

EDITORIAL

A 'Shared Commitment for Employment'

Europe has responded rapidly to the financial and economic crisis. The Member States have made major efforts to coordinate their action on restoring the credibility of the financial markets and rebuilding confidence in the economy. In addition, Europe must now show equal determination in committing to preserve employment and help those in difficulty. That is why, on 3 June, the Commission proposed a communication for employment, as a follow-up to the recent European Employment Summit held on 7 May.

'The impact of this crisis on jobs is our number one concern,' Commission President José Manuel Barroso told the summit. 'When you have millions of people being haunted by the spectre of unemployment, Europe cannot limit itself to being a bystander.' He called for a shared commitment by the Commission, EU governments and the social partners.

The plan sets three priorities: maintaining employment and creating jobs; upgrading skills and matching labour market needs; and increasing access to employment. At the EU level, the key measure aims to free up € 19bn of European Social Fund money to help the victims of the crisis. This funding will be paid out in advance, and above all, the Member States will, exceptionally, be able to use this aid without having to put in the national co-financing that is usually required. The Member States are responsible for employment and social policy, and the Commission recommends that they preserve viable jobs, notably through short-time working or training measures. It is also urging them to finance immediate assistance to those who are out of work, so as to prevent long-term unemployment and loss of skills, support the creation of apprenticeships for young people and promote a return to employment by disadvantaged groups, for example by reducing non-wage labour costs.

The communication was presented to the European Council on 18-19 June. On that occasion, the Heads of State and Government acknowledged the three priority areas of the communication on 'the shared commitment for employment.'

FOCUS

Commission examines the social consequences of the crisis

The Commission and the Social Protection Committee (SPC) are now regularly monitoring the social impact of the crisis, together with the social policy measures that Member States are taking to tackle it. Particular attention is being paid to the most vulnerable groups. The first joint assessment by the SPC and the Commission was presented to the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO) Council in March 2009. An updated version was finalised at the end of May. It paints an even fuller picture of the challenges facing the EU 27 and the ways in which they are responding. It will be presented to the next EPSCO Council.

The impact of the crisis on labour markets is growing. The EU unemployment rate reached 8.3% in March, as against 6.8% in April 2008. Worst hit are young people, older people, migrants, the low-qualified and those on short-term contracts. In all the Member States, the social protection systems have started to take on their role of automatic stabilisers. But the assessment also shows that these trends hide widely varying national situations. Some States have been hit much harder by the crisis than others. And not all of them are equally well equipped to tackle it, due to big differences in the quality and level of social protection systems.



Picture: Michel Loraux / © European Communities

Faced with the crisis, Member States have responded rapidly with measures in four main fields: the labour market; income support; measures to soften the direct impact of the financial crisis on households; and investments in social and health infrastructure. For the most part, these are temporary measures, but most Member States have reaffirmed the long-term commitments to which they were already pledged. The EU-wide coordination of national measures, through the mobilisation of all available instruments, including EU resources, can help to strengthen these commitments.

Assessing the social impacts of European policies

How can we tell if the internalisation of external transport costs will result in job cuts? Or if stricter energy performance requirements for buildings will increase the rents paid by the most vulnerable people? By assessing social impacts in advance. But their diversity and complexity make this a tricky task. *Assessing the Employment and Social Impacts of Selected Strategic Commission Policies* is a new study produced for the Commission. It suggests ways of moving forward in this field.

Its authors designed a database which gives an overview of social impact assessment techniques. They then examined different assessment methods, applying them to concrete cases in four strategic policy areas: trade, the internal market, transport and energy. As the study emphasises, each case is unique and calls for a different method of assessment, but some methods are more promising than others. Through a set of recommendations, the authors give their roadmap for choosing the most appropriate assessment method and identifying, selecting and analysing the social impacts in a relevant way.

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=485&furtherNews=yes>

FOCUS

A European platform for Roma inclusion

The new European platform for the inclusion of Roma has got off to a good start. It was launched in Prague this April, at an event attended by many EU government leaders and representatives. The aim is to combat more effectively the exclusion suffered by Europe's biggest minority, through better coordination of national policies and strengthened cooperation among the various actors.



Picture: Michel Loraux / © European Communities

The launch of the platform was marked by the drawing up of 12 basic common principles intended as a guide for action. The meeting also took stock of the progress made since the first European Roma summit in September 2008. 'I attach great importance to this initiative, because there is no doubt that the situation of Roma in the European Union is very serious,' Commissioner Vladimír Špidla declared. He recalled that improving their lot is the shared responsibility of the Commission and the Member States. He also announced that other, more specific recommendations would be drawn up over the coming months. Moreover, the Commission undertook to report on the progress of a € 5m pilot project which the European Parliament added to the budget for 2009.

The next stocktaking will be in early 2010, and will serve as a basis for discussion at the European Roma summit scheduled for April 2010 in Spain.

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=491&furtherNews=yes>

Housing's role in homelessness pathways – FEANTSA report

FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with People who are Homeless, focused on housing as a theme for 2008. Its work raised a question that goes to the heart of the matter: what role does housing policy play in combating housing-related exclusion, as distinct from the social, economic or health issues faced by those with no fixed abode?

To find the answer, FEANTSA drew up a detailed questionnaire which its members used when preparing reports in 18 EU countries. In its 43-page summary report, FEANTSA's verdict is clear: 'structural barriers to housing (i.e. shortages and rent levels) largely determine whether vulnerable people actually become homeless. Social and public housing remains the most relevant long-term housing solution for homeless people,' the report emphasises. One advantage is that it is the type of housing that governments can most easily control as regards quality and cost. Also, it is the best environment for tackling other health and social needs.

The report also describes key housing policies in 18 EU countries, together with certain national anti-homelessness strategies centred on housing policy.



Picture: Michel Loraux / © European Communities

http://www.feantsa.org/files/Housing_Annual_Theme/European_Report/08_European_Report_FEANTSA_Housing_final_EN.pdf

New EU poverty indicator

The indicators sub-group of the Social Protection Committee (SPC) has just added a new indicator to the existing range of European poverty indicators. This one is designed to measure poverty of living conditions. It aims at a better understanding of the diversity of living conditions. This is all the more necessary because, following the enlargement of the EU to 27, the disparities in European citizens' living standards have become more obvious.

Unlike the main poverty indicator, which is income-based, the living conditions poverty indicator measures the proportion of people whose living conditions are severely affected by a lack of resources. For instance, they may not have enough money pay the rent, meet unexpected expenses, eat meat regularly, go on holiday, or buy a TV, car or telephone. The statistical data used are those collected as part of the EU-SILC study (European Union statistics on income and living conditions).

Living conditions poverty indicator permits additional insights which go beyond those offered by a monetary approach to poverty and reflects the fact that two individuals may have exactly the same income but very different living conditions, depending on their overall resources. As the indicators sub-group of the Social Protection Committee points out, the aim is not to substitute one indicator for another, but rather to use both approaches in order to better grasp the phenomenon of poverty in Europe.

ON THE GROUND

Europe celebrates solidarity between generations

The first-ever European Day of Solidarity between Generations was held on 29 April 2009. Events took place right across Europe. Some were fun, such as the intergenerational interactive video games tournament or the frank tales of childhood misdeeds. Others were more serious. But they all set out to make the public more aware of the need to strengthen links between the young and the less young.



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'Over the coming years, the first baby-boomers will be starting to retire,' Commissioner Vladimír Špidla pointed out. 'This marks the beginning of a fundamental shift in the balance between retirees and people of working age. We have to make sure that ageing will not undermine solidarity between generations.' To mark the Day, the Commission brought out a Eurobarometer survey on European citizens' perceptions of solidarity between generations. Its main findings:

- The great majority of Europeans have a positive perception of older people, and 85% believe that they are not a 'burden on society'.
- 49% of Europeans think that governments should devote more money to pensions and care for older people. However, they are less sanguine about the reality. 58% think that governments will not be in a position to fund pensions and care for the elderly in the coming decades.
- 66% take the view that governments should facilitate working by people beyond retirement age, where they so wish.
- More than 8 out of 10 people in almost all the Member States think that financial assistance from parents and grandparents is important when young adults found their own households and families. A big majority (78%) of EU citizens feel that elderly people make an important contribution to society through their involvement in national voluntary work.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/651&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

GOOD PRACTICE

European cities unite against child poverty

There are already many studies on the extent and causes of urban child poverty, but information is very scarce on policies and programmes that effectively reduce this poverty at the local level. So the Greater London Enterprise (GLE), in partnership with Amsterdam, Milan, Helsinki and Budapest (and associated partners in Copenhagen, Denmark, and Solna, Sollentuna, Vasteras and Uppsala, in Sweden) had the idea of launching a network of European cities against child poverty. This initiative, together with 13 other projects, was selected by the EU for its PROGRESS programme. As such, it is receiving European funding worth € 718 000 over two years.



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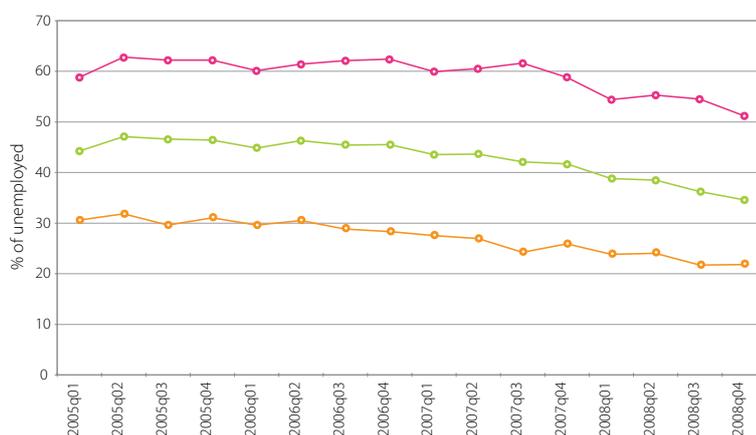
The network started its activities at the beginning of 2008. The method is simple: exchanging good practices and promoting mutual learning by local authorities on initiatives and policies aimed at reducing child poverty. The objective is to identify innovative, effective initiatives that enable the development of a common model for integrated local strategies. The network chose a series of priority themes, notably improving children's life chances and breaking cycles of deprivation by means of educational and health programmes; promoting access to employment; training parents; and the impact of homelessness and bad housing conditions on children. Concretely, each partner city has the task of organising a set of study visits, seminars, workshops or conferences. These meetings are a central element of the network's activities.

The project partners have developed a 'learning method' as a way of mobilising all the decision-makers in each partner city within the process. The key elements of this method are questionnaires, case studies (assessing the transferability, sustainability and added value of the practices described) and a practical guide which will present all the case studies in an easy-to-access online format. The results will also form the basis for recommendations as to the best way of combating child poverty. This guide will be launched at the network's last meeting, in London in November 2009.

<http://www.againstchildpoverty.com/>

STATISTICS

Long-term unemployment as a proportion of the overall number of unemployed people in the EU



Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey.



VIEWPOINT

Ending child poverty within the European Union?

Over recent years we've seen increasing attention being given to child poverty across the EU. This may be due to the higher levels of poverty experienced by children (19% of under-18s live in relative poverty, compared to 16% of the population as a whole) or the fact that tackling child poverty helps break the cycle of inter-generational inheritance of poverty. The attention is welcome. But, what is lacking in the EU is any sense of political urgency.

Whilst there are some good policy ideas, there is a huge gap between aspiration and implementation. And when we analyze the data, child poverty shows no signs of decreasing.

The current economic crisis might have provided an opportunity to reflect on political priorities and re-focus on how to build a more just society that gives equal chances to citizens. Instead, the policy responses seem to be short-term reactions to the problems, rather than addressing their root causes.

For Eurochild, increasing investment in children is the most effective and sustainable way to prevent poverty. In the current economic climate, we need to think long-term. It is children who will bear the burden of the escalating public debt. But many children are now facing high levels of family stress that will shape their self-esteem and mental health long into the future. We need to act now.

Our plea is therefore that governments increase public investment. We urgently need to increase early years services – not only to help parents



By *Jana Hainsworth*,
general secretary of
Eurochild

who want to work, but also to support children's development. Early childhood services must be conceived around the child's best interest. Staff must be well-trained and valued, parents must be involved and supported, services must be accessible and affordable for all. Secondly, it is crucial that families are given the necessary support before problems escalate and children's well-being and mental health is at risk. Finally we must not forget the most vulnerable in society. Families already living in poverty before the crisis hit are likely to fall further into hardship. Children at risk or those already growing up in formal care must be supported through services which take account of each individual child's needs. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) should provide the guiding principles for all our policy and action concerning children.

The EU can provide important leadership. The Social Open Method of Coordination now needs to raise its game and set common targets to reduce poverty and social exclusion. Targets will raise the visibility of the process and mobilise resources. In child poverty, we support an EC Recommendation which would commit member states to on-going policy reform and better monitoring and evaluation of outcomes for children.

2010 is the 'European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion'. It is also the year the EU will adopt its post-Lisbon agenda. Perhaps the best way to shape the future we want is to focus on our children, and ensure that every child, whatever their background or circumstance, can fulfil their full potential.

AGENDA

RURAL POVERTY

Conference on poverty on social exclusion in rural areas (in collaboration with AGRI and REGIO)
Budapest, 11-12 June 2009

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=88&langId=en&eventsId=158&furtherEvents=yes>

PEER REVIEWS

Alzheimer's and other related diseases: coping with behavioural disorders in the patient's home

France, 5-6 May 2009

http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2009/alzheimers-and-related-diseases-how-to-cope-with-crisis-situations-in-the-patient2019s-home?set_language=en

Integrated programme for the social inclusion of Roma

Greece, 27-28 May 2009

<http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2009/integrated-programme-for-the-social-inclusion-of-roma>

Ensuring a functioning healthcare system in regions with declining and ageing populations

Germany, 15-16 June 2009

<http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2009/ensuring-a-functioning-healthcare-system-in-regions-with-declining-and-ageing-populations>

E-LIBRARY

Facing up to a globalised world

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=673&langId=en&videoId=1521&vl=en>

Inclusion & equality

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=671&langId=en>

LEGISLATION – PUBLICATION

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<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=437&langId=en>

'STOP DISCRIMINATION' NEWSLETTER

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<http://www.stop-discrimination.info/8041.0.html>