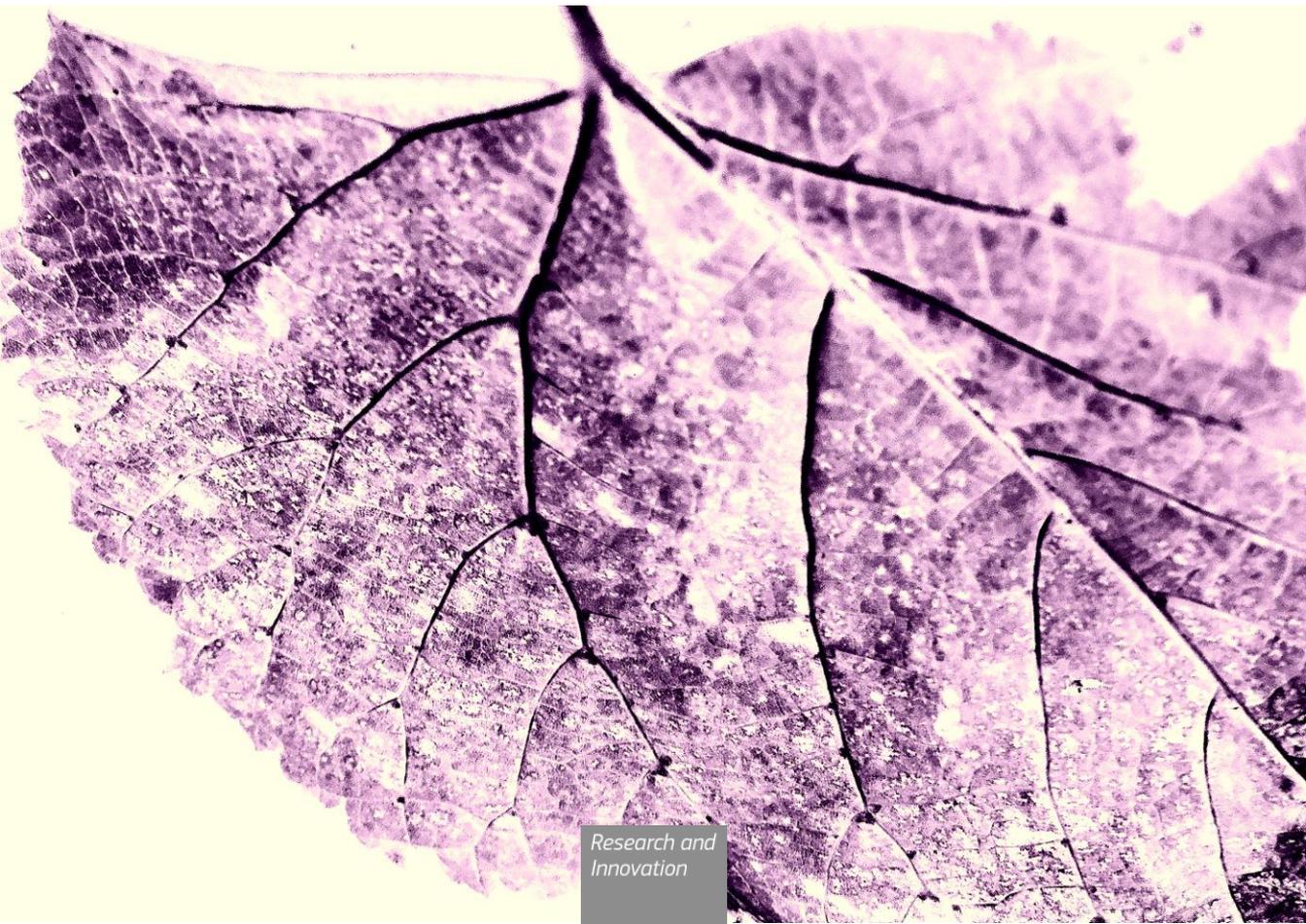




Work, Welfare and Inequalities in Europe – The Research Perspective

Conference Report



*Research and
Innovation*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DG Research and Innovation 'Open and Inclusive Societies' organised the one day seminar 'Work, Welfare and Inequalities in Europe – The Research Perspective' (October 10, 2016 Brussels) to present scientific evidence in relation to the present and future of welfare systems, labour markets and the content of work, reversing inequalities, social investment and poverty etc.¹ The seminar brought leading researchers in the fields of social and employment policies together with EU policy makers, international experts and other relevant stakeholders. Findings were discussed from a policy perspective and contributed to the public dialogue concerning the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) launched by the European Commission in March 2016.² Throughout 2016, the Commission discussed with national authorities, social partners, experts, academics, civil society and citizens on the content and role of the EPSR.

Experts and discussants stressed that work in the future will be affected by technological developments and require a greater effort in terms of skills development, especially as regards a combination of hard (e.g. engineering, business, medicine, knowledge of digital technology etc.) and transversal skills (problem solving, open-mindedness, creativity, emotional intelligence etc.). At the same time, European research shows that boosting job quality and security, including providing access to social security regardless of contract type, would be conducive to inclusive growth.

The seminar took stock of rising inequalities in Europe in the past decades and pointed in terms of policy responses to the need to promote employment and good-quality jobs; strengthen quality education and skills development; foster women's participation in economic life; and improve the efficiency and fairness of redistribution policies.

The seminar assessed social investment policies in the context of the fight against poverty and social exclusion, and foregrounded the importance of early interventions in the well-being and competencies of children and the need to combat youth unemployment. European research underlines the fact that young people from work-poor households in Europe have a significantly higher probability of being unemployed. Policies enhancing job quality – including wages and earnings – are also significant in assisting people succeed in labour market transitions and lift themselves out of poverty. Special mention was made of combining social investment with social protection policies and better calibrating interventions according to local needs and capacities.

Furthermore, as regards EU mobility, evidence demonstrates that post-enlargement migration had positive effects on GDP, GDP per capita and employment rate of citizens of host countries. The introduction of a European Minimum Income Scheme was discussed as a policy that would effectively support the social right of EU citizens to mobility.

In relation to the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) research shows that it could assist in establishing a stabilisation mechanism in the frame of EMU. For example, a re-insurance system of national unemployment systems, whereby Member States would receive lump-sum budgetary transfers from a European fund after a deviation

¹ This Report presents discussions of research results and not the official views of the European Commission.

² Presentations and the live-stream recording of the event are available at <http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/index.cfm?pg=newspage&item=160901>

in short-term unemployment trends. The EPSR would help us agree on a set of minimum requirements of the quality of national systems, which would be the precondition for an effective stabilisation mechanism. Overall, research suggests that upward convergence across the EU would require a combination of social investment, sufficiently egalitarian background conditions and social protection, as embodied in the EPSR.

INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of the discussions held during the one day seminar 'Work, Welfare and Inequalities in Europe – The Research Perspective' (October 10, 2016). The objective of the seminar was to present European research findings in relation to challenges in labour markets and the future of work, welfare systems and social policies, inequalities and social exclusion and boosting the social dimension of the European Union. Creating jobs and reducing unemployment remains a priority for the EU. Despite the recent strengthening of economic activity, the consequences of the financial and economic crisis for employment are yet to be fully addressed. Those hardest hit include young workers, the low skilled and people in more precarious working conditions. At the same time, the deterioration of the labour market has had an effect on poverty and social exclusion. Approximately 122.3 million people, or 24.5 % of the population of the EU-28, are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Inequalities in Europe remain a challenge. The combined effects of globalisation, technological changes and tax reforms have led to a deterioration in the distribution of income and wealth between Europeans. The trend has not been the same in all Member States. The rise in inequality has been more pronounced in countries that have experienced transitions (e.g. Central and Eastern Europe) or have been hit hardest by the economic crisis. Lower income and jobless households have suffered the biggest income losses.

Boosting jobs and growth, enhancing social security, tackling inequalities and promoting fairness are political imperatives for the European Commission. This was underlined by President Juncker's commitment to create a Europe with a 'Triple A Social Rating' and to introduce a European Pillar of Social Rights as part of his agenda for jobs, growth and fairness. DG Research and Innovation supports the Commission's efforts for more inclusive growth by bringing evidence needed for policy-making. Having access to robust data and results is paramount for the design of effective policy. The EU's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration activities and the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation finance several research projects on (un)employment and job creation; labour market innovations; vulnerabilities of different groups of workers (youth, women, disabled, migrants); social exclusion and inequalities; quality of work and skills; impact of technology on labour markets etc.

The seminar comprised five sessions devoted to a) enhancing the fairness of labour markets while boosting the quality of jobs; b) tackling inequalities in Europe; c) discussing scientific evidence as regards the welfare policies of Social Investment and their implementation in European countries; d) addressing issues pertaining to the challenges faced by youth, migrants and skills and their importance for a more cohesive economic future; e) examining trends in European welfare states and sketching out possible pathways for more inclusive and socially sustainable growth. In this context, an overview of the scope and potential of the EPSR as an instrument to promote the social dimension of the EU was discussed.

The seminar served as a venue for the presentation of the Policy Review entitled "Fighting poverty and exclusion through social investment: A European research perspective". The Review, published days before the seminar, presents evidence from twenty 7th Framework Programme research projects on issues pertaining to poverty and exclusion; social investment and protection; new risks and vulnerabilities of different social groups; tax and benefit policies for promoting inclusion and overall policy learning concerning what works, where and why. It highlights invaluable research and policy insights and puts forward recommendations for moving forwards towards battling poverty and exclusion.

Insights and results from the Policy Review "An ever closer union among the people of Europe? Rising inequalities in the EU and their social, economic and political impacts" (2015) were also discussed. The Review presents evidence and policy recommendations from sixteen FP7 and FP6 funded projects with a view to tackle inequalities in the EU.

WORK, WELFARE AND INEQUALITIES IN EUROPE –

THE RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

The seminar was opened by **Wolfgang Burtscher** (Deputy Director-General, DG Research and Innovation). Mr Burtscher stressed that in order to meet present and future challenges, policies are urgently needed that support upskilling; take account of the impact of digitalisation and the collaborative economy; reach out to the long-term unemployed and youth not in education, employment or training (NEETs); provide appropriate social security; invest in education and the well-being of children etc. The European Commission's Framework Programme, in particular the part that deals with the Social and Human Sciences (the most important part of Challenge 6), has over the past years devoted many resources to the study of work, welfare and inequalities. The outcome is a sizeable evidence base that is at the heart of the EC's consultation on the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). Mr Burtscher also noted that in the 2014-2017 Horizon 2020 Work Programme for Societal Challenge 6, dedicated calls were included on ideas and strategies for overcoming the crisis, reversing inequalities and addressing the multidimensional challenges faced by youth. Furthermore, DG Research and Innovation is in the process of preparing the Horizon 2020 Work Programme for 2018-2020, which may lead to future research on employment, productivity, welfare policies, the social dimension of the EU etc.

Stefan Olsson, Director Employment in DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion referred to the importance of the European Pillar of Social Rights as a direct initiative of Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. In this context, the EC launched the public consultation process preparing the groundwork for the EPSR in March 2016. In the subsequent months, DG EMPL consulted a multitude of stakeholders; civil society organisations, employer organisations, trade unions, academics, officials of international organisations etc. Mr Olsson called attention to the big challenges facing the EU's Members States such as addressing the labour market impacts of technological transformation, safeguarding and improving social protection, addressing poverty and inequality trends, improving productivity, and equipping people with more and higher skills. He made clear that scientific expertise and input are important in the framework of the EPSR as they would allow the EC to design comprehensive policies implementing the principles underpinning the initiative.

SESSION 1 – GOOD JOBS, FAIR LABOUR MARKETS

The first session was introduced by **Max Uebe** (Head of Unit-Employment Strategy, DG EMPL) who underlined that the issues to be explored pertained to the future of work and labour markets, trends in job quality, skills for the future, and labour market reforms needed in order to deal with unemployment and insecurity.

Prof. Simon Dolan (ESADE Business School) discussed the role of digitalization, globalization and creativity in potentially reducing the number of available jobs, altering the content of work, and influencing future skills needs. He stressed in particular that modern economies will increasingly need a mix of important key disciplinary skills (e.g. engineering, business, medicine etc.) combined with good knowledge of digital technology and complemented with an important dosage of soft skills (open-mindedness, creativity, emotional intelligence etc.). Mr Dolan further mentioned that work in the future will be more mobile and flexible, involving fewer

working hours and more time for learning and developing competencies. Nonetheless, he also pointed to the fact that technological innovations will also mean that in the labour markets of the future, workers will have to compete for jobs with robots as well as humans.

Dr. Christine Erhel (Paris 1 University) presented research findings on trends related to job quality that show that since the 1990s and up until the onset of the Great Recession there was an upward trend and some convergence across Europe. Since the crisis, however, data reveal a decreasing trend, especially for non-standard employment, wages and labour security. Furthermore, according to Ms Erhel, in a context of high unemployment and weaker labour unions, labour supply strategies based on education and training will not be sufficient to raise job quality. Hence, there is a role for the minimum wage and standard setting policies as means to enhance job quality. In relation to the European Pillar of Social Rights, Ms Erhel noted that it is indeed oriented towards job quality but would need to better clarify indicators that can be followed up and enforced through better coordination of labour market policies in Europe.

Dr. Werner Eichhorst (Institute for the Study of Labour) put the focus on the segmentation of labour markets produced by the different types of employment protection. He noted that the result of these divisions was that fixed-term employees and young people were heavily impacted during and after the crisis. In response, some countries have following the crisis sought to reduce or clarify dismissal protection for more secure contracts. On the other hand, trends in employment protection legislation (EPL) are less clear with some re-regulation taking place together with a tendency to make short-term contracts more costly to employers. As for recommendations, Mr Eichhorst argued for a moderate re-regulation of fixed-term contracts while easing dismissal protection where appropriate. Moreover, he stressed the need to ease transitions from temporary jobs to permanent ones via more training during fixed-term contract spells and to provide incentives for employers to encourage permanent hirings.

In the discussion that followed, **Maria Vaalavuo** (DG EMPL) reflected on the possibility of extending the definition of work to include non-paid work (e.g. community or voluntary work) in combination with access to a universal social income. This would allow the valorisation of non-paid work and could improve the situation of the unemployed, especially in a context of decreasing job creation as a result of technological transformations. **Mr Burtscher** made the point that the impact of automation and digitalisation on the sustainability of the European Social Model needs to be assessed. Joining in the debate, **Prof. Duncan Gallie** (University of Oxford) noted that that in the last thirty years the impact of technological changes on job tasks and unemployment has been minimal. Mr Gallie pointed to the role of company policies on work organisation and job design as a mediating factor and argued that the EC would have a role to play in influencing them and thus providing a boost to job quality.

SESSION 2 – REVERSING INEQUALITIES

The second session was chaired by **Philippe Keraudren** (Deputy Head of Unit - Open and Inclusive Societies, DG RTD). Referring to insights from the Policy Review "An ever closer union among the people of Europe? Rising inequalities in the EU and their social, economic and political impacts", Mr Keraudren alluded to the rising inequality levels in Europe and put the emphasis on the multifaceted nature of policy responses: combining social protection and investment, labour market reform, taxation and redistribution, access to education etc.

Presenting OECD data, **Céline Thevenot** (Policy Analyst, OECD) highlighted that in the last three decades there has been an overall increase in disposable income inequality among the organisation's Member States. With respect to long-term trends affecting inequality levels, Ms Thevenot stressed that the increase in non-standard work contributed to job polarisation, and that inequality would have been higher if women's employment had remained the same as 20 years ago. OECD data also point to the fact that since the crisis, redistribution has weakened, with tax and benefit systems achieving less in terms of reducing market income inequality. In order to address these challenges, the OECD stresses the need to promote employment and good-quality jobs; strengthen quality education and skills development; foster women's participation in economic life; and improve the design of tax and benefit systems for a more efficient redistribution.

Dr. Abigail McKnight (London School of Economics) also stressed that inequality has increased across EU/OECD countries and made the case for greater governmental action in combatting it. She presented evidence related in particular to three key areas where governments can actively help to shape more equitable outcomes: education, wage determination and welfare states. Ms McKnight emphasised that education inequality is a driver of economic inequality and that education plays a key role in the reproduction of inequality across generations. Furthermore, she noted that the erosion or absence of collective wage bargaining is associated with an increase in the incidence of low pay and an increase in the dispersion of pay in the lower half of the distribution. Finally, in relation to welfare states, she argued that the generosity and scope of social security payments are critical for reducing inequality and poverty and that on the contrary greater selectivity with respect to net cash transfers is less effective.

Prof. Daniele Checchi (University of Milan) critically examined the role of education policies in reducing inequalities. He argued that with regard to educational attainment both the distribution of schooling among the population and the distribution of competencies are important. Evidence shows that both numeracy and years of schooling have an impact on labour incomes. Thus, educational attainment should incorporate schooling and achievements. However, these two dimensions are correlated with parental background and unobservable abilities (e.g. intelligence). According to Mr Checchi, we would hence need to ascertain how competences are formed, and whether they can be influenced or shaped before schooling. To this end, longitudinal surveys and/or administrative data would be necessary.

In the ensuing discussion, **Prof. Ides Nicaise** (Catholic University of Leuven) pointed to the fact that long-lasting inequalities are very often already formed during the time that adolescents complete secondary education. Other participants referred to the importance of tackling inequalities in health and housing but also referred to the crucial role of social dialogue and labour representation in supporting incomes and combating social disparities.

SESSION 3 – POVERTY AND SOCIAL INVESTMENT

The third session opened with a presentation by **Georgios Papanagnou** (Policy Officer - Open and Inclusive Societies, DG RTD) on the findings from the ***Policy Review – Fighting Poverty and Exclusion through Social Investment*** (prepared by **Prof. Jon Kvist**). According to the Review, European research makes clear that if we are to reduce poverty and exclusion in the EU, intervention should start as early as possible, as investments in the well-being and competencies of children reduce social, economic and health inequalities. Equally important is combating youth unemployment and investing in higher skills as the absence of

robust policies in these fields can lead to reduced lifetime earnings, worse labour market outcomes, and poorer health for European citizens (and especially the young). Furthermore, European socio-economic evidence shows that there are both social and economic benefits from improved job quality – including wages and earnings – and that social protection is key in assisting labour market transitions. In global terms, what transpires from the findings presented is that both social investment and more classic social protection – together with robust and up-to-date data – are necessary for achieving the EU's poverty and exclusion targets.

Following the presentation of the Policy Review, **Prof. Bea Cantillon** (Antwerp University) critically reflected on the failure to reduce poverty among the working age population in Europe, despite the growth in both income and employment before the crisis. According to her analysis, this has been an outcome of profound changes in welfare states. In particular, Ms Cantillon argued that with the turn to social investment, modern welfare states increased efforts for the employed while low-skilled workers suffered greater redundancy rates or saw real pay fall. The jobless have also seen their protection decrease. As a result, the erosion of the social floor for the jobless has brought about an increase in poverty and has led to a social dualisation between haves and have-nots. The way forward lies in increasing the redistributive capacity of the welfare state and augmenting the capacity of the less skilled and jobless to be better integrated into the economic fabric.

Picking up the thread, **Prof. Maurizio Ferrera** (University of Milan) discussed the role of the EU in promoting social investment in the context of the European Pillar of Social Rights. He noted that the EU has played a decisive role in the articulation of the social investment paradigm but that outcomes and implementation in Member States show significant divergence. These developments, he noted, are related to the EU's strength to provide a comprehensive policy narrative supported by evidence and its capacity to enact policies for the long term. In terms of narrative, the EU's record has been less successful since it has not been able to extend the reach of its message outside specialised expert arenas. On the other hand, its capacity record has been stronger as a result of peer pressure, learning, socialization and leverage mechanisms of the new conditionality framework for the use of EU funds (especially ex ante conditionality). Nonetheless, Mr Ferrera noted that unexploited potential exists, especially in terms of engaging civil society organisations and European regional authorities. Ultimately, if social investment is to take root in Member States, a new political message emphasising how it would relate to stable growth and redistribution, and how it would promote social justice – also with instruments like the European Pillar of Social Rights, would be necessary.

The discussion following the presentations noted the need to have regional data on the implementation of social investment. Furthermore, discussants critically examined the role of active labour market policies as the main route out of poverty, made a plea for more coherently discussing social rights as part of policy initiatives and reaffirmed the need to combine social investment with strong social protection.

SESSION 4 – INVESTING IN THE FUTURE: YOUTH, MOBILITY, SKILLS

The fourth session was chaired by **Philippe Keraudren** who underlined that the goal of the presentations and discussions would be to examine future looking policies in the field of youth unemployment, EU mobility and skills. A strong investment approach in these three fields would have the potential to lead to stronger and more cohesive economic growth and to a process of upward convergence among EU Member States.

Prof. Jacqueline O'Reilly (University of Brighton) opened the session with a presentation on evidence concerning EU youth unemployment. In particular, she pointed to four major challenges facing young people since the 1980s: a) a burgeoning skills mismatch (and over-education), which strongly affects graduates from poorer backgrounds; b) the fact that self-employment is a more viable option for youth in the more innovative and technologically advanced sectors; c) the difficulties faced by young migrants (including some EU mobile citizens) with regard to skills mismatch and labour market security in destination countries; d) the role of inherited disadvantage and the fact that young people from work-poor households in Europe have a significantly higher probability of being unemployed. In the context of the European Pillar of Social Rights, Ms O'Reilly discussed the potential of treating the EC's Youth Guarantee initiative as a social right.

Prof. Martin Kahanec (Central European University) elaborated on the labour market dimension of EU mobility. He called attention to the fact that mobility within the EU is in general low (annual EU interstate mobility is 1% vs. 3% in USA, and 2% in Canada). EU mobile citizens exhibit higher labour market activity rates than natives. However, at the same time, EU15 migrants perform better in terms of skills, labour market integration and unemployment probability than EU12 migrants. Furthermore, for post-enlargement intra-EU migration, research finds positive effects on GDP, GDP per capita and the employment rate in host countries. Similarly, data suggest that immigrants do not lower the wages or employment prospects of natives and create jobs in the long run. Finally, according to Mr Kahanec, EU migrants do not choose destination countries based on levels of welfare spending but rather in terms of employment opportunities.

Closing the session, **Prof. Peer Ederer** (Zeppelin University) discussed how to promote higher skills and by extension reduce the wealth differences that exist among European regions. According to FP7 research findings, income gaps between top and bottom-earners (hourly wage) grow with time. This cannot be explained if one considers only the skills people acquired through education, since in that case the gap would stay the same. The difference can thus be attributed to the fact that the productivity of people with higher skills keeps increasing as a result of them performing complex tasks e.g. optimisation of production, making decisions with significant financial consequences, teaching, organising work of large teams etc. Complex job holders experience a sustained growth of income and the more complex the job, the faster, longer and higher their income. In conclusion, Mr Ederer noted that handling complexity can indeed be learned but we would need significant social investments in that regard in order to reach out to those who have not been exposed to complexity.

SESSION 5 – THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN WELFARE

The final session, chaired by **Radek Maly** (Head of Unit DG EMPL), was devoted to the future of European welfare and sought to cover issues relating to disparities across Member States and how to address them through social policies, the introduction of a European Minimum Income Scheme, and an overarching discussion on the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Prof. Martin Seeleib Kaiser (University of Oxford) talked about enhancing the social dimension of EU citizenship by means of a European Minimum Income Scheme (EMIS). He noted that EU mobile citizens' right to access social rights in the host country is heavily stratified during the first five years of residence. During this initial period, there is a stark distinction between EU workers, who have the same rights as nationals, and economically inactive EU citizens – jobseekers, students,

retired persons, and accompanying family members – who must have comprehensive sickness insurance and sufficient resources for themselves and their family members. As a consequence, citizens from poorer EU MS would be considerably worse off than natives if they moved to another country (as pensioners or job-seekers) if they have to export benefits from the origin country. Mr Seeleib Kaiser suggested that in order to correct this fundamental inequality in relation to EU citizenship, the EU should consider establishing an EMIS. The basic income guarantee would effectively support EU mobility and allow every EU citizen to live a life in dignity. According to the research findings, given potential detrimental effects due to different levels of economic development, it would be more realistic to develop specific benefits for pensioners and mobile jobseekers as a start.

Commenting on the future of European welfare states, **Prof. Ana Guillen** (University of Oviedo) brought insights from Southern Europe. Welfare states in Southern European countries were deeply impacted by the Great Recession and policies of austerity. As a result, both inequality and at-risk-of poverty rates increased, with the poor becoming younger than before the crisis. Hence, presently some kind of social emergency policies would have to be implemented in order to counteract the most severe effects of the crisis. This casts some doubt on the potential of social investment, as a social policy paradigm, to address challenges in Southern Europe because education and training per se would not translate into an automatic creation of high quality jobs. Likewise, in order for the supply of high skilled labour to create demand, high productivity sectors would have to be expanded. Equally, family-work reconciliation policies would not guarantee massive female labour market participation unless discrimination was tackled first. In order to resolve these conundrums, the EU would have to better tailor social policy recommendations to specific countries and regions.

Bringing the discussions to a close, **Prof. Frank Vandenbroucke** (University of Amsterdam) highlighted the main design problem in EMU, which is the lack of a stabilisation capacity. This necessitates the introduction of a stabilisation device like for example a re-insurance system of national unemployment systems. Reinsurance operates with lump sum budgetary transfers between a European fund and member states. Under this system Member States would receive transfers on the basis of a trigger (based on the deviation of current short-term unemployment in the member state from its past trajectory). However, Mr Vandenbroucke noted that it would be impossible to achieve that if we do not have a set of minimum requirements of the quality of national stabilisation devices. In effect, what would be required is a consensus on quality standards for national systems. More generally, EMU forces upon the member states a shared conception of labour market flexibility (and, hence, security), symmetric guidelines on wage cost competitiveness (e.g. 'golden rule' linking wages to productivity) and institutions that can deliver on these (importance of coordinated collective bargaining). In the long-term, it also involves the sustainability of pensions. The EPSR can thus contribute to such a consensus, eventually supporting the establishment of a Union of national welfare states. Upward convergence across the EMU or the EU would require a combination of social investment, sufficiently egalitarian background conditions and social protection, as embodied in the EPSR. At the same time however, Mr Vandenbroucke cautioned against the EPSR creating false expectations in terms of justiciable rights. He stressed that we should perceive the instrument as an agenda and thus seek to clarify its links to the legislative process and benchmark setting. Ultimately he argued that if the initiative is to have an impact, its implementation should be debated at the highest political level i.e. at the level of the European Fiscal Compact.

In the subsequent discussion, **Philippe Keraudren** stressed that the appetite for more common European approaches in terms of social policy at the national level might not be so strong. He mentioned the role of populist politicians and discourses

in promoting the idea that the protection of the welfare state is premised on the closure of borders and disconnecting from the process of European integration. Mr Vandembroucke equally argued that there is a decreased appetite for more Europe in relation to the past. In terms of responding to such popular anxieties, he made the point that policy communities would have to show that current EU initiatives actually increase the capacity of national welfare states to perform better.

The seminar closed with an intervention by **Elisabeth Lipiatou**, Head of Unit Open and Inclusive Societies DG RTD. Ms Lipiatou referred to the role of DG Research and Innovation in putting high-quality research evidence at the heart of the policy process and at the same time setting the agenda for innovative, policy relevant, ground-breaking European socio-economic research. She pointed to the bulk of policy relevant data in the fields of work, welfare and inequalities produced under FP7 as presented by the *Policy Review – Fighting Poverty and Exclusion through Social Investment* and alluded to the usefulness of Policy Reviews for policy making. Finally, she mentioned that DG RTD is in the process of preparing the H2020 Work Programme 2018-20 and argued that the stimulating ideas and feedback from the seminar could assist the drafting process.

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