500 million inhabitants and beyond, as parts of EaSI also reach out to European Economic Area countries and to countries negotiating to join the EU.

Koos Richelle

Director General of the European Commission’s Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion department

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NEWS IN BRIEF



Brieuc Hubin – © European Union

Telling the story: Through the European Social Fund, the EU can play a decisive role in people's lives (see Brigitte's story, p.24).

9-10 December: telling the story through the Funds

The European Commission is organising a major conference for communication officers from national and regional authorities, stakeholders, project managers and journalists to discuss how to better tell the story of Europe through its achievements on the ground via the European Structural and Investment Funds, including the European Social Fund. The event aims to present good practices in communication in the EU countries and facilitate mutual learning, underline the importance of communicating the achievements of EU funding during 2007-2013 and preparing for the new period 2014-2020.

Registration: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/telling/index_en.cfm.

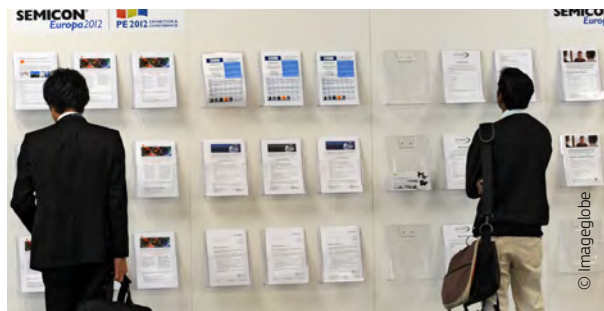
2 October: EMU social integration

The European Commission has proposed to create a new scoreboard to allow for better and earlier identification of major employment and social problems in the framework of the European Semester, the EU's yearly economic policy-making cycle. Further involving trades unions and employers at both the EU and national level in the definition and implementation

of policy recommendations during the European Semester, making better use of EU and national budgets to alleviate social distress and removing barriers to job mobility are also proposals that feature in a Communication on the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), adopted by the European Commission (see p.6).

1 October: 882 000 more people unemployed

In August 2013, 26.595 million men and women were unemployed in the EU as a whole, of whom 19.178 million were in the euro area. Compared with August 2012, unemployment rose by 882 000 in the EU as a whole and by 895 000 in the euro area. The euro area seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate was 12.0 % in August 2013, stable compared with July. The global EU unemployment rate was 10.9 %, also stable compared with July. In both zones, rates have risen compared with August 2012, when they were 11.5 % and 10.6 % respectively. These figures are published by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union.



882 000 more unemployed than last year:
10.9% global EU unemployment rate in August 2013.

© Imageglobe

NEWS IN BRIEF

30 September: Roma integration at local level



On the ground: The challenges of implementing Roma integration strategies at the local level.

Representatives from the bodies tasked with implementing national Roma integration strategies in the 28 Member States met in Brussels to pool experience and discuss ways forward for Roma integration in the EU. Representatives of local and regional authorities from all Member States were invited to join the meeting to provide an insight into the challenges for implementing Roma integration policies at the local level. The meeting also shared expertise and good practices on how to step up Roma integration in the Member States (see p.12).

12 September: Job creation through microfinance

More than 6 000 entrepreneurs have already benefitted from loans worth a total of close to €50 million under the European Progress Microfinance Facility, according to the third annual report on this EU instrument. The report confirms that Progress Microfinance has significantly

contributed to job creation. The report indicates that almost one third of final beneficiaries said they were unemployed or inactive when they applied. Almost 80 % of the micro-companies supported are start-ups operating for less than three years.

9 September: Growing job opportunities in healthcare sector

The latest European Vacancy Monitor confirms an increasing labour demand in the healthcare sector, where employment has grown almost 2 % annually between 2008 and 2012. Nevertheless the Monitor reflects falling demand overall in the EU labour market, with 6 % fewer vacancies in the fourth quarter of 2012 compared with the last quarter of 2011.



2% annual employment growth: There is an increasing labour demand in the healthcare sector.

30 August: Member States should step up jobs effort

“It is encouraging that many countries have managed to slightly reduce seasonally-adjusted unemployment without a time lag after economic growth picked up or even while still in recession”, said European Commissioner Andor, responsible for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. “The slight decline in unemployment in these countries shows the importance of active employment policy measures like hiring subsidies, reduced taxes on low-paid labour, re-skilling and good-quality

job placement services. But clearly it is unacceptable that more than 26.6 million jobseekers are still without a job in the EU (19.2 million in the eurozone), of which more than 5.5 million are aged under 25 (3.5 million in the eurozone). The recent improvements are minimal, and the situation is still very fragile. This is no time for celebration or complacency. On the contrary, now that we can see we are on the right employment policy track we must step up our ‘jobs effort’”.

ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION

Strengthening the **social** dimension

European Commission contributes to the debate
on deepening the EMU



Repeated calls: In December 2012 and June 2013, Herman Van Rompuy, European Council President, called for a strengthening of the social dimension of EMU.

In December 2012, the European Council (EU Heads of State and Governments) called for a strengthening of the social dimension of economic and monetary union (EMU). In June 2013, it emphasised the importance of better monitoring the social and labour market situation within the EMU by using appropriate employment and social indicators within the European Semester, the EU's yearly cycle of economic policy coordination.

In an EMU such as the Euro zone, countries cannot devalue any more their currency in order to regain productivity and competitiveness, even when faced with an asymmetric economic shock (i.e. different from one country to another) or with the effects of sustained loss of competitiveness. Furthermore, the ability to use traditional monetary and fiscal policy levers is greatly reduced. The good functioning of the EMU therefore requires that their economies and labour markets are flexible enough to allow for adjustments.

To support these adjustments, solidarity mechanisms must be in place and investments made in people (social

investment - childcare, education, social protection reform, active labour market policies...) in order to enhance productivity and ensure that the labour markets and society at large do not exclude people and create poverty.

Employment and social indicators

On 2nd October, the European Commission put forward a policy document (Communication) on strengthening the social dimension of the Euro area EMU. It proposes to create a scoreboard to follow key employment and social developments: the unemployment rate; the rate of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and the youth unemployment rate; the real gross disposable income of households; the "at-risk-of-poverty" rate of the working age population; and inequalities.

The employment and social scoreboard would make it possible to detect unfavourable socioeconomic developments at an early stage, to monitor them more closely and, if appropriate,



Investing in people: European Commissioner Andor promoting social investment, a key source of growth in an economic and monetary union.

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deal with them collectively. It would be complementary to the Employment Performance Monitor and to the Social Protection Performance Monitor (which contains a dashboard of 20 key social indicators and gives a representation of Member States' performance against best performers).

The scoreboard would be integrated into the policy cycle through the Joint Employment Report (that identifies the key employment developments) and the implementation of the Employment Guidelines. Eventually, it would also feed into the Commission proposals for country-specific recommendations adopted in May as part of the European Semester.

The scope of the EU budget should be fully exploited to develop the social dimension of the EMU. The Commission has proposed that, during the next programming period 2014-2020, the EU countries devote at least 20% of their European Social Fund envelopes to promoting social inclusion and combating poverty.

The Communication also focuses on reinforcing labour mobility by stressing the need to reduce the costs and hurdles of moving for work across the EU. While there are substantial differences in (youth) unemployment rates between EU countries, less than 4% of the working age population in the EMU comes from a different Member State.

Social dialogue

EMU is also a governance issue. Social dialogue is presently under pressure in most EU countries, as the Commission's Industrial Relations report 2012 shows (see p.10). And yet, strong industrial relations institutions and well-structured social dialogue can produce positive economic and social outcomes.

In its Communication on the social dimension of EMU, the Commission insists that there is room for improvement in the way social partners are consulted at key steps of the decision-making process, under the European Semester in particular.

The Commission pledges to meet the EU social partners ahead of the adoption of the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) which, each

autumn, marks the launch of the European Semester. And once the AGS has been adopted, it will organise a debate both with the EU-level social partners and their national affiliates.

It will also hold technical preparatory meetings before the Tripartite Social Summit (trade unions, employers' organisations and EU institutions), which takes place every year in March, and other high-level meetings, and encourage Member States to discuss all reforms linked to the European Semester country-specific recommendations with national social partners.

More information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=1979&furtherNews=yes>

Preventing the spill-over effects

The on-going economic crisis has led to increasingly diverging employment and social outcomes which can threaten the well-functioning and the very existence of the EMU. In the context of a monetary union, major employment and social problems in one country can have negative spill-over effects in another Member State of the Union.

In November 2012, the European Commission set out a vision for a strong and stable architecture for the political, fiscal and economic components of the Euro zone Economic and Monetary Union, based on a progressive pooling of sovereignty. This vision was contained in a "Blueprint on a deep and genuine EMU".

Some of the measures envisaged in the Blueprint would require substantial Treaty changes. For example, an autonomous EMU budget with a fiscal capacity which would provide for an EMU-level stabilisation tool which could take the form of payment earmarked for unemployment benefits.

FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY

The floor to local actors

Annual convention will focus on implementation



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Inclusion: At the convention, stakeholders will organise an event on the integration of people living in poverty.

In June 2013, the EU Council of Ministers adopted the Social Investment Package which the European Commission had put forward in February. On 26-27 November the third annual convention of the European platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion will meet in Brussels and focus on how to concretely implement the social investment approach.

For the first time, between 100 and 150 local and regional officials can register directly to take part in the convention. On the front line in the fight against social exclusion and poverty, they will find themselves alongside national delegations of the EU Member States and candidate countries, representatives of international organisations, of European civil society and of social partner organisations, academics, European think-tanks and foundations, officials from the European Commission and other EU institutions and bodies...

Investing in people

Workshops will tackle the issue of investing in people throughout their life, from five different angles: early childhood education and care, Roma inclusion policies, integrated strategies for re-housing homeless people, adequate access to health care in times of austerity and policy solutions for youth experiencing disadvantage.

Another series of workshops will tackle the instruments and indicators required to implement and monitor poverty reduction: innovative financial instruments developed with the private sector; the Europe 2020 poverty reduction target; and reference budgets for adequate livelihoods. A participatory “world café” discussion will tackle the issue of European structural and investment funds’ priorities in the new EU Multi-annual Financial Framework for 2014-2020.

Speed dating

In connection with the workshops, a “speed dating” event will be organised to present 15 projects co-funded by the European Social Fund or by national sources. Stakeholders have also been given a free hand to organise side-events, e.g. on migration to and within Europe, the integration of people living in poverty...

The issue of implementing social policies to reduce poverty will be addressed by various personalities at different stages of the convention: José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, and Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, will open the convention; László Andor, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, will give a



concluding key-note speech; Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament, and Ilze Vinkele, Latvian Minister for Social Affairs, will intervene during the convention; George Soros, Chairman of the Open Society Foundation, will give a keynote speech on Roma and marginalised populations. Heather Roy, President of the Social Platform, and Koos Richelle, European Commission Director general for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion will

also intervene, as well as mayors of big cities such as Rotterdam and Athens.

More information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=88&eventsId=927&furtherEvents=yes>

What role for regions and cities?

On 29 May 2013, the Committee of the Regions, the EU's assembly of regional and local representatives, held a conference on regional and local aspects of the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Local policy approaches and good practices were discussed, especially those taken in partnership with different tiers of government, together with lessons learnt from successful transnational cooperation. The conclusions of the conference will feed into the Committee's contribution to the mid-term evaluation of the EU's "Europe 2020" strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, to be presented at the Committee's 6th European Summit of Regions and Cities in Athens in Spring 2014.

<http://cor.europa.eu/en/news/events/Documents/Proceedings%202020%20poverty%20social%20exclusion%20in%201%20July.pdf>

Anti-poverty recommendations to 9 countries

As a result of the European Semester economic cooperation process, country-specific recommendations were sent by the

*EU in July 2013 to **Belgium** (high exposure to the risk of poverty for certain groups of the population), **Bulgaria** (need for a national strategy combating poverty and social exclusion), **Hungary** (disproportionate incidence of poverty with regard to disadvantaged territories and communities), **Latvia** (problems with the social welfare system and its transparency, benefit adequacy and coverage, and insufficient labour market integration measures), **Lithuania** (a high risk of poverty for the older population), **Poland** (high in-work poverty rates), **Romania** (high poverty rates in general and of children in particular, as well as efficiency of transfers), **Spain** (need to rationalise targets and resources under an adequate policy framework, improve governance and inter-institutional coordination at national, regional and local level) and the **United Kingdom** (need to support low-income households and reduce the risk of child poverty). No country-specific recommendations were issued for Greece, Portugal, Ireland and Cyprus because their macroeconomic adjustment programmes are monitored under a separate process which already includes adjustment of social transfers and welfare systems.*

<http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/>

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Social dialogue under strain

Focus on the public sector and on Central and Eastern European countries

The 2012 edition of the *Industrial Relations in Europe* report shows that strong industrial relations institutions and well-structured social dialogue is vital for the sustainability of reforms. It can also produce positive economic and social outcomes.

Published by the European Commission on 11 April 2013, the report covers the crucial years 2010-2012, when the nature of the crisis changed from financial to economic and moved from the private sector to the public budgets and administration.

It focuses on the public sector, which governments began targeting for adjustment and fiscal consolidation. It also provides an in-depth analysis of the Eastern and Central European Member States.

Strikes and demonstrations

In the EU as a whole, the public sector – administration, education and health – employs about a quarter of the workforce. The people who work there are much more likely to be

covered by collective labour agreements and to be members of trade unions, than in the private sector.

Yet, in addition to cutting or freezing pay and reducing jobs, some governments have challenged the role of trade unions and have reformed collective bargaining systems. In many cases, they have dramatically accelerated and intensified public sector reforms without consulting the trade unions. This has resulted in strikes and demonstrations.

Such has been the case in particular in the countries benefitting from EU and International Monetary Fund assistance (Greece, Portugal, Ireland and Cyprus) but it has also been the case in several Central and Eastern European countries, where social dialogue was already particularly weak. Apart from Slovenia, in these countries many employers are not organised in associations and union membership is decreasing faster than in the rest of the EU.

The picture that emerges from the report is one of a social dialogue generally under strain, if not under outright pressure, precisely at the time when the EU institutions are considering involving the social partners more in the economic



Targeted: As the crisis drags on, governments now target the public sector for economic adjustment and fiscal consolidation.



governance process at EU level (see article p.6 on a social Economic and Monetary Union) but also at national level.

Indeed, the report concludes that the social partners should be more involved in national governments' reforms, for example in the field of unemployment benefit and pensions: solutions found through social dialogue tend to be better accepted in society at large and therefore easier to implement.

European successes

During the period under scrutiny, EU-level social dialogue has made a real difference to the working lives of Europeans. The cross-industry and sectoral European social partners have adopted more than 70 joint texts concerning a wide range of topics (e.g. health and safety at work, restructuring, skills, training measures and green growth).

In 2012, 4 of the 41 sectoral social dialogue committees agreed on binding agreements: On working time in inland waterways transport, occupational health and safety in hair-dressing, work in the sea fisheries sector and standard player contracts in the professional football sector.

The report also investigates the potential contribution of social dialogue to sustainable development. It details particular cases where social partners have successfully contributed to greening the economy in the construction, energy, chemical and non-metal manufacturing sectors. The report concludes that reinforcing and promoting social partners' activities at all levels, from European to local, is crucial for the successful transition towards a green economy.

The next edition of the Industrial Relations in Europe report, due to come out in 2014, will focus on the social dimension of Economic and Monetary Union.

More information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=575&langId=en>

Significant differences between countries

In Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Spain, trade unions have been involved in the pension reform process. Elsewhere, the role of social partners has been minimal, leading to conflict. In the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Cyprus, the difference between bargaining coverage (the number of employees covered by collectively bargained labour agreements) in the public sector and the whole economy is particularly large. Only six Member States have an equally high bargaining coverage of 90% across the whole economy: Belgium, Austria, Sweden, Slovenia, France and Finland. In Greece, the percentage of public sector workers that are members of a trade union is more than four times higher than the national figure. Significant differences between the public and private sector can also be identified in Austria and Luxembourg. Only in the Czech Republic, Estonia and in Poland is union density slightly lower in the public sector than across the whole economy. 44% of workers are covered by negotiated agreements in the Central and Eastern European Member States (with a great variety between them: 25% in the Baltic states, 35-45% in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia and 70% and more in Romania and Slovenia), compared to 70% of workers in the rest of the EU. Social partners are strongly involved in shaping the greening of the economy in northern and western EU countries like Finland, Belgium and Germany. In a dozen European countries, including in many of the more recent Member States, tripartite bodies have been established to discuss a common approach to climate change and to find negotiated solutions to the challenges posed by the transition to a low-carbon economy.

ROMA INTEGRATION

Moving up a gear

First EU law proposal on the table

Go local, involve civil society, work together across borders, use EU and other funds and urgently address in particular the needs of young Roma (35.7% of Roma are under 15, compared to 15.7% of the EU population as a whole): such is, in a nutshell, the European Commission's message to the EU countries. It is contained in its second annual progress report on the implementation of the EU Framework for national Roma integration, published on 26 June 2013.

On that same day, the European Commission put forward the first ever EU legal instrument for Roma inclusion: a Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States, which now has to be approved by the EU Council of Ministers and the European Parliament.

Indeed, many EU countries have set up mechanisms to better coordinate their Roma integration efforts and promote dialogue with local and regional authorities. But there is room for improvement in involving civil society organisations (including Roma), in allocating adequate resources to finance their national strategies and in monitoring what is being achieved.

Positive action

The Recommendation calls upon the EU countries to take positive action to bridge the gaps between the Roma and the rest of the

population. It asks the Member States to address the needs of their Roma communities within their mainstream policies and to consider putting in place targeted actions to help ensure effective equal access to education, employment, healthcare or housing.

Roma children often face greater barriers than other disadvantaged children, preventing them from gaining a good education, in particular when it comes to discrimination and segregation at school. As a result, young Roma are less equipped and qualified to find a job: Only one in three Roma are in employment.

Roma live on average 10 years less than other EU citizens and have a significantly higher rate of child mortality. Access to housing connected to essential services (e.g. water supply) is much lower among Roma than for other EU households. This in turn affects their health and broader integration prospects

These actions should be funded not only by EU funds but also by state budget funds and by private and third sector funds.

Economic recovery

In fact, Roma integration is crucial if the EU is to achieve the objectives of its "Europe 2020" sustainable and socially inclusive economic recovery strategy (e.g. 75% of people in the EU aged 20-64 to be in employment, compared to the current



Facing barriers: Roma children often face greater barriers than other disadvantaged children, preventing them from gaining a good education.



rate of 68.8% and compared to the much lower – around 30% – employment rate among working age Roma). Roma people represent a significant and growing proportion of the school-age population and of the EU's future workforce.

This why, year after year, the issue of Roma integration comes up more and more in the country-specific recommendations addressed in July to the EU countries as a result of the European Semester economic cooperation process: From 3 in 2012, the number of EU countries to receive Roma-related recommendations jumped to 5 in 2013 (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia), some of which received 2 recommendations (one on the implementation of the strategy

and the other on specific policy developments in the fields of education and employment).

The European Commission is now checking whether the 2013 European Semester recommendations are fully reflected in the partnership agreements put forward by the Member States to benefit from EU funds from 2014 till 2020.

More information:

http://ec.europa.eu/justice/newsroom/discrimination/news/130626_en.htm

The benefits of Roma integration

There are around 10-12 million Roma people in Europe, around a third of which live outside the EU, mostly in the Western Balkans and in Turkey.

*Roma people form a significant proportion of the population in **Bulgaria** (c.10%), **Slovakia** (9%), **Romania** (8%), **Hungary** (7%), **Greece**, the **Czech Republic** and **Spain** (1.5-2.5% each). In **Bulgaria** and **Romania**, Roma people form 1 in 5 new labour market entrants.*

*A survey by the Open Society Institute carried out in **Bulgaria**, **Hungary**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **Romania** and **Slovakia** found that only 42% of Roma children complete primary school. The United Nations Development programme research in **Bulgaria**, **Romania**, **Slovakia**, **Hungary** and the **Czech Republic** found that Roma infant mortality rates there are 2-6 times higher than those of the EU population as a whole.*

Examples of good practice from EU countries include: The regional action plan for Roma inclusion put

*in place by the State of Berlin in **Germany**; the introduction of obligatory participation of children above 3 years old in kindergarten and the Sure Start children houses offering complex services to families with small children in **Hungary**; and earmarking every year places for Roma students in schools, universities and vocational training in **Romania**.*

There are also examples of successful projects targeting Roma such as "A Good Start: Scaling-Up Access to Quality Services for Young Roma Children" run by the Roma Education Fund, that provided quality early childhood education and care activities to disadvantaged communities through well-designed, community-based services. The ACCEDER project, co-funded by European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund and managed by the Secretariado Gitano Foundation, facilitates access to the labour market.

According to the World Bank, full Roma integration in the labour market could bring economic benefits estimated at around €0.5 billion annually for some countries.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Employment and Social Innovation

EaSI, a new European Commission programme for 2014-2020

On 28 June 2013, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Council of Ministers agreed on EaSI, the programme for Employment and Social Innovation. Directly managed by the European Commission, it is part and parcel of the 2014-2020 EU Multi-annual Financial Framework.

Reforms

EaSI will support EU Member States and other countries (see p.15) in designing and implementing employment and social reforms. It will benefit regional and local authorities, on whom it often falls in practice to actually apply social policy, as well as social partners and civil society organisations.

Extension

In this special feature, you will find a general presentation of EaSI, which integrates and extends the coverage of three existing programmes: the Programme for employment and social solidarity (PROGRESS), the European Employment Services network (EURES) and the European PROGRESS Microfinance facility.

Innovation

The special feature also highlights the “I” for “Innovation” contained in the name of the programme. Indeed, EaSI will support concrete projects and activities to test reforms on the ground before up-scaling the most successful, including via the ESF: it will devote around € 10-14 million a year to launching such experiments in the most critical policy areas, such as youth employment or the inclusion of disadvantaged groups.

New territory

Finally, three senior European Commission officials jointly explain the continuation between EaSI and the previous programmes, as well as the novelties it contains. For example, EaSI will provide funding for helping the creation, or scaling-up of, social enterprises: a first at EU-level.

More information on the EU Multiannual Financial Framework:

http://ec.europa.eu/budget/mff/index_en.cfm



Not just technological: Innovation and experimentation is also key for employment, social affairs and inclusion policies.



Is it working? The purpose of EaSI is to test, analyse and raise awareness of innovative policy initiatives which could be of relevance across the EU in the areas of employment, social affairs and inclusion.

A booster for a three-stage rocket

Social innovation, a reformed EURES and funding for social enterprises

The Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme is a new pan-European programme which will start on 1 January 2014, as part of the EU 2014-2020 Multi-annual Financial Framework. It will be managed directly by the European Commission, which will chair a management committee made up of representatives of the EU countries. Some aspects of the programme will stretch out beyond the EU (see on p. 16).

EaSI's fundamental aim is to contribute to implementing the EU's Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. More specifically, it seeks to strengthen ownership by the Member States of the EU's objectives in the areas of employment, social affairs and inclusion: promoting a high level of quality and sustainable employment, guaranteeing adequate and decent social protection, combating social exclusion and poverty, and improving working conditions.

Synergies

EaSI brings together three programmes which the European Commission managed separately between 2007 and 2013:

- The Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (PROGRESS), which supported the development and coordination of EU policy in the areas of employment, social inclusion, social protection, working conditions, anti-discrimination and gender equality;
- EURES, a co-operation network between the European Commission and the Public Employment Services of the Member States;
- and the European Progress Microfinance Facility (which increases the availability of microcredit - loans below € 25 000 - to individuals for setting up or developing a small business).

SPECIAL FEATURE

From 1 January 2014, PROGRESS, EURES and Microfinance will make up the three axes of EaSI. They will share the same monitoring and evaluation facilities.

Novelties

However, EaSI is much more than the sum of the current programmes. In addition to the simplification and synergy potential of bringing PROGRESS, EURES and Microfinance together, EaSI gives a boost to each strand.

In the PROGRESS axis, a new emphasis is placed on social innovation and experimentation, both in terms of methodology (a more rigorously scientific approach, see p.17) and in financial terms (from € 2-4 million to € 10-14 million, over the whole programming period).

In the EURES axis, the launch of EaSI is due to coincide with the transformation of EURES into a virtual pan-European employment mobility agency, offering a set of high-performance IT self-services to employers and job-seekers who cannot find the jobs or staff they are looking for in their own country.

EaSI will also allow EURES to build upon "My First EURES Job", a pilot project currently experimenting targeted mobility schemes to address the issue of vacancies for specific types of jobs which remain vacant in certain parts of the EU.

In addition to facilitating access to microfinance for individuals and micro-enterprises, the third EaSI axis will also provide funding for social enterprises: a totally new territory for the European Commission (see article p.20 for more information on each of these axis).

€ 919.5 million

With an overall budget of € 919.5 million in current prices (taking inflation into account), EaSI will allocate 61 % of its funds to the PROGRESS axis, 18 % to EURES and 21 % to the microfinance/social entrepreneurship axis.

Within the PROGRESS axis, a minimum of 20 % of the funds will be allocated to employment-related projects, 50 % to social protection, 10 % to working conditions and 20 % to cross-cutting projects.

EaSI-EURES will see 32 % of its funds allocated to the transparency of job vacancies, 30 % to the development of

services for the recruitment and placing of workers, 18 % to cross-border partnership (to set up support services specifically geared to the needs of cross-border commuters) and 20 % to cross-cutting projects.

As for the funds devoted to the Microfinance/Social entrepreneurship axis, they will be evenly spread between microfinance and social entrepreneurship: 45 % each, with 10 % going to cross-cutting projects.

Knock-on effect

Beyond the budgetary aspects, the purpose of EaSI is to test, analyse and raise awareness of innovative policy initiatives which could be of relevance across the EU in the areas of employment, social affairs and inclusion.

The evidence gathered would encourage other national, regional or local authorities to replicate such initiatives with the support this time of bigger EU funds, such as the European Social Fund, co-managed by the Member States... which would thereby take ownership of what started as an EU-level initiative.

More information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=1093>

Beyond the EU

In addition to the EU countries, EaSI's first axis (PROGRESS-employment, social protection and working conditions) also involves the European Economic Area (EEA) countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway), the countries that are officially candidate to joining the EU (Iceland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey) and potential candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo). The second EaSI axis, EURES (European Employment Services), involves the EEA countries and the Swiss Confederation. Only the third axis - Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship - is restricted to the EU Member States.

SPECIAL FEATURE



Turning a handicap into a skill: A visually impaired person using her sense of touch to detect breast cancer, thanks to a social innovation programme involving Germany, Austria, Ireland, Romania and France.

Breaking through via innovation

The EaSI programme clinches the connection between innovation and social policy

As its very name indicates, the EaSI programme is an explicit recognition of the strategic importance which the concept of innovation has gained over the years in the employment, social affairs and inclusion policy areas.

Until recently, innovation was mainly linked to technical improvements and to enterprises' bid for knowledge and competitiveness. Today, it also relates to the social dimension of the economy, including public sector interventions in the social field.

Not only does EaSI increase the amount of funding devoted to social innovation. It also definitely connects social innovation with the policy priorities which are at the core of Europe 2020, the EU's leading strategy to achieve a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy.

Embedded

The Social Investment package (SIP), proposed by the European Commission in February 2013 and adopted by the

EU Council of Ministers in June, emphasizes the importance of embedding social policy innovation in policy making and connecting it to priorities - in particular the country-specific recommendations given every year to the Member States as part of the European Semester economic coordination process (see box), and the way the European Social Fund is spent.

For the public sector, innovation is a must, as social protection schemes and policies face a double challenge: addressing immediate needs stemming from the present crisis, in a context of severe budgetary restrictions; and responding to needs emerging from structural changes (demography, technological innovations, international competition...).

It is therefore crucial to ensure that social policy reforms are efficient and effective. This requires developing a capacity both to analyse social needs and policy impacts and to scale-up successful social policy experiments, so that social innovation actually influences policies.

SPECIAL FEATURE



Books for tolerance: Hungarian editor Rainbow, co-funded by the EU, publishes books for children which address sensitive societal issues.

Reinforcement

Social innovation and social policy experimentation has been at the heart of the European Commission-managed Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (PROGRESS) and of its Microfinance Facility. The first dedicated call for proposals was launched in 2009 as part of the 2007-2013 EU Multiannual Financial Framework. Building on these first experiences, EaSI reinforces the innovation aspects of PROGRESS, in line with the Europe 2020 strategy which the EU had adopted in the meantime, in 2010.

Including “innovation” in the actual name of the new programme is not just symbolic. It reflects both a qualitative and a quantitative step change. Qualitative, in as far as the programme will promote an approach to social innovation and social policy experimentation which is both more precise and scientific (see box), as well as more geared to policy-making and governance. Quantitative, as funding for social policy experimentation will jump from € 2-4 million to € 10-14 million per year.

Beyond PROGRESS, innovation becomes a kind of red thread between the three axes of EaSI (see p.15). It is further reinforced by the introduction of funding for social enterprises - cooperatives, foundations, associations and mutual societies - which can

play a crucial role in identifying unmet needs and developing new types of services.

Methodology

The first social policy experimentation calls for proposals launched by the European Commission attracted projects that were interesting but whose methodology was too shaky to ensure that their results may be replicated elsewhere. In 2011, the European Commission began to toughen up its methodology requirements for such calls.

The latest call, launched in September 2013, is very demanding in terms of methodology. It was prepared with the assistance of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre based in Ispra, Italy, which will also be involved in the evaluation of the projects.

The call requires a rigorous description of the social need to be addressed, of the action envisaged and of the population from which the participants to the experiment will be sampled: both the “what” and the “how”. It also requests justification for the sample size, based on statistical methods, as well as a clear and measurable definition of the outcomes on which the policy intervention is to have an impact.

SPECIAL FEATURE

A guide

To help project planners meet those demanding experiment methodology requirements, including for projects outside the PROGRESS/EaSI calls, a project was launched on 1 October 2013 to provide support services. The contractors will provide on-line and face-to face training modules in at least 8 countries representing different social protection systems, a half-a-day information module on social policy experimentation and tailor-made advice. In addition, they will help the European Commission develop its own programmes.

Under the coordination of the London School of Economics, the project will also deliver a Guide on Social Policy Experimentation.

More information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newSId=1093>

Supporting policy-making

As a result of the 2013 European Semester economic coordination process, some EU countries received specific recommendations to address child poverty or to implement the Youth Guarantee (adopted by the EU Council of Ministers in April 2013 to ensure that no person up to the age of 25 is left for more than four months without further education, a traineeship, an apprenticeship or a job).

EaSI will help the Member States benefit from the experience accumulated across the EU (e.g. in Finland and Austria, which had already introduced a youth guarantee before the EU decided to do so).

They will be able to test whether what works well in one country can also succeed on their own territory. If the test is positive, they can up-scale the experiment through the European Social Fund or other EU Cohesion Funds, for which they have prime management responsibility.

Social in ends and means

With innovation taking on so much importance in the employment and social policy areas, it is crucial to define what is meant exactly by “social innovation” and “social experimentation”. Indeed, there are a range of definitions and interpretations going around, in which linguistic nuances and different social, economic, cultural and administrative traditions play a role.

At EU level, “Social innovation” may be defined as the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services and models) to meet social needs and create new social relationships and collaborations/partnerships. They are innovations that are social in both their ends and means and which are not only good for society but also enhance individuals’ capacity to act: the social is both in the “how” and in the “why”. They are an opportunity both for the public sector and for the markets to design services and products that better satisfy individual but also collective aspirations.

Social innovation is the entire process by which new responses to social needs are developed in order to deliver better social outcomes. It contains four main elements: identification of new/unmet/ inadequately met social needs; development of new solutions in response to these social needs; evaluation of the effectiveness of new solutions in meeting social needs, and scaling up effective social innovations.

While “social policy experimentation” refers to small scale projects designed to test policy innovations or reforms before adopting them more widely. Strictly speaking, it entails assessing the impact of the innovation on a sample population against the situation of a “control group” with similar socio-economic characteristics that remains under the usual policy regime. The members of a representative sample of the target-population are randomly assigned to either the “treatment” group or to the “control” group.

SPECIAL FEATURE



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Testing: EaSI could pave the way for testing different ways of ensuring the recently adopted EU Youth Guarantee.

A culture change

Three senior officials from the European Commission's directorate general for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion explain their vision of EaSI

Why bring together three existing programmes (PROGRESS, EURES and Progress Microfinance, see p.15)?

The three current programmes were evaluated and they were deemed successful. They pursue the same objectives: promoting employment, social inclusion and labour mobility. A young person with a brilliant business idea will be able to benefit from the Microfinance strand of EaSI to create a start-up. Someone else could join the start-up through the

EURES strand and the PROGRESS strand could help them develop innovative ideas. By bringing these three programmes together, we are looking for synergies. For example, people who will receive support through the Microfinance strand will also be able to benefit from technical assistance through the PROGRESS strand. All three programmes will be managed by a single committee, made up of the representatives of the Member States and chaired by the European Commission. It will be in a position to make sure that all of this makes sense and is complementary, with no overlaps.

SPECIAL FEATURE



© European Union

"EaSI will fund the EURES portal, which is becoming a virtual self-service employment agency": Lambert Kleinmann, policy officer in charge of EURES, Employment Services unit.

EaSI stands for employment and social innovation: connecting the two so explicitly, is that the real novelty of EaSI?

EaSi is designed to test reforms on the ground and evaluate their potential to be scaled up via the European Social Fund (ESF). The concept of social innovation is key. It is enshrined both in the EaSI regulation and in the new ESF regulation for 2014-2020. We used to have € 2-4 million per year for social policy experiments which were not always "social policy experiments" *stricto sensu*. EaSi is much more precise about what is a social policy experiment and it will provide € 10-14 million a year! The idea of social change and innovation was already at the heart of the draft Regulation presented by the European Commission in October 2011. At the time, the draft programme was called PSCI: Programme for Social Change and Innovation.

From PSCI to EaSI

What happened to "Change"?

It was interpreted by some as wanting to make a break with what had been done so far. On the contrary, we wanted to up-grade and improve the programmes! EaSI is an instrument to invest more and more into testing, evaluating and delivering more scientifically robust recommendations upon which you can base policies. It is thanks to preliminary work funded by PROGRESS that we managed to come up with the Employment package, the Social Investment Package and the Youth Package. We now have to implement those packages and again, through EaSI this time, we will fund projects to test various ways of doing so. It is all about going back and forth from the ground to the drawing board. EaSI is a culture change.

Another culture change is the concept of partnership?

The evaluation of the current programmes showed that grass-root partnership has been a success. When calls for proposals were launched, the project promoters were called upon to liaise with Non-Governmental Organisations, social partners, academia...

How will EaSI contribute to the further development of EURES?

Currently, there is a single budget line centrally managed by the European Commission for anything to do with EURES. By the time EaSI gets going, on 1 January 2014, EURES will launch new innovative projects: The EURES portal will become a virtual self-service employment agency where employers and job-seekers will be able to pick and choose from a variety of on-line services, managed by the European Commission and funded via EaSI. EaSI will also fund targeted mobility schemes organised by the Commission, as well as partnerships between actors on both side of a border (employment services, social partners...) to help them develop a service offer for cross-border commuters. On the other hand, all national activities carried out under EURES will be financed by the ESF. For example, if France wants to invest in the mobility of its workers, it will be able to do so via the ESF which already

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finances other aspects of national public employment services' activities. If a Frenchman wants to go and work in Sweden but needs to improve his knowledge of Swedish to qualify for the job, he could benefit from language training through the ESF. Both the cross-border mobility aspects and the language course could be managed by the same employment service.

Will EURES also benefit from the other EaSI axes (PROGRESS and Microfinance-social entrepreneurship)?

The PROGRESS strand will provide us with evidence on how to target the future mobility schemes which we are presently testing through "My first EURES Job" with project promoters from Denmark, Italy, Germany and Spain. The European Vacancy Monitor is already operational and we are carrying out further research on bottleneck vacancies. All this will help us select particular sectors and countries where there are job opportunities that cannot be seized by the workers of that country. EURES will provide training support in the transition phase. Indirectly, EURES can also benefit from synergies between the two other strands: PROGRESS and Micro-finance. Under Progress, EURES is already running a network of public employment services. Some of them provide advice on start-ups and self-employment. A recent study revealed that they succeeded in connecting with micro-finance providers.

New territory

So how will EaSI contribute to micro-finance and social entrepreneurship?

It will bring the European Commission to a completely new territory: Funding social entrepreneurship! €92 million will be available for the 2014-2020 period for supporting social entrepreneurs, up to a ceiling of €500 000 per enterprise and so long as an enterprise has less than €30 million per year of turnover. In countries where the social economy is in its infancy, like in Eastern Europe, it will be a matter of helping social enterprises getting going. In others, such as the United Kingdom, where the social economy is well developed, it will be a matter of scaling up such companies. The procedure will be rather similar to the one already in place with micro-financing: EaSI will offer guarantees and funded instruments (such as loans or equity) for the intermediaries. For micro-finance, EaSI will also fund

capacity-building and technical assistance to micro-finance institutions. Microloans for individuals have a ceiling of €25 000 per beneficiary.

Up till now, how has the European Commission been helping social entrepreneurs?

By putting in place a regulatory framework to give a boost to the social economy, which has proved sustainable and creates jobs in spite of the crisis. On 16-17 January 2014, in Strasbourg (France), the Commission is organising a big event called "Social entrepreneurs, have your say". 2 000 people are expected to take part (see p.28). There is the on-going Social Business Initiative (an action plan launched in 2011) and an expert group called GECES is working out how to measure the social impact of the enterprises the Commission helps. Indeed, the Commission can only fund those that have a measurable social impact, e.g. do they employ people who are traditionally excluded from the labour market?



"EaSI will bring the European Commission to a completely new territory: Funding social entrepreneurship": Max Uebe, Head of the Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship unit.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Will EaSI contribute to fighting youth unemployment, a top priority for the Commission?

The concern over youth unemployment was already very much embedded in the first draft of the programme. It was reinforced even further during the negotiations with the EU Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. Social experimentation targeting youth is already on-going under the current PROGRESS programme and the European Parliament has provided extra budgetary means to run pilot projects in 19 regions of the EU, to test how the Youth Guarantee (ensuring that all young people up to age 25 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed) may be established in different parts of the EU. We are looking for innovative ideas and the project promoters are required to create partnerships with four or five different types of players, e.g. universities, public employment services, training bodies, youth social services... The PROGRESS strand of EaSI will make it possible to carry out further testing and evaluate what the EU countries are doing, what works or does not work, what could be transferred to other regions or countries... The EURES strand will build upon "My First EURES Job" and, of course, the Micro-finance strand already strives to increase access to and availability of funding to groups that have particular difficulties - including young people, who have no track record and lack networks. Supported social enterprises may also help young people find a path to employment.

Thinking outside the box***EaSI is very much about collecting evidence for policy-making. Will this contribute to reinforcing the role of social affairs in EU economic governance?***

Social issues are often of national competence, shared national-EU competence at the most. If we want to convince the Member States that there is an EU issue at stake, we need to be convincing, to provide them with the facts and figures and say: "There is an issue; we are in a position to identify good practices taking place across Europe; let us talk and come up with something relevant and pertinent at EU level". We are going to have the European elections in May 2014, from which a new European Parliament and a new European Commission will emerge. So presently, we are only planning the first year of EaSI implementation. Some issues will carry on from the



"We must think outside the box and imagine the issues that could emerge in the coming years": David Dion, Head of the Coordination unit.

current programmes but we also need to think ahead and imagine the new employment, social affairs and inclusion issues which could emerge at EU level in the coming years. Part of EaSI will therefore be reserved to have this potential to think outside the box. However, identifying best practices and sharing them - mutual learning - has always been an important aspect of the current PROGRESS programme. We want to keep it going and carry on identifying new ideas, issues and projects.

Video on My First EURES Job:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=25&langId=en&videoId=2628&vI=en&furtherVideos=yes>

Video on cross-border commuters:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=702&langId=en&videoId=2625&vI=en&furtherVideos=yes>

Brigitte, health care assistant

Trained at 60 thanks to help from the European Social Fund



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Finding the right support: "When you doubt yourself, you have to stay strong and keep your wits about you. There's always support there to get you through. You just need to find the right support", Brigitte (on the right) says.

After many different jobs and time raising children, Brigitte decided she wanted to train as a healthcare assistant, despite being almost into her sixties. Her dream was realised thanks to a programme backed by the European Social Fund which aims to get people of all ages back into work.

The PLIE (Plan Lillois pour l'Insertion et l'Emploi) project operates in Lille, France, as a strategic partnership to tackle long-term unemployment by bringing together institutional, social and economic partners.

The project identifies groups vulnerable to social exclusion and uses work placements, training and the services of employment agencies to guide people into secure employment. Project personnel mentor participants until they find full-time work.

Brigitte was a student nurse at 18 but dropped out and did a range of other jobs before eventually beginning a career. She decided to move her career forward by training to be a qualified healthcare

assistant, but soon after enrolling on a 12-month course she began to struggle financially.

As a job seeker she was reimbursed when she started her training, but when she turned 60 the reimbursements stopped. However, the project team was able to step in and help her obtain earned income support so she could carry on training with peace of mind.

Over to Brigitte:

"My husband and I live in Hellemmes, in an old house built for workers in the North of France, right beside Lille. The house still has its original front door. It's the only one on the street that does. All of our neighbours have replaced their doors. This is certainly not the only thing about us that our neighbours feel is unique. My husband is a former wrestler and lorry driver who survived being run over by a bulldozer and who now works with ponies. It's certainly not a dull back story. And if we add to that the fact that I went back to school at the age of sixty, you can see why we are real characters in the neighbourhood.



Not a dull back story: Brigitte with her husband Francis, a former wrestler and lorry driver who survived being run over by a bulldozer.

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After Francis' accident, we started breeding ponies. My granddaughter was very keen on this: she loves animals. It's a lot of hassle sometimes but we all made the decision together. It means my husband has to leave the house and look after the animals: it's been a real lifeline for him. On the weekend we take the children out for rides with the ponies, using wagons. It's a nice way to enjoy ourselves nearby. We only ask that the parents make a small contribution towards feeding the ponies.

Broke

When I went back to study I stopped working. So I didn't have any income. I found an organisation to pay for my studies. But that wasn't enough. I then went to the Social Action Centre where I met Valérie and Aziz. They helped me. The involvement of the European Social Fund meant that I could complete my studies. When you doubt yourself, you have to stay strong and keep your wits about you. There's always support there to get you through. You just need to find the right support. No-one is ever really stuck. You have to get to know yourself and recognise that we all need each other.

When Les Orchidées called me, I didn't hesitate at all. I liked it from the very start. When I started, people were surprised at my age. But they accepted me very quickly. I'm now part of the furniture. I'm in my element. The residents have really taken to me, to my personality. I have a fun, easy relationship with them. I am a spontaneous and warm person. The residents often tell me that I add an atmosphere where there wasn't any before. I try to give them moral support. And their kindness always goes straight to my heart.

I love giving to others. I always say that it's easier to give than to receive. When you receive something you have to say thank you. And I'm not sure how to go about saying thank you because I tend to have feelings that are disproportionate to the action of the other person. So, for me, giving is more natural. I give my good mood, my energy and my love. I give to people who need this. Whether it's here or elsewhere. I am very tactile and like to

get involved with people. I sing for them and play around with them. I make them laugh and that makes everyone's day better.

Life experience

I get on well with many of the residents, because they are simple people. I can have serious conversations with them even though we often end up laughing. The more reserved among them also let me help them from time to time, as they can relate to me because of my age. These affinities have to do with my experience of life. I've had a very diverse life and know a little bit about everything. Young people don't always understand older people. I'm more able, than someone who has just finished school, to accept certain things. My people skills are better.

I love my work. I will keep doing it for as long as I have something to give. I'm not going to stop now that things are going so well. Although I may have to set certain limits. I still have lots of plans. I would like to learn sign language. I already talk a lot with my hands... it's a start! I would also like to look after children... I'd like to finish my secondary education too. I've been thinking about that for the last ten years. And I would like to learn English and German. I've bought books to help me get started".

Taken from:

"Seven lives – on the road to success with the European Social Fund", ISBN 978-92-79-30126-1

Video:

<http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=564&langId=en&portaitId=254>

More information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=564&langId=en>

OTHER VOICES

Developing an EPAP that is effective in the fight against poverty



A need for clarity: Heather Roy, President of the Social Platform.

Due to the economic crisis and effects of austerity measures, Europe has witnessed an increase in poverty and social exclusion of 4 million more people in the last 3 years. Inequalities between the north and south and between wealthy and poor continue to rise, making the debate on poverty and how to address it even more critical.

An integrated poverty and social exclusion strategy at EU and national level is needed. This is the only way to ensure an immediate reduction in poverty. While such a strategy is still lacking, it is essential that existing instruments are used as effectively as possible. The European Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (EPAP), is an opportunity to harness the various instruments and policies available in a systematic and strategic way. In addition, the Social Investment Package (SIP) is a welcome initiative and a step in the right direction. But the bigger picture of how different instruments and processes in the social field (the EPAP, SIP and Social Open Method of Coordination) should work together to achieve a reduction of poverty could still use clarity.

This clarity will hopefully be found through the 2013 Annual Convention of the EPAP. It is a unique opportunity to bring together various strands of action and ensure their effectiveness and efficiency. However, the Convention must also be a political forum ensuring clear political outcomes that inform and influence both social and economic dialogues at EU and Member State level and beyond.

The EPAP and its Convention are a perfect opportunity for the EU to take stock of the implementation of the poverty target in all Member States and where necessary raise questions about the reality of poverty across Europe. It should look at different aspects of poverty and priority areas for action, such as homelessness, child poverty and in-work poverty as well as ensure issues of gender, discrimination, accessibility and participation are included in all discussions.

For the Convention to reach its goals, participation of all key stakeholders is essential. This element of democratic participation means ensuring diversity of participants and for them to share their experiences and give input. This is particularly essential for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, as their real life experience is the most powerful testament to the impact of badly designed or implemented social and economic policies. The Convention can also promote dialogue between Member States and civil society which is sadly lacking in the wider European Semester process. The more we can ensure the effective involvement of civil society and other stakeholders in the European processes, the more we will improve the quality of policy making and enhance overall legitimacy. This would help address growing concerns around the issue of democratic and civic engagement in European governance.

The Convention needs to combine maximum participation with real political impact to go beyond the exchange of information and be results orientated.

The eradication of poverty requires a real commitment from all actors. We owe it to the 120 million people experiencing poverty and social exclusion to make this integrated effort and to move the debate on poverty forward.

Heather Roy
President, Social Platform

"We need to communicate at an early stage on the potential impact of an EU proposal on citizens and business": María-José Cueto Faus, Head of the Communication Unit, European Commission Employment and Social Affairs DG.

INTERVIEW



María-José Cueto Faus is head of the Communication service of the European Commission's Employment and Social Affairs department since 1 May 2013

Embedding communication into policy-making

You joined the European Commission as a lawyer before moving on to communication. Do the two go together?

Yes, law and communication are in fact very complementary. I have spent some years working on legal issues related with gender equality, labour law and anti-discrimination and I had to be very precise and analytical. But when adopting an EU law, it's important also that the general public understand how it benefits day to day life. This requires finding a good compromise between being precise and giving the broader picture, sending simple and clear messages such as: why is such a law required, what will it bring, what impact will it have? One should communicate at an early stage on the potential impact of a legal initiative on citizens and business, and when the proposal is presented by the Commission, when it is agreed in Council and Parliament and when it enters into force.

The policy area has evolved considerably since you joined communication?

Employment, labour mobility and the fight against poverty have become people's major concerns, as shown regularly by Eurobarometer surveys. More than ever, we need to explain to stakeholders and citizens at large the added value of the European policies to the economic and social situation of the Member States. How we present what we do has become crucial. We have to communicate more, yet without over-selling what the EU does: we need to be very realistic about what we can or cannot do at EU level.

The communication means and platforms have evolved too?

There have been important changes in the communication landscape in the last few years. Audiovisual tools, web and

social media are more and more important, alongside communication via traditional media and print publications. We have developed a new set of innovative communication tools for the main policy priorities, such as viral clips, policy animations or regular Facebook or Twitter chats between Commissioner Andor and interested citizens. But there is no magical tool for communicating: Depending on the context and the target, a mix of complementary tools is more effective than a single one.

Have the target audiences evolved over time?

Yes, there is a general shift towards reaching out beyond traditional stakeholders to wider audiences. Social media in particular have made it possible to communicate in a more instantaneous and non-institutional way to citizens, especially young people: We need to communicate with them by going to places where they happen to be active, such as Internet and social platforms.

How do you see EU communication evolving in the future?

The issue ahead of us is both extremely interesting and challenging. On one hand, we need to communicate less about institutions and more about Europe and develop a European public opinion space. This requires a joint corporate effort, at European Commission level and with the other EU institutions and bodies, in partnership with the Member States. We should not be afraid of questioning ourselves, not just in the field of communication but across the board: Are we doing the right kind of policies? What is our real added-value? Are we communicating in a way people understand? On the other hand, the cycles of communication are accelerating and communicating in real time is critical if we want to be effective.

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Useful websites

The website of Commissioner Andor: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/andor/index_en.htm

The home page of the Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/>

The website of the European Social Fund: <http://ec.europa.eu/esf>

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