



Exchange

Social Protection & Inclusion in the EU

Issue 01/2007

EDITORIAL

Exchanging ideas to combat poverty and exclusion

Across Europe, governments choose various paths to address pressing social issues. Approaches abound, but they are all deeply rooted in European history, culture and participatory social traditions. Common European values underpin each of our social models. They constitute the cornerstones for developing economic and social policies and achieving progress and societal change.

Through the Open Method of Coordination on social protection and social inclusion, the EU capitalises on the intrinsic diversity of approaches and policies in these areas and promotes the European culture of dialogue and partnership. Likewise, it coordinates and encourages Member State actions to reform their social protection systems and to combat poverty and social exclusion. It facilitates the exchange of best practices and mutual learning and brings forward emerging common issues for debate. The aim is to strengthen the social dimension of the Lisbon Strategy.

To address the considerable social challenges linked to demographic ageing and globalisation, a strong European drive and efficient coordination - as well as effective mobilisation and engagement of actors at all levels, including the people directly concerned - are vital for reinforcing national policy efforts.

Strengthening information and communication on the EU Social Protection and Inclusion Process is crucial for maximising the impact of this coordination. To this end, the European Commission is launching *Exchange – News on Social Protection and Inclusion*, a Europe-wide newsletter destined to reach our key stakeholders. We are committed together with you to make it a valuable tool to underpin the successful policy, information and best practice exchange with a view to promote progress and mutual learning.

European Commission
Directorate General of Employment,
Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

■ A shared approach helps improve social cohesion in Europe



European cooperation does help EU Member States improve social cohesion policies and spending, says a Commission report discussed by employment ministers on 22 February. The *2007 Joint Report on Social Protection and Inclusion* highlights priorities and progress made in the areas of social inclusion, pensions, healthcare and long-term care – but emphasises that big challenges remain. Member States are stepping up efforts to tackle child poverty, promote ‘active inclusion’ of the most disadvantaged, ensure adequate and sustainable pensions, as well as equal access to health and long-term care.

"Recent reforms to make national systems more fiscally and socially sustainable are encouraging, but there are still big challenges ahead," said Vladimír Špidla, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

The figures speak for themselves: 16% of Europeans remain at risk of poverty and 10% live in jobless households. Across Europe, there is a 13 year gap between the highest and lowest life expectancies for men, and spending on health and long-term care in the EU ranges from 5% of GDP to 11%. "Through mutual learning and by stimulating countries to set common goals, Europe bring a real added value to national efforts to reinforce social cohesion," Mr Špidla said.

This year's report examines the first ever integrated national strategies on social inclusion, pensions, healthcare and long-term care. It was presented to EU leaders together with the Joint Report on Employment and will feed into the conclusions of the Spring Summit, which also stressed that the common social objectives of Member States should be better taken into account within the Lisbon Agenda.

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/jrep_en.htm



■ Improved data collection on homelessness for better policy making

Homelessness and housing deprivation is a Europe-wide problem and yet official statistics in this area are scarce or rarely comparable between countries. The research and evidence highlighted in the Commission report presented at

the seminar *Measurement of Homelessness at EU level* held in Brussels on 7 February marks a real step forward in the review of current systems for data collection.

Commissioned by DG Employment in the framework of the Social Protection Social Inclusion Process, the research aims to identify methods and practices to develop the information base required for measuring homelessness and housing deprivation. With a particular focus on using information from service providers, the report presents procedures and methodologies to:

- Define living situations and homelessness;
- Improve the governance of data collection;
- Set up strategies for data collection; and
- Search for indicators on homelessness and housing exclusion

The aim is not to harmonise the collection of data on homelessness at EU level but rather to provide common tools to facilitate data collection exercises, thereby enhancing the use of the data in an EU/international context, and ultimately helping us deal more efficiently with this issue.

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/studies_en.htm



IN FOCUS

■ Access to care and health status inequalities in a context of healthcare reform

This first Peer Review on healthcare issues took place in Budapest on 17-18 January hosted by the Hungarian Ministry of Health. Under the subsidiarity principle, the organisation of healthcare is a national matter. However, the EU Member States have agreed to extend the Open Method of Coordination to healthcare and long term care from a social protection point of view, looking together at the three objectives of universal access, high-quality service and long-term sustainability.

The main purpose of the peer review was to take stock of the reforms currently underway in the Hungarian healthcare system. At the same time, it examined wider European developments. Throughout the EU, there have been huge health improvements, but major divergences in living and working conditions, differences in health related behaviour, and differences in the way individuals access and use health care services are also causing differences in health status among and within Member States.

While the Budapest seminar did not adopt any formal conclusions, it did raise a number of points and questions which will be brought to the attention of the Social Protection Committee, such as the capacity of healthcare services to address the needs of different population groups based on their age, gender, income, socio-economic status, ethnicity and geography. The debate has just begun.

<http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/peer-reviews/2007>

■ Demography and social situation in Europe: the big picture

With the aim of providing a general overview of the social situation in the Europe of then 25, the Commission has completed the 2005/2006 report on the EU-wide social situation. Containing a range of social indicators, harmonised quantitative information and public opinion survey data, the report acts as a reference document and a tool for monitoring social development in the course of time.

The 2005/2006 report describes population trends and looks at the challenges for European societies presented by changing demographic structures. It examines in detail the altered family and household patterns, including the tendency of young people to remain longer at home and the greater likelihood of the elderly living alone or in institutions. The subject of low fertility is further examined through a look at the situation of families and intergenerational balances. Distribution of income and the risk of poverty are also described, focusing in particular on individuals of working age. The statistical portraits produced by Eurostat cover a wide spectrum of relevant areas, ranging from figures for economic growth within the Union to labour market statistics.

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_situation/socsit_en.htm

■ Two new calls for proposals under PROGRESS

As the EU's new integrated programme for employment and social solidarity – PROGRESS – gets on track, two new calls for proposals are to be launched. Participation in the programme is open to national, regional and local authorities, public employment services, companies and employee organisations.

The first call for proposals seeks to promote the exchange of best practice and innovative approaches in the areas of social inclusion and social protection intended to encourage mutual learning amongst the PROGRESS participating countries.

The second call for proposals will provide funding for the operating costs of European-level networks of non-governmental organisations active in promoting social inclusion, combating discrimination, promoting gender equality and the integration of disabled people in society.

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/emplweb/tenders/index_calls_en.cfm



BEST PRACTICE

■ Supporting a return to work



In Sweden, as in the rest of the world, people who have been ill or unemployed for a long period face greater difficulties in finding a new job and accessing social services on a regular basis. While they can benefit from support provided

by numerous public authorities, some find that this multiplicity of aid increases their risk of 'falling between two stools'. Ultimately, it can prove to be highly discouraging.

With the view to improving the quality of services given to all users, regardless of their employability, various social service providers in the Gothenburg suburb of Hisingen are currently joining forces on 26 related projects. Coordination between social insurance offices, primary health care system providers, the county labour board, psychiatric clinics and the adult education system, in a scheme known as DELTA, is designed to ensure that those in need receive better assistance and treatment, and their quality of life is improved. The target group consists of people of working age who face complex problems and thus need coordinated support and rehabilitation services.

An evaluation by the Gothenburg and Karlstad Universities shows that the collaborative approach has worked well, both for the residents of Hisingen and for the staff concerned. Numerous participants expressed their satisfaction with the scheme and reported that they have returned to work or embarked on self-financed studies – thereby highlighting the general economic benefits of this project. The DELTA project has been successful in helping individuals support themselves through their own work.

<http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/peer-reviews/2006/financial-coordination-within-the-field-of-rehabilitation>



FROM THE GROUND

■ A new website on homelessness and housing exclusion is launched in Poland

Julia Wygnanska, a Polish FEANTSA research correspondent for the European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH), in cooperation with FEANTSA members in Poland, has launched a website on homelessness and housing exclusion.

The basic aim of the website, as laid out in its mission statement, "lies in the promotion of knowledge exchange about homelessness and housing exclusion for the development of better and more effective policies and aid programmes. The main assumption of the project is that scientific research is not for academic purposes only, but a necessary first step towards designing and delivering real help that will make a difference. Still, many bodies with real power to change things rely in its actions on incomplete data, unreliable opinions and consultations and not systematically gathered and complete information. Too many useful research results are wasted, and never reach those with power to change."

A crucial part of the project lies in gathering and translating European data (like FEANTSA reports) into Polish and the promotion of this information at grassroots level. The documents on the website also include translations of some EOH publications such as the Polish National Statistics and Policy Update coming from Polish member organisations or other sources. Funding for the website was provided by the Polish Ministry for Employment and Social Affairs as well as through FEANTSA's Translation Fund.

<http://www.bezdomnosc.edu.pl>



■ Launch of an EU-wide Network of journalists and publications specialised in SPSI issues

In an effort to improve its information and communication with stakeholders and draw the attention of targeted specialised trade media to the European Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process, the European Commission is supporting a European Network of Publications and Journalists specialised on Social Protection and Social Inclusion issues at Member State level.

The Network, which will operate as a pilot project until the end of 2007, aims to:

- Increase the visibility of the European Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process at Member State level;
- Strengthen the European perspective on the social protection

and inclusion topics covered by specialised trade publications at Member State level;

- Promote the exchanges of ideas, articles, and other materials among like-minded publications;
- Facilitate the trans-national exchange of best practice amongst social affairs journalists;
- Popularise and promote innovative approaches to poverty and social exclusion.

Two types of services are provided. First is the setup and maintenance of a Europe-wide database of specialised journalists and publications with a specific interest in social affairs. Second is the dissemination of information materials and 'pointers' to projects, programmes and policies showcasing concretely the European value-added of mutual learning and exchange of best practices in the fields of social protection and social inclusion.

For more information on the Network, please contact Gellis Communications: spsi@gellis.com



■ EUMC InfoBase: A platform to act against discriminations

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC)

- in preparation for the Human Rights Day on 10 December 2006
- has launched its EUMC InfoBase. This online support is meant to serve the interested parties writing and working on racism and human rights issues in the 27 EU Member States. This new website's role is to provide the public with impartial information on racism in the EU and to serve as a reference point for actions against racial discrimination.

According to EUMC Director Beate Winkler, "Accurate information is the starting point for sound policy-making against racism. The EUMC InfoBase provides a more comprehensive picture of the situation of immigrants and ethnic minorities in the EU. It helps to raise awareness of racial discrimination in education, housing and employment, and offers analytical information about racial equality in the EU."

For each EU Member State, the InfoBase presents country specific information on five main areas: the legal situation, including information on anti-discrimination legislation; racist violence and crime; situation of migrants and minorities in employment; education; and housing.

The data and information to be provided by the InfoBase are collected through the *European Racism and Xenophobia Information Network* (RAXEN).

<http://eumc.europa.eu/factsheets/factSheetPage.php>



VIEWPOINT

Reflections on the OMC

It has been six years since the launch of the Open Method of Coordination in the fields of Social Protection and Social Inclusion and the European Anti Poverty Network has mixed views about its development and the results it has achieved.

The OMC was established as a tool to address one of the Lisbon Strategy goals of achieving "greater social cohesion". It was meant to be the EU's driving mechanism in meeting its objective to reduce poverty and social exclusion by 2010. Looking back at these commitments, the ambitions and the respective achievements, we are faced with the reality of 72 million people in the EU still bearing the burden of poverty and social exclusion.

Certainly the OMC has been important for trying to keep the issue of poverty on the EU agenda and that of some Member States which might otherwise have not given attention to this issue. It has also proved a useful tool for exchange, mutual learning, and increased knowledge. However, it is still not embedded in national policy making processes. It has not achieved a more social and sustainable model of development which informs all EU policies and actions. Consequently it has not been able to impact on the persistently high levels of poverty.

Despite this reality, the EAPN still has a vision of an EU contributing to the achievement of



Fintan Farrell, Director of the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN)

'a good life for all' and the OMC remains as one of the tools to make steps towards that goal. EAPN is proud of the role it has played since its inception in 1990 to bring the issue of poverty to the attention of decision makers at EU level and for setting up a broad alliance to ensure a European social inclusion strategy. Having had a part in the 'parenting' of the OMC, EAPN remains highly motivated to make this tool deliver the objectives agreed in Lisbon "of making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty".

We invite the European institutions and the Member States to give due consideration to how the processes in place can effectively deliver a change in the reality of the everyday lives of people experiencing poverty and exclusion. We call on decision makers to consider whether this method is sufficient to achieve that aim, or whether it is a starting point towards a more binding process at the EU level.

<http://www.eapn.org>

AGENDA

EU conference of people experiencing poverty

Brussels, 4-5 May 2007
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/events_en.htm

Informal meeting of the European Social Protection Committee

Erfurt, Germany, 22-23 May 2007

FEANTSA/Committee of Regions seminar:

Key elements for a successful local homeless strategy: How Europe can support local authorities to improve the fight against homelessness

Brussels, 1 June 2007
<http://www.feantsa.org/code/en/pg.asp?Page=716>

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council meeting (EPSCO Council)

Brussels, 30-31 May 2007

European Commission conference on Social Services of General Interest

Brussels, 4 June 2007

European Commission conference on active inclusion

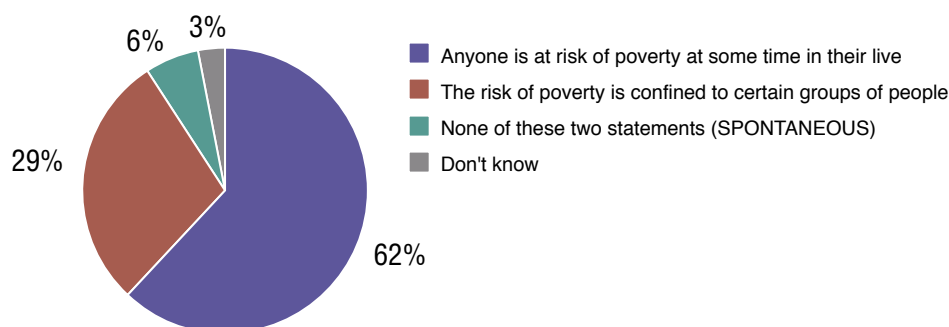
Brussels, 15 June 2007

STATISTICS

Perception of the risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU

Even if citizens are not necessarily personally affected, poverty is something that many feel could happen to them. More than 6 out of 10 Europeans believe that anyone is at risk of poverty at some time in their lives (62%).

Which of these statements comes closest to your view?



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EXCHANGE

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http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi

