



## EDITORIAL

Living with poverty and social exclusion can present a myriad of different problems for different people, from not having enough to spend on food and clothing through to homelessness and over-indebtedness.

Lack of resources blight the lives of millions of Europeans who end up excluded from what is – for many others – a prosperous society full of opportunity.

The EU and its Member States are acutely aware of the iniquities of poverty and social exclusion and of how divisive they are to society. That is why they have chosen 2010 as a special year to raise awareness of these interrelated issues and to stimulate greater effort to combat the problems they cause.

This European Year theme was chosen before the onset of the current economic crisis. However, the downturn has made thousands more people poorer through unemployment. It is reasonable to argue that the EU could not have picked a better time to press home the message that we must all come together to combat poverty and social exclusion.

This edition of the Exchange newsletter focuses on the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. In addition to outlining the aims and objectives of the Year, articles focus on the events and activities that will take place at both EU and national level.

Readers can also check out what is store for the official launch of EY2010, which takes place under Spanish Presidency of the EU in January.

The impact of poverty and social exclusion on health inequalities is examined in a special contribution from EuroHealthnet, a network of regional and national agencies responsible for health promotion and disease protection in Europe. This is complemented by a report on European Commission's recent Communication on tackling the health gap.

Meanwhile a focus article reports on an assessment of the social impact of the recession and related policy responses, which has been drafted jointly by the Commission and the Social Protection Committee.

## FOCUS

### Gearing up for the 2010 European Year

About 80 million people live at risk of poverty in the European Union. This is the backdrop for the EU and its Member States (along with Norway and Iceland) as they launch the 2010 European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (EY2010).

The campaign aims to raise the general public's awareness, and also that of public authorities and other players, of poverty and social exclusion and how it affects one in six EU citizens. A wide variety of activities are planned at European and national level throughout the year (information campaigns, innovative projects, debates, competitions), in a bid to bolster the efforts currently being made to combat these inter-related issues.

EY2010 wants to inspire every citizen to take up the fight against poverty and social exclusion, while promoting social solidarity across the EU. Along with the general public, the campaign aims to reach a number of target groups including people who are living in poverty and those whose work to negate its effects.

Active participation by civil society organisations, social partners, local authorities and media organisations is also expected to boost the impact of the campaign.

### Building momentum

A key challenge will be to keep EY2010 in the public eye throughout the year. To do so **momentum** will be generated around a number of **campaign peaks**, which include the following:

- The **official campaign launch**, which will take place in Madrid under the Spanish EU Presidency on **21 January 2010**.
- Two special **campaign focus weeks**, to be held in **May and October**. In May, a special broadcasting week promises to boost coverage of the year's activities.
- An **Art Initiative** will be launched towards the end of the first quarter. People experiencing poverty and artists will be invited to give their interpretation of poverty and social exclusion, and how they affect people's lives. The results will be displayed in an exhibition later on in the year.

- In **March** an EU-wide **competition for journalists** will be launched, which aims to inspire media professionals to explore issues surrounding poverty and social exclusion. The winners will be announced at an awards ceremony later on in the year.
- **December** will see the campaign's closing conference, to be held in Brussels under the Belgian Presidency. The Presidency will draft an ambitious political declaration on the fight against poverty, which will be endorsed by Heads of State and governments.



Permanent communications activities will complement the campaign peaks, including regular press bulletins and a variety of stakeholder activities. Special thematic milestones echoed on the EY2010 website, and other channels, will focus on particular aspects of poverty and social exclusion.

A video clip on the European Year will be released in January in 23 languages. And a video news release is planned for the second quarter of the year, along with a regular video diary of events.

A poster campaign with the strap-line 'Stop Poverty Now' promises to show in stark terms the impact that poverty and social exclusion has on people's lives. The posters will be displayed in selected cities across the EU as well as in magazines that focus on social issues.

Brochures and promotional leaflets will also be available to explain the mission and provide useful facts and figures.

For more information, see the campaign website: <http://www.2010againstopoverty.eu/>



## EY2010 at national level

Each participating country has its own tailored programme of activities and events designed by the EY2010 National Implementing Bodies (NIBs) with input from government, local authorities, NGOs, and other stakeholders.

National NGO Focus Weeks will take place from February to November in all countries. These will complement the huge variety of specific national actions that have been developed to promote EY2010, which include seminars, workshops, publicity campaigns and competitions.

For example, the UK has already run a series of roadshows that showcase regional efforts to tackle social exclusion. In Romania, gifted youngsters from poorer backgrounds will be invited to take part in a special 'Children's Olympics'. Greece, meanwhile, will hold a conference to find out what can be done to help homeless migrants.



Picture: Michel Loriaux / © European Union

The aim will be to get grassroots organisations involved as much as possible in all events to give the year true depth and impact. Successful solutions, initiatives and policies for combating poverty and social exclusion from around Europe will be publicised on the EY2010 website.

National communication correspondents for EY2010 will work with NIBs to stimulate press coverage and arrange press breakfasts. These events will provide journalists with the chance to interview campaign ambassadors and others closely involved in the Year's activities. Six such briefings per country should keep interest high throughout the year and improve awareness of poverty-related issues.

This network of national communication correspondents will also work to ensure that EY2010 has a presence at scheduled national events and festivals. In addition, the correspondents will draft ten articles throughout the year and issue regular press releases.

For more information on national programmes see the country pages of the EY2010 website: [www.2010againstopoverty.eu](http://www.2010againstopoverty.eu)

## Spain set for opening conference

The opening conference for the 2010 European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion will take place in Madrid, Spain, on 21 January.

In the opening session, Spanish President José Zapatero and his minister for health and social policy, Trinidad Jiménez, as well as José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, will share with their audience their vision of how combating poverty and social exclusion is to be orchestrated 10 years after Heads of States and governments committed to making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty.

Following them, Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, will outline the aims and objectives of EY2010 and run through the main events of the year. He will also launch the first video clip of the year, and present the website of the European Year.

Felipe González, Chairman of the Reflection Group on the Future of the European Union, will then give the keynote speech: 'The Social Europe we want: The challenge of poverty and inequality.'

The first roundtable session will give four people who live with the consequences of poverty and social exclusion the chance to share their experiences with delegates.

A panel discussion will get things started again after lunch centred around the subject: 'What the Lisbon Strategy has meant for the target of reducing poverty: Points of view of different Member States and a review of experiences.'

Aurelio Fernández, Chairman of the Social Protection Committee, will moderate the proceedings. High-level representatives with a social portfolio from Belgium, Hungary, France and Sweden will take part in the discussion.

A Commission video will outline key facts and figures relating to poverty and social exclusion. After that the second roundtable will begin. It will explore the challenges which have to be met in the fight against poverty and social exclusion before going on to examine future commitments post-2010.

Moderation will be provided by Maria Joao Rodrigues who is a member of the Council of the Institute for Strategic International Studies at the University of Lisbon and a special advisor on the Lisbon Agenda. High-level representatives from the Commission, the European Parliament, European NGOs and social partners will be among those taking part.

The closing session is due to be led by Jerzy Buzek, President of the European Parliament, and José Bono, President of the Spanish Parliament.

## EY2010 ambassadors will give campaign a human face

To increase EY2010's outreach and to provide a human face to the campaign, inspiring role models are being asked to engage as EY2010 'ambassadors'.

The aim is to select between three and six famous personalities acknowledged across Europe, along with people from public life (ten per participating country) who are actively involved in fighting poverty and social exclusion.

People experiencing poverty themselves are full actors in the campaign, and some will also be active as ambassadors in the participating countries. Their central presence in the campaign will help breakdown stereotypes in the media and with the general public.

The ambassadors will use their talents and testimonies to increase awareness of the campaign's messages, illustrate them through concrete examples of personal commitment, and help keep EY2010 firmly in the media spotlight. To do this they will be expected to take part in a variety of activities, such as writing testimonies on the campaign's website and appearing at press briefings and special events.

## Assessing the recession's impact on Europe

The full impact of the economic crisis on labour markets and public finances has still to be faced by EU Member States, according to a recently published report from the Commission and the EU's Social Protection Committee.

The 'second joint assessment of the social impact of the crisis and of policy responses to it' also warns that the human cost of the recession cannot yet be fully evaluated. Already 5 million more people have lost their jobs since the crisis began and many households have seen their incomes drop significantly.

The report took soundings from all Member States to gauge how they have responded to the recent economic downturn to protect vulnerable groups and those facing unemployment and hardship.

Strong policy intervention which concentrated on aiding recovery and strengthening social protection systems appears to have had a major role in mitigating the social consequences of the crisis.

However, the report notes that situation is still fragile. The Commission forecasts that unemployment is likely to reach 10.3% by the end of 2010,



## ON THE GROUND

### Why dramatic health differences demand attention

Health inequalities are the differences in health that exist between different groups of people in society. They exist between all States: a woman born in France can expect to live 7 years longer on average than a woman born in Lithuania<sup>[1]</sup>.

These dramatic differences also exist within countries. A man born in one part of Glasgow in the UK has an average life expectancy at birth of 54 years, while the average life expectancy at birth for a man born in a different part of the same city is 82 years<sup>[2]</sup>.



Picture: Michel Loriaux / © European Union

Although the different levels of health between and within populations have been known and monitored for a long time, biology alone does not provide a sufficient explanation for why they exist. Instead, more recent research has shown that much of the variation in health is a result of the social and economic conditions in which we live. These circumstances, known as the 'social determinants of health', produce unfair health differences which can be avoided.

A study of eight European populations has established a greater risk of mortality for people with lower education, as compared to those with higher education, ranging between 22 and 43 per cent in men, and 20 and 32 per cent in women<sup>[3]</sup>. This demonstrates how health is closely dependent on its social determinants, from education and poverty levels to urban planning and access to green spaces.

In the context of the 2010 European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, it is essential to remember that poverty does not only refer to a lack of income. A low socioeconomic status means poor education, lack of amenities,

and social expenditure could grow from 27.5% to 30.8% of GDP between 2007 and 2010.

Along with significant increases in claims for unemployment benefits, pressure on 'last resort' social assistance schemes has also started to increase in most parts of the EU.

Some countries have reported increases in mortgage defaults and personal debt. Funded pension schemes are facing a decline in the value of investments that underpin liabilities.

Most countries have strengthened their policy responses to reduce the impact that the crisis is having on their citizens. Many have for example bolstered labour market measures designed to preserve employment, reintegrate people into the jobs market and manage restructuring.

The European Social Fund has been harnessed by Member States to provide support for the unemployed and keep people in jobs. Its resources have also been used to help vulnerable groups like disabled people find work.

A lot of Member States have also enhanced measures to support people's incomes, strengthened unemployment benefits and reinforced minimum income schemes. Some countries have taken steps to protect mortgage holders from repossession, while addressing over-indebtedness and access to credit for those on low incomes.

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/09/st16/st16169-ad01.en09.pdf>

### Tackling health inequalities in the EU

Last October the Commission announced a set of actions to help Member States and a range of actors tackle gaps in health which exist across the European Union.

Recent decades have seen overall improvements in people's health and well-being as the EU has become more prosperous. However differences in health remain between and within Member States, and in some cases the gap is widening.

For example the difference in life expectancy at birth between different EU countries can be up to 8 years for women and 14 years for men. There are many complex reasons behind such variations, embracing factors such as income levels, education, living conditions, working environments, lifestyle and access to healthcare.

What is more, the Commission fears that the current financial crisis could widen the health gap still further as more people are driven into financial hardship.

The recession could also lead to a reduction in the level of funding for health and long-term care services in several Member States due to budget cuts and reduced tax revenues. At the same time, demand for these services may increase due to a combination of factors that could lead to a deterioration in the health of the general population.

To combat these problems, the Commission aims to improve understanding of the health gap issue. It wants to see better monitoring and data collection as well as more assessments of how EU policies can be deployed to tackle health inequalities.

To close health gaps the Commission believes that regions and populations which are struggling should be given assistance so they can catch up with the rest of Europe. More attention must therefore be focused on the needs of disadvantaged people in the provision of health services and through health promotion and protection activities. Efforts should also be made to improve living and working conditions for the less well off.

In addition to strengthening own its policy evaluation procedures, the EU will work with Member States and stakeholders to identify and utilise best practice. As well as producing regular statistics, the Commission will provide reports on health inequalities and strategies that have proven to reduce health gaps.

The Commission will also help Member States to access EU funds which are available to improve the health of disadvantaged people and narrow health gaps between regions. For instance, money is available to improve primary care facilities, water and sanitation, and housing.

Member States have agreed to the objectives of addressing health inequalities in relation to health outcomes via the EU's Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Inclusion (social OMC).

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/socio\\_economics/socio\\_economic\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/socio_economics/socio_economic_en.htm)



unemployment or job insecurity, poor working conditions and unsafe neighbourhoods, with a consequent impact on family life.

Evidence shows these dimensions of social disadvantage all influence health. Moreover, as the European Commission's Social Protection Committee has warned <sup>(4)</sup>, these disadvantages may worsen due to the current economic crisis, which evidence suggests may lead to a deterioration in the health of the population depending on policy decisions.

As smaller budgets reduce the capacity of the health care sector, it is clear that the social determinants of health demand urgent attention.

Health inequalities do not only affect those with a low socioeconomic status. These variations in health exist in a social gradient across the population. Health inequalities affect everyone, and this is why they have been given increasing attention by decision-makers.

At EU level, the European Commission has shown a commitment to act via its Communication on Action to Reduce Health Inequalities <sup>(5)</sup>. Part of this action plan involves encouraging other sectors to consider the potential impacts of their decisions to make sure factors that affect people's health are addressed in a coherent way.

Knowledge is growing about the effects of social and economic conditions which influence health inequalities. EuroHealthNet, the network of public health and health promotion agencies in Europe, has set up a dedicated website at [www.equitychannel.net](http://www.equitychannel.net) which carries the latest reports and information about health inequalities.

(1) WHO World Health Statistics 2009.

(2) Final report of the WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health: 'Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health' (2008).

(3) Mackenbach J, Health inequalities: Europe in profile (2006).

(4) Second joint assessment by the Social Protection Committee and the European Commission of the social impact of the economic crisis and of policy responses, 24 November 2009.

(5) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Solidarity in health – Reducing health inequalities in the EU.

## EXCHANGE EVOLVES

The *Exchange* newsletter will come in a new form starting with the next issue. News on social protection and social inclusion in the EU will now be included in *Social Europe*, the electronic newsletter published by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. If you are a subscriber to *Exchange*, we will be contacting you soon to request authorisation to transfer your address to the *Social Europe* mailing list.

## VIEWPOINT

### Making the most of EY2010

Organising the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion is a massive undertaking. Here Anne Degrand-Guillaud, head of the EY2010 Task Force, explains some of the key challenges that her team has had to deal with.

EY2010 involves 29 countries and so while the Commission provides a coordinating role and key communications tools, the emphasis is very much on generating decentralised actions.

'The geographical and cultural diversity of our participating countries means that we have to balance common approaches to the Year with national priorities for tackling poverty and social exclusion,' explains Mrs Degrand-Guillaud.

'National programmes for EY2010 are therefore strongly linked to national anti-poverty strategies, which means different countries will prioritise different issues such as child poverty, building inclusive labour markets or improving access to services.'

Whatever the thematic priorities may be, one key aspect of the Year will be to involve people who have experienced poverty and social exclusion in as many major activities and events as possible.

'Their involvement is actually crucial: Adding just one person who has experienced poverty to the usual mix of administrative officials and NGO representatives can change the whole dynamic of a discussion or event.'



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Anne Degrand-Guillaud

Good progress has been made to recruit people with an experience of poverty, thanks in no small part to the NGOs who have helped to find suitable candidates. These are likely to be people who are now living in a more secure environment or who act as advocates for vulnerable groups.

'Another key goal for the EY2010 team is to help Europeans to create new links and partnerships that can generate fresh ideas and approaches to dealing with poverty and social exclusion.'

To achieve such synergies, EY2010 is focusing on bringing together people from public administrations, the media, NGOs and those who have lived with the burden of poverty.

'We also want to give a platform to those working in the field who are normally far from the spotlight – it's about recognising the value of their work and renewing everyone's motivation to deal with these pressing issues,' adds Mrs Degrand-Guillaud.

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### 'STOP DISCRIMINATION' NEWSLETTER

Interested in learning more about discrimination and diversity issues in Europe? Read the new 'Stop Discrimination' Newsletter: <http://www.stop-discrimination.info/8041.0.html>