

SOCIAL AGENDA

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European Year 2010: Fighting against poverty and social exclusion

Women still underrepresented in EU boardrooms

Europe 2020: Putting Europe back on track



By most standards, Europe can be considered an affluent society. More than 50 years of economic growth and inclusive social policies have brought about unprecedented levels of prosperity and comfort for its citizens. And yet as you read this, almost 80 million Europeans are struggling to make ends meet, to clothe and feed their children, to keep a roof over their heads. 17% of our fellow EU citizens currently live below the poverty threshold. 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. The decision to designate 2010 as European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion was made 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.

“as you read this, almost 80 million Europeans are struggling to make ends meet, to clothe and feed their children, to keep a roof over their heads”

In this edition’s “Special feature”, which begins on page 15, we take a closer look at the objectives that the European Year has set itself, and at the events and activities taking place throughout the European Union in order to help achieving them. We pay special attention to the role of the media: their power and

influence in shaping public opinion and perceptions make them important allies in the fight to eradicate poverty and social exclusion.

Elsewhere in the magazine we report on the latest Eurobarometre survey on discrimination in the EU, which shows that discrimination, particularly on the grounds of race and ethnic origin, remains a problem across Europe. People’s perceptions are broadly unchanged compared to 2008, but the recession has increased fears of a rise in discrimination based on age, as competition for available job becomes fiercer. Meanwhile, in this issue’s feature we examine the root causes of women’s continuing underrepresentation at the highest levels of the business and financial world.

In our regular interview we ask the new European Commissioner for Employment, Social affairs and Inclusion László Andor about his vision and his priorities for action as he prepares to steer European social policy through the next Commission’s term of office.

Finally, in the Other Voices section on page 26 Fintan Farrell, director of the European Anti-Poverty Network, explains what needs to be achieved by the European Year 2010 in order to guarantee a visible step forward for the fight against poverty, social exclusion and inequality in the next decade.

Robert Verrue

Focus On:



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European Year 2010: fighting poverty and social exclusion

This year’s European Year will raise awareness of the many forms of poverty and exclusion affecting European citizens p.15

Women still underrepresented in EU boardrooms

Almost 9 out of 10 board members of the largest EU companies are men p. 7

Europe 2020: Putting Europe back on track

Newly launched Europe 2020 strategy aims at smart, sustainable and inclusive growth p. 21

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NEWS IN BRIEF

GENERAL

The new European Commission took office on 10 February, following the positive vote in the European Parliament on 9 February. László Andor is the new Commissioner responsible for employment, social affairs and inclusion, while Commission vice-president Viviane Reding is in charge of gender equality and anti discrimination policies as part of her justice, fundamental rights and citizenship portfolio. ■■



Europeans are on average broadly satisfied with their personal situation, but less satisfied when it comes to the economy, public services and social policies in their country, according to an opinion survey released 2 February. The **Eurobarometer on the social climate in the EU** also found large differences between countries, with people

in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands generally most satisfied with their personal situation. According to the Eurobarometer survey, a majority of Europeans are satisfied with life in general, giving an average score of +3.2 points (on a scale of -10 to +10). But there are big differences between Member States: the highest level of satisfaction was reported in Denmark, (+8.0), with Sweden, the Netherlands and Finland also having high levels. The lowest levels of satisfaction were reported in Bulgaria (-1.9), followed by Hungary, Greece and Romania. ■■

Seven months after the launch of the **“Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs”** mobility programme, the first participants are returning from their experiences abroad, providing very positive feedback. New Entrepreneurs were pleased to develop the skills necessary for building and running a business and Host Entrepreneurs have reported about hopes for future cooperation abroad and the positive influence of a fresh perspective on their businesses. To date, 1200 potential New and Host Entrepreneurs from 24 EU countries have applied to participate in the programme, with Spain and Italy leading the way (29% of New Entrepreneurs and 30% of Host Entrepreneurs respectively). The advertising/promotion/media is the most requested sector (15% of the current exchanges), followed by Education and training (10%). www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu ■■

EMPLOYMENT AND EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND

Latest data for November and December 2009 show **that EU labour markets continue to weaken**, although at a more moderate pace. Unemployment is still rising in most Member States, but labour markets have shown stronger signs of stabilising in certain countries, confirming an easing in the deterioration of the EU labour market overall. Nevertheless, despite improving economic prospects and sentiment, the labour market outlook for 2010 remains unfavourable and is only expected to show a gradual improvement afterwards. ■■

Crisis response measures and EU financial support have helped to stem the adverse impacts of the slowdown on EU labour markets in 2009, according to a European Commission report issued on December 15. But these measures must be coherent with long-term employment reforms to prepare a successful exit from the crisis. The draft **‘Joint Employment Report’** will be discussed by employment and social affairs ministers in the Council in March 2010 and will contribute to the EU’s new 2020 strategy for growth and jobs, due to be adopted by EU leaders in Spring 2010. ■■

The European Commission has approved applications from Lithuania for assistance under the **European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF)**. The requested amount of € 1 185 569 will help 491 redundant workers in the clothing sector and 636 workers in the furniture manufacturing sector to get back into employment. The Lithuanian application relates to 1 469 redundancies in 49 enterprises operating in the furniture manufacturing sector, one of the first sectors to be affected by the economic and financial crisis as a direct consequence of the slow-down in construction activity, both in Lithuania and elsewhere. ■■

On 16 November 2009 the **European network of employment services (EURES)** celebrated 15 years of activity. True to its aim of helping people find a job in another European country, EURES brings together public employment services from 31 countries and offers direct online access to over 700 000 job vacancies every day. ■■

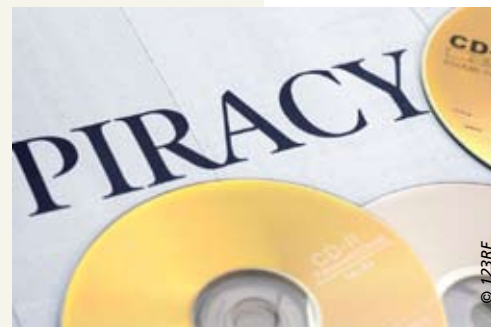
WORK ORGANISATION, WORKING CONDITIONS AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Trade unions and employers in the metalwork sector – representing around 10 million employees – launch a **new sectoral social dialogue committee**. The new committee will enable the Council of European Employers of the Metal, Engineering and Technology-Based Industries (CEEMET) and The European Metalworkers Federation (EMF) to sign contractual agreements at EU level. The committee aims to help the industry – which is being hit hard by the crisis – to face challenges such as globalisation, management change and the restructuring process. ■■

Employers and trade unions in the **audiovisual sector** have adopted a joint opinion on protecting creativity, innovation and jobs from Internet piracy. Unauthorised file sharing poses an increasing problem to the European economy in terms of lost job opportunities and revenues for the industry as well as for governments. Companies are faced with a loss of revenues and return on investment in the production and exploitation of creative contents. In addition, many authors, performers and other rights holders

are deprived from a fair share of the benefits generated by the digital economy in practice. ■■

Eurofound has published its first findings of the **European Company Survey 2009– Flexibility practices and social dialogue**. In the survey, representatives from more than 21 000 companies were interviewed on the state of social dialogue at the establishment level. It also looks at various forms of flexibility practices at the company level, in particular with regards to contracts, flexibility practices in companies, working time and performance-related pay. More information is available on the Eurofound website: www.eurofound.europa.eu ■■



PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

The Council has given the go-ahead to the European Community's becoming a party to the 2006 UN **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, which guarantees that the disabled enjoy the same human rights and fundamental liberties as the rest of society. The Convention is the first international, legally binding instrument establishing minimum standards for the protection and safeguarding of a wide range of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights for persons with disabilities around the world. It is also the first comprehensive human rights convention to which the European Community will become a party. ■■

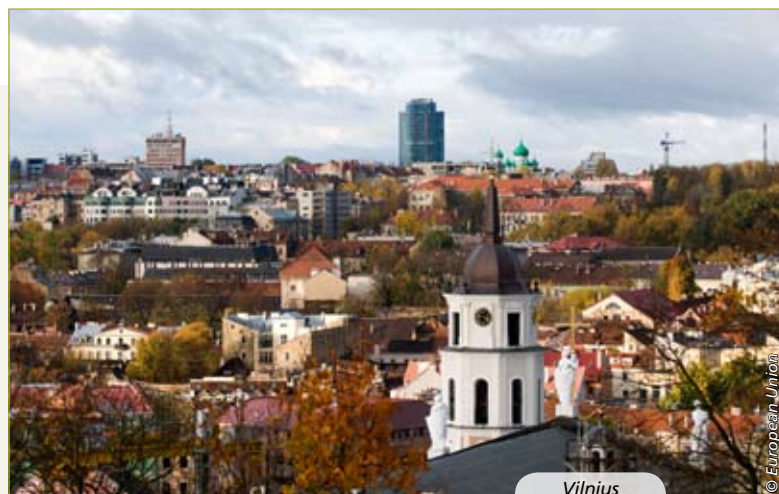


In 2008, **17% of the population in the EU 27, just over 84 million persons, were at risk of poverty**. This means that their income was below the poverty threshold. The highest at-risk-of-poverty rates in 2008 were found in Latvia (26%), Romania (23%), Bulgaria (21%), Greece, Spain and Lithuania (all 20%), and the lowest in the Czech Republic (9%), the Netherlands and Slovakia (both 11%), Denmark, Hungary, Austria, Slovenia and Sweden (all 12%). Children (19%) and elderly people (20%) are more at risk of poverty than the total population. ■■

Around one in six people in Europe claim to have personally experienced **discrimination** in the past year, according to a new opinion survey released by the European Commission on 9 November 2009. Personal experience of discrimination by respondents remains largely unchanged since the same survey was carried out last year. However, there has been a strong increase in perceived discrimination based on age and disability, with 64% of Europeans worried that the recession will contribute to more age discrimination in the job market (see article on p. 12). ■■

GENDER EQUALITY

Parents will have the right to **longer parental leave**, under new rules agreed by EU ministers on 1st December. The revised Directive on Parental Leave will give each working parent the right to at least four months leave after the birth or adoption of a child (up from three months now). At least one of the four months cannot be transferred to the other parent – meaning it will be lost if not taken – offering incentives to fathers to take the leave. The Directive puts into effect an agreement between European employers and trade union organisations. ■■



The **European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)** opened its doors in Vilnius on 16 December 2009. The Presidents of Lithuania and Latvia, Dalia Grybauskaitė and Valdis Zatlers, along with Commissioner Vladimír Špidla, the Institute's Chair of the Management Board, Eva Welskop-Deffaa and the Director of the Institute, Virginija Langbakk unveiled the new premises at a ribbon cutting ceremony honouring the launch of one of the EU's youngest agencies. ■■

Both women and men have been hit by job losses in the downturn **but women face a higher risk of not being re-employed** and continue to be in a generally weaker position in the labour market, according to new report adopted by the European Commission on 18 December 2009. The European Commission's annual report on equality between women and men shows that despite a generally positive trend towards a more equal society and labour market in the EU, progress in eliminating gender inequalities is slow. Beyond the current crisis, the Commission's report underlines the persisting challenges for gender equality in Europe and calls for a stronger gender dimension as part of the EU's future strategy for growth and jobs. ■■

INTERNATIONAL EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL ISSUES

The European Commission has published studies assessing the challenges that **Belarus and Moldova** face in the areas of poverty, social exclusion, pensions and health care. They are the first in a series of studies examining social protection and social inclusion in the countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Forthcoming publications will cover Ukraine (spring 2010) the Southern Caucasus (2011). ■■

Delegates from EU Member States, candidate and EEA countries, key emerging economies, international organisations, the academic world, NGO's and social partners took part in the International Conference "**Social Protection: Its contribution to Recovery**" held in Brussels last December. The purpose of the conference was to serve as a forum between EU Member States and key emerging economies to exchange experiences and views on the role of social protection in recovery. ■■



Women still underrepresented in EU boardrooms

© Getty Images

Almost 9 out of 10 board members of the largest EU companies are men

Reaching the top of any profession requires a combination of hard-work, determination, talent and, for most people, a little luck. And being a man does not hurt either, it seems. In spite of recent advances, women in the European Union continue to be under-represented in all forms of leadership positions, particularly on corporate boardrooms. A new report on women in senior positions released by the European Commission to coincide with International Women's Day paints an eloquent picture: in 2009 women accounted for an average of just 3% of the presidents of the largest companies in each of the EU member States, and less than 11%

of board members. On the positive side, it must be noted that this is an improvement – in 2003 less than 8% of board members were women – but clearly there is still a long way to go. Across Europe in 2009, Norway stood out as being the only country where large companies have boards with anything approaching gender equality, with just under 42% women and 58% men – a direct result of the legal quota implemented three years earlier. Within the EU, Sweden and Finland are the only two countries with more than 20% women on boards (26.8% and 23.6% respectively). In Luxembourg, Cyprus, Portugal, Italy and Malta, the companies that make

up the blue-chip indices of the local stock exchanges all have less than one woman in every twenty board members. The situation grows predictably worse the closer one gets to the top. The latest collection of data for the European Commission database on women and men in decision-making found just eighteen women presidents of leading companies in the EU compared to 577 men. Indeed, there are fourteen EU countries (i.e. more than half the total) where not one constituent of the blue-chip index of leading companies has a woman president.

Clearly there still is a long way to go to ensure anything approaching a balanced gender representation in the boardroom. And yet, there is a growing body of evidence showing that companies where women are most strongly represented are also



the companies that perform best financially. Recent events have shown that companies with more women in management have survived the financial crisis better, and as markets around the world keep tumbling, the evidence grows stronger.

Writing in *The Financial Times* last year, French management professor Michel Ferrary noted that the only large French company to record a share price gain in 2008 was Hermès, whose management is 55% women, the second largest share among French blue chips. In general, companies with a management at least 38% women suffered less than the CAC 40 benchmark index (though no others than Hermès posted a gain in share price, but then who did in 2008?). By contrast, the largest declines were recorded by companies with at least 75% male management. Ferrary compared the performance of French banking giant BNP Paribas, where 38.7% of managers are women and which experienced a drop in its share price of 39% in 2008, with that of Credit Agricole, where only 16% of managers are women and whose share price plummeted by more than 62% over the same period.

This is because during crises, investors reward companies that are stable and avoid high risks. "A larger proportion of female managers appears to balance the risk-taking behaviour of their male colleagues," Ferrary writes. "Gender diversity supports managerial efficiency by creating a more diverse culture and favouring the exploration of different business opportunities."

So why aren't more women reaching the upper echelons of economic and financial management? They do after all represent 51% of the EU population, 45% of its workforce and no less than 60% of its university graduates. Improving women's access and participation in the labour market has long

been a central preoccupation for policy-makers both at EU and national level. Over the years legislation has been introduced to ensure women's equal treatment in the workplace, and to help them combine work and family life through the availability of flexible working arrangements as well as childcare services and infrastructure. Different countries have adopted different solutions to the problem of combining work and parenthood. Some stress the importance of very young children spending time with their mothers. Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland and Hungary provide up to three years of paid leave for mothers. Germany has introduced a "parent's salary" or *Elterngeld* to encourage mothers to stay at home. Other countries put more emphasis on preschool education – the Nordic countries in particular are keen on getting women back to work and children into kindergartens. They

also increased incentives for fathers to spend more time caring for their children. Britain, Germany and, above all, the Netherlands are keen on mothers working part-time. It is difficult to evaluate the relative merits of these various arrangements. What is certain is that the trend towards more women working looks set to continue. In the European Union, women have filled 6m of the 8m new jobs created since 2000. In America, three out of four people made jobless by the recession are men. Women will also benefit from the increasing "war for talent". The combination of an ageing workforce and a more skill-dependent economy means that countries will have to make better use of their female populations.

PROMOTING ROLE MODELS

Aside from the efforts of individual companies, there are different ways of raising the profile of successful women so that they become more accessible as potential role models.

- Each year the Finnish weekly magazine *Talouselämä* (Financial Life) publishes a special issue on women directors. It also organises an annual gala for women directors, covered in a feature article, and publishes a top-100 ranking of Finnish businesswomen.
- The *First Women Awards* were established in the United Kingdom by Real Business magazine in co-operation with the CBI (Confederation for British Industry). The awards aim to recognise women in business who are "glass ceiling breakers" and "whose achievement and individual actions have helped and are helping to remove barriers and open up opportunities for others to follow".
- The Brussels-based *Eurochambres Women Network*, representing chambers of commerce and industry across Europe, has published a brochure presenting a number of successful European businesswomen who have overcome stereotypical obstacles in the course of their professional careers.
- The *Cartier Women's Initiative Awards* support women entrepreneurs, foster their development, and celebrate their successes. The awards, which take place in five different locations covering all countries in the world, recognise business plans that include social aspects as well as profit-making.

Goldman Sachs calculates that, leaving other things equal, increasing women's participation in the labour market to male levels will boost GDP by 21% in Italy, 19% in Spain, 9% in France and Germany and 8% in Britain.

But while social policies may be more or less favourable to women's employment, corporate models – historically designed by men – form the pillars that keep the so-called glass ceiling firmly in place. The dominant model in the business world equates leadership with unfailing availability and total geographical mobility, with no space for career breaks. It is a model that is hard to combine with family life and its attendant constraints (maternity, child-rearing, the organisation of family life, care of the elderly etc.) which remain overwhelmingly the responsibility of women, the so-called "double burden". It is little wonder then that in a study by Eurochambres in six EU Member States 90% of the women interviewed agreed that men are in a better position to progress in their career because women drop out due to family constraints, and 80% saw motherhood as an obstacle to their careers. And of course one of the negative consequences of women having to adapt to male-imposed patterns in order to succeed is the perpetuation of the very models that constitute the most formidable obstacle to women's careers.

Legislation has already lowered the barriers facing women in the workplace and further developments should contribute to a continued, but gradual, breakdown of stereotypes – for example, making leave arrangements equally available to men and women should help to diminish the view that early-stage child care is solely a female responsibility.

But the most important initiatives to promote gender equality in business will have to come from within – from

the people that currently take the decisions inside companies, because they are the only ones that can directly influence company policy on recruitment and career progression and the selection of their peers and successors. Creating a diverse culture implies a critical mass of female managers. To reach this point, companies must recruit more women, promote them and train them when the labour market does not supply enough. To be fair, the corporate world is doing ever more to address the loss of female talent and the difficulty of combining work with childcare. Many elite companies are rethinking their promotion practices. Ernst & Young and other accountancy

firms have increased their efforts to maintain connections with women who take time off to have children and then ease them back into work. Companies are even rethinking career structures, as people live and work longer. Barclays is one of many firms that allow five years' unpaid leave, while UK retailing group John Lewis offers a six-month paid sabbatical to people who have been in the company for 25 years. Companies are allowing people to phase their retirement. Child-bearing years will thus make up a smaller proportion of women's potential working lives, so that spells out of the labour force will become less a mark of female exceptionalism.

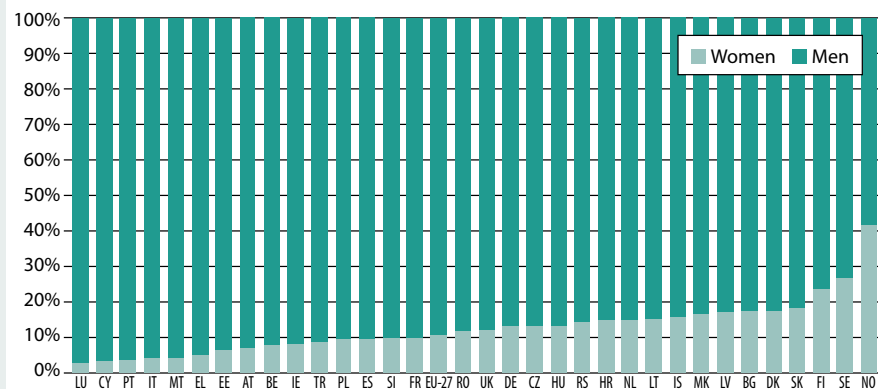
Figure 1 - Beijing follow-up indicators

The proportion of women among the presidents/chairpersons of the highest decision-making body of the largest publicly quoted firms on the national stock exchange				
	2003*	2007	2008	2009
EU-15 average	1.0%	1.0%	1.1%	1.6%
EU-27 average	2.2%	2.9%	2.9%	3.0%

The proportion of women among members of the highest decision-making body of the largest publicly quoted firms on the national stock exchange				
	2003*	2007	2008	2009
EU-15 average	7.0%	8.9%	9.4%	10.9%
EU-27 average	7.8%	10.3%	10.8%	10.9%

*2003 EU-27 averages include 2004 data for CZ, LT, MT and PL

Figure 2 - Gender balance amongst board members of the largest publicly listed companies, 2009



Source: European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making.



ESF in Bulgaria - Career progression

As a regional manager for a large chain of filling stations 33-year-old Biliانا Filipova, from Dupnitsa in Bulgaria, spends much of her time on the road, traveling between 19 filling stations. She has overall responsibility for the day-to-day running of the stations, with her duties ranging from managing personnel, to ensuring equipment is maintained and stock is ordered, to dealing with legal issues, and responding to emergencies such as floods.

Promoted to her current position in March 2008, she was previously managing a single station. "There's a lot more responsibility," she says. "But I knew what the job involved as I used to cover for the regional manager before."

She outlines the qualities that she needs in her role: "I'm able to stay calm and react quickly – that's important. And I often have to deal with lots of things at the same time. I have to prioritise and be well-organised."

Biliana originally studied industrial engineering, specialising in technologies for clothes production. After finishing her five-year Masters' course, she had her daughter, Joanna. "I didn't work for three years after that," she says. "But I began to get sick of spending all my time at home. I'm a

dynamic person who likes to be doing things. I get restless easily."

She began to work in the textile sector, in a role related to her studies. However, after a year and a half working for two different companies, she realised she wanted to do something different. "Sometimes you need to change completely to find satisfaction. I needed a new challenge to get energised."

She heard that there were opportunities working for Petrol, formerly a state-run network and still one of the largest chains of fuel stations in Bulgaria. She was offered an interview for a position in management, but instead she chose to go for a job as a cashier. "I didn't want to go for a management position straight away, she says. I wanted to start at a lower level as I didn't know anything about this business."

The move paid off. Starting to work for the company in 2002, she applied herself to the job and quickly worked her way up through the ranks. "Starting as a cashier helped me a lot. Now I know the job from the inside. I know where managers can miss things."

She took part in a series of intensive training sessions co-funded by the European Union through the European

Social Fund. The courses involved team-building, role playing, discussions and problem solving exercises. It helped her develop the skills that she needs in her new role – whether dealing with people, making decisions, prioritising and coping with difficult situations. "It helped me a lot with the job, and also skills for life in general. It really made me think about how you go about finding solutions to a given problem," she says.

Thinking of the future, Biliana says: "I'm not sure what I want exactly, but I know that I want to continue to improve and develop myself. First I need to prove myself in this role." Back home, her life is just as busy. Renovating the family home with her husband is an on-going – and long-term – project. "We started the renovations five years ago," she says, but we still have to do more work before we can live in it," she says, adding that a few years ago all three of them were living in one room while work was being done. The rest of her time is spent looking after Joanna, who is now 10, and seeing her extended family. "I have two younger sisters and my husband has a brother. We all live around here and we're very close. All the families get together with our parents at weekends. "My priorities are my family and my job. I work hard to ensure our security."

Free movement of workers in the EU still subject to restrictions

More member States removed barriers labour market access for workers from the new Member States in 2009 but restrictions remain

Five years after the historic enlargement of the EU by ten new Member States, the transitional arrangements that allow the other Member States to temporarily restrict the access to their labour markets for workers from these countries (except Cyprus and Malta) have entered into the third and final phase, and the transitional arrangements for workers from Bulgaria and Romania into the second phase.

To recall, free movement of workers was gradually introduced in the six original member States of the European Economic Community between 1958 and 1968, but temporary restrictions applied for workers from Greece, Portugal and Spain when these countries joined the Union in the 1980s. With the last two EU enlargements, Member States were again given the possibility to restrict access to their labour markets for a maximum of seven years after accession. During this period, Member States may ask workers from eight of the ten countries that joined the EU in 2004 ("EU-8") and from Bulgaria and Romania ("EU-2"), which joined in 2007, to comply with national law if they want to work in their country, thus restricting labour

market access in comparison to the free access granted by EU law. The overall transitional period of seven years is divided into three phases (lasting two, three and another two years respectively), and different conditions apply during each phase.

Belgium and Denmark ended their restrictions on labour market access for workers from the EU-8 Member States as of the beginning of the third and final phase on 1 May 2009, thus bringing the number of Member States where EU-8 workers now enjoy the complete right of free movement to 12 (out of 15).

The remaining three member States - Germany, Austria and the United Kingdom - on the other hand, notified the Commission in April 2009 of serious disturbances occurring on their labour markets, and therefore according to the terms of the Accession Treaty national law on labour market access continues to apply after 1 May 2009, until 30 April 2011 at the latest. In Germany and Austria this means that EU-8 workers need a work permit, while the United Kingdom allows workers to start employment but asks them to register this work within 30 days.

According to the Accession Treaty, member States do not need the Commission's permission in order to continue applying national measures on labour market access during the transitional period, however, commenting on the notifications by the three countries, the then employment and social affairs Commissioner Vladimir Špidla agreed that the labour markets of Germany, Austria and the UK were seriously disturbed and recognised that additional inflows of EU-8 workers as a result of ending restrictions, even if small, were a valid factor to justify maintaining these restrictions into place. At the same time, he urged especially Germany and Austria to work towards the progressive opening of their labour markets to EU-8 workers by 2011.

With the beginning of the second phase of the transitional arrangements for workers from Bulgaria and Romania on 1 January 2009, Spain, Greece, Portugal and Hungary decided to end restrictions on labour market access. As Denmark decided to do the same from 1 May 2009, Bulgarian and Romanian workers now enjoy full free movement rights under EU law in a total of 14 out of 25 Member States. In the Czech Republic they do not need to apply for a work permit but in the remaining ten Member States that continue to restrict the labour market access of workers from Bulgaria and Romania, the existence of different national measures mean that legal procedures and conditions for labour market access can vary considerably.

DISCRIMINATION



One European in six feels discriminated against

New survey confirms race, age and disability to be the most common grounds of discrimination

Around one in six people in Europe claim to have personally experienced discrimination in the past year, according to a new opinion survey released by the European Commission. Meanwhile, 64% of Europeans are concerned that the recession will contribute to more age discrimination in the job market.

This is the third Special Eurobarometer survey carried out by the European Commission on attitudes to discrimination in the EU. It aims to track perceptions of people in Europe towards different forms of discrimination and diversity.

The survey was made public in November 2009 before the third

Equality Summit under the Swedish Presidency. 26 756 people were interviewed in 30 countries. For the first time, the survey also covered the three Candidate Countries: Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Turkey. New questions were added, notably to gauge the impact of the economic downturn on the level of perceived discrimination.

As in previous similar surveys, discrimination on the ground of ethnic origin is seen to be the most widespread form of discrimination in the EU (61%), followed by discrimination based

on age (58%) and disability (53%). While perceptions of ethnic discrimination remain stable (62% in 2008), there has been a significant increase since the 2008 survey in the number of people who consider that discrimination based on age (+16 percentage points since 2008) and disability (+8) are the most widespread.

There is a clear link with the current economic situation, with 64% of people expecting the downturn to lead to more age discrimination in the job market. This may reflect both the rising unemployment among young people in many EU countries as a result of the slowdown but also growing awareness of these forms of discrimination.

In addition, 48% of respondents consider one's age to be a disadvantage when seeking employment. This increase of three percent with respect to last year's level sees age becoming the most common perceived disadvantage when seeking a job (together with a candidate's look, dress and presentation) and will no doubt colour public perception of the crisis as jobs become scarcer than they have been for many years.

Finally, there is an expectation that the crisis is likely to have a generally negative effect on action to tackle discrimination in terms of political and financial priority given by governments. Overall, 49% of Europeans expect less priority to be given to discrimination policies as a result of the economic situation, while 34% disagree.

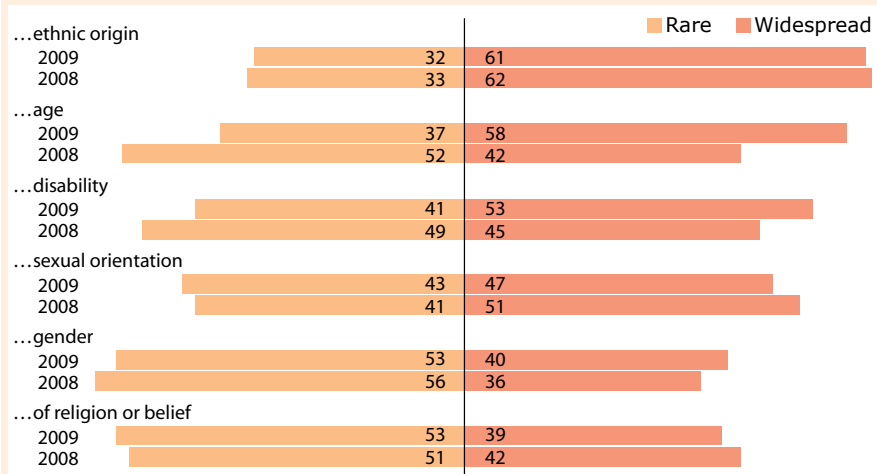
Personal experience of discrimination by respondents remains largely unchanged since the same survey was carried out last year, with age being the most common reason (6% of respondents). Overall, 16% of Europeans reported experiencing discrimination (on the basis of race/ethnic origin, religion, age, disability or sexual orientation) in 2009, the same level as in 2008.

These data point to a strong relationship between citizens defining themselves as part of a minority group and the experience of discrimination, and this is particularly notable in the case of discrimination on the grounds of disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation. For example, a quarter of Europeans who say that they belong to a minority group in terms of ethnic origin also say that they have felt discriminated against on these grounds in the last 12 months. This suggests either that self-perceived minorities are more likely to experi-

ence discrimination and/or that the experience of discrimination or harassment is a significant factor in citizens perceiving themselves to be a 'minority' in these terms.

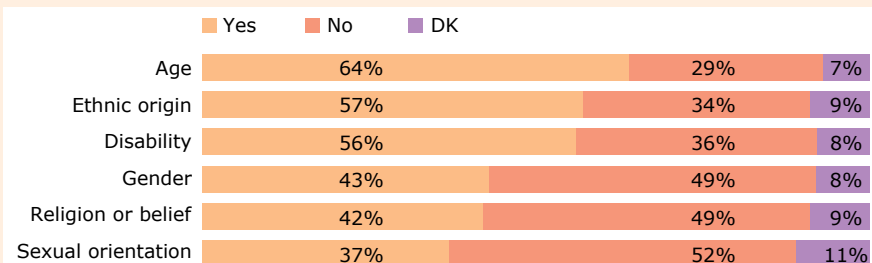
Overall, only one in three Europeans are aware of their rights should they become victims of discrimination or harassment. However, this figure masks considerable differences at national level. Awareness has increased since the last survey in 2008 in the UK (+8 points), France (+7), Ireland and Sweden (each +6), but fallen in Poland (-12) and Portugal (-11).

Perception of discrimination on the basis of... – % EU



NB: "Don't know" and "non-existent" (SPONTANEOUS) answers are not shown

Do you think that the economical crisis will contribute to an increase of discrimination on the basis of... in the labour market? – %EU27



Source: Eurobarometer 317

In terms of reporting cases of discrimination, most Europeans would first contact the police (55%), while 35% would get in touch with their equality body and 27% with a trade union. Confidence in the various organisations working with discrimination issues however strongly differs from one country to another.

While many people consider that more action needs to be taken to combat discrimination (44% on average across the EU), there has been a progressive fall in the number of people who consider that efforts are inadequate, suggesting rising awareness of government action. In 2006, an average of 51% of people thought that action was insufficient, falling to 47% in 2008 and 44% in 2009.

Encouragingly, the survey data gives an insight into the social mechanisms by which discrimination can be resolved. The report shows that social circles, education and awareness-raising efforts are contributing to a

better acceptance of diversity. Efforts and policies that seek to work with this reality will no doubt further contribute to combating discrimination and promoting diversity.

What is the Commission doing to change attitudes?

Raising public awareness is a long-term process which requires joint efforts at European and national level, including important actors such as National Equality Bodies.

For its part, the European Commission runs a pan-European information campaign "For Diversity – Against Discrimination" - with an annual budget of approximately €4 million - to help inform people in Europe about their rights and responsibilities under EU anti-discrimination legislation. The campaign organises activities in all 27 EU Member States to make people more aware of discrimination and to highlight the benefits of diversity. The European Commission also contributes

financially to national awareness-raising campaigns organized under the PROGRESS programme (around 35 projects each year totalling € 5.6 million in the last two years) as well as supporting training for law professionals, NGOs and social partners on how to use EU equality law. In addition, the Commission also runs a series of networks bringing together key actors in the fight against discrimination, such as national equality bodies, from around Europe.

Further information

Special Eurobarometer survey on discrimination – summary, report and national factsheets
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_special_en.htm

Tackling discrimination

<http://ec.europa.eu/antidiscrimination>
www.stop-discrimination.info





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Fighting poverty and social exclusion: the European Year 2010

Lack of resources blights the lives of millions of Europeans, who end up excluded from what is – for many others – a prosperous society full of opportunity. Almost 80 million people, 19 million of them children, live below the poverty line in the EU. Despite an improvement in overall living standards over the past decade, poverty and social exclusion remain major issues in most countries, albeit with substantial differences amongst them. Living with poverty and social exclusion can take many forms, from not having enough to spend on food and clothing to homeless-

ness and over-indebtedness. Poverty and exclusion are complex issues, with no quick-fix solution. They can only be eradicated through a lasting, concerted, collective effort by society as a whole, from policy- and opinion-makers to individual citizens. The 2010 European Year for Combating poverty and social exclusion is dedicated to raising awareness of these interrelated issues and to stimulate greater effort to combat the problems they cause. The articles you will find on the following pages look in more detail at the philosophy behind the 2010 European Year, at the objectives it will try to achieve,

as well as at the initiatives and activities planned all over Europe to help achieving them. A separate article is devoted to the role of the media. The pen is mightier of the sword, they say, and indeed the way that poverty and social exclusion are portrayed by newspapers and on television directly shapes our perceptions of the phenomenon and our attitudes to it, in a positive or in a negative way. It is therefore crucially important that poverty and exclusion and the people suffering from them are portrayed in a fair and accurate way, which eschews sensationalism and stereotypes.



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2010: fighting poverty and social exclusion

This year's European Year will raise awareness of the many forms of poverty and exclusion affecting European citizens

Combating poverty and social exclusion ranks among the main objectives of the European Union and its Member States. Despite the efforts deployed, a significant proportion of the European population still lives in destitution and has no access to basic services such as health care. This state of affairs conflicts with the European Union's common values of solidarity and social justice.

Some figures

Our social protection systems are among the most highly-developed in the world and yet, today, too many people in the EU still live in poverty. Certain figures speak for themselves: almost €80 million people live below the poverty line (set at 60% of their country's median income). That represents 17% of the EU's population;

for 8% of Europeans, having a job is not enough to work one's way out of poverty. Finally, in most Member States, children are more exposed to this scourge than the rest of the population: 19 million children are affected.

Why a European Year?

One decade after EU heads of state and government committed to "making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty" the European Year Against Poverty and Social Exclusion aims to increase awareness of the many forms of poverty and social exclusion and inspiring people to come together to combat them. The Year also aims to show how more effective solutions to

fighting poverty and social exclusion in the EU can be found if we are all committed to making a difference, thus generating a new impetus in this fight.

Each year since 1983, Europe has initiated a "European Year" awareness campaign designed to inform the citizens of Europe and dialogue with them to work for change in mentalities and behaviour. These European years also provide opportunities to draw the attention of national governments to societal themes. In 2009, the Union celebrated the European Year for creativity and innovation, in 2008 intercultural dialogue, in 2007 equal opportunities for all, and in 2006, workers' mobility.

Organisation on the ground

The key principles of the '2010 European Year' are decentralisation and coordination. Activities will be prepared at EU level and at national level and implemented at all levels including regions, cities or villages. A range of activities will be organised across Europe, such as awareness-raising campaigns, information sessions in schools, roundtables and training for the media and decision-makers, a journalist competition, artworks created by artists and people experiencing poverty, and many other

innovative projects. National actions will cover many hundreds of different projects linked to national priorities and the objectives of the Year.

Events across 29 countries

All 27 EU Member States, as well as Iceland and Norway, have signed up to the Year and are committed to its aims. The activities are defined and implemented by a national body designated by the participating country. A national programme has been drawn up by each of the participating countries and can be found on the Year's website: www.2010againstopoverty.eu. At European level, a consultative committee composed of representatives of the participating countries assists the Commission in implementing the European Year. The involvement of civil society and all stakeholders is essential. A wide range of organisations have been involved in the conception and implementation of the European Year, including the organisations which defend the interests of the people experiencing poverty, the social partners, local and regional authorities, think-tanks etc. The EY2010 will also aim to strengthen participation and partnerships through networking activities, national meetings of people experiencing poverty and policy

makers and major round tables. This should all pave the way to a strengthened political commitment, from the local to the European level.

Eurobarometer survey on poverty and social exclusion

A Eurobarometer survey has provided information on European perceptions about poverty and social exclusion. It was carried out between 28 August and 17 September 2009 in the EU. Overall, nearly 27,000 citizens in all EU Member States were interviewed face-to-face, following a random selection of respondents. It found that EU citizens are strongly aware of poverty and social exclusion, with 73% feeling that poverty in their country is widespread. High unemployment (52%) and insufficient wages (49%) are the most widely perceived 'societal' explanations for poverty, together with insufficient social benefits and pensions (29%) and the excessive cost of decent housing (26%). On the other hand, a lack of education, training or skills (37%), as well as 'inherited' poverty (25%) are the most widely perceived 'personal' reasons behind poverty.

Building together a society for all

Solidarity is a fundamental value of the EU with all members of society sharing the benefits in times of prosperity and the burden in times of difficulty. In line with this principle, we need to build a more inclusive Europe where everyone is able to make a contribution to society. No one can solve poverty alone, it is a collective responsibility. The hope for the European Year is therefore that all those involved will work together throughout 2010, giving a voice to the concerns, needs and wishes of people experiencing poverty, raising hope and inspiring each and every European citizen.

The objectives of the European Year 2010

Four cross-disciplinary objectives lie at the heart of this European Year:

Recognition: To better acknowledge the rights of people living in poverty to play a full part in society.

Shared responsibility and participation: To build and reinforce partnerships between all actors working to fight poverty and social exclusion and emphasize collective and individual responsibility.

Cohesion: To promote a more cohesive society, where no one doubts that society as a whole benefits from the eradication of poverty.

Commitment and practical action: To renew the pledge of the EU and its Member States to combat poverty and social exclusion.

Driving the message home

A wide range of awareness-raising activities is set to reach as many people as possible

A key theme of the European year is the importance of collective responsibility in combating poverty. A wide range of activities are planned across Europe during the year to raise awareness of the many forms of poverty and social exclusion, help build and reinforce partnerships in the field, and inspire people to engage. The events will be implemented at all levels including regions, cities and villages, providing as many opportunities as possible for people to participate.

The link between the participating countries is a common European information and communication campaign co-ordinated by the European Commission. It builds around communication tools (posters, publications, videos, website and social networking tools) and features six key events. The first was the conference "Poverty between reality and perceptions: the communication challenge" (Brussels, 29 October 2009) which aimed to analyse perceptions of poverty and exclusion in Europe in a context of economic crisis and explore how media and public authorities integrate them into their daily work. It was preceded by a seminar for journalists from across the EU, which focused on the part that the media plays in helping to tackle poverty and exclusion. Journalists

were invited to three field visits which gave them the opportunity to interview grass-roots practitioners.

The second key event was the opening conference on 21 January 2010 in Madrid, organised in partnership with the Spanish presidency which officially launched the year by presenting the EU-wide campaign and setting its political ambitions.

An art initiative will illustrate the positive contribution that arts can make in combating poverty and social exclusion. It will show examples of projects from various countries and media including painting and photography. It will put a particular focus on arts as a tool to rebuild confidence and to promote social inclusion and personal empowerment.

In addition, two focus weeks - one in May, the other in October - will give increased visibility to the European Year 2010. Rather than single events, the focus weeks should be seen primarily as a forum for various events and projects, such as conferences and debates but also photo exhibitions, sports events, media work and festivals. The key themes will be diversity, exchange and participation. Various stakeholders at EU and national level (NGOs, social partners,

corporate sector and public authorities) are expected to get involved.

Finally, a closing conference will provide the opportunity to look back on the year, to showcase some of the successful projects and to celebrate the progress made across the continent. The conference will be organised around a set of plenary sessions and interactive workshops, with a strong participatory dimension.

In addition to these common European events, hundreds of projects are expected across the participating countries, all to be developed by stakeholders such as public authorities, NGOs, social partners, foundations and the media.

Awareness-raising has been prioritised in many countries, targeting both people experiencing poverty and the wider public. Example of activities include information campaigns on existing rights, awareness-raising events involving ambassadors, cooperation with audiovisual media, use of innovative technologies and social networking sites, training for various actors aiming to enhance knowledge and understanding of the reality of poverty and a variety of art initiatives involving theatre groups and a travelling exhibition on homelessness.

**STOP
POVERTY
NOW**





The crucial task of communicating

Media portrayals of poverty have a major role in shaping public perceptions of the issue

Effective communication can strengthen and reinforce public administrations' efforts to break down stereotypes and combat poverty. The challenge for governments is not only to decide how to make the best use of public communication tools, but also how to engage with the media. The recent conference organised by the European Commission "Poverty between reality and perceptions: the communication challenge" started a debate which will continue throughout the year.

It is not uncommon for the media to come under criticism for relying on stereotypes and for labelling the poor as 'scroungers' or lazy. These stereotypes may be shared by a proportion of their audience and such partial portrayal in the press can do much to reinforce them. But journalists can also play a valuable role in challenging stereotypes and explaining the scale of poverty and the factors that cause it. Accurate and effective coverage can have a real influence, improving understanding of the reality of living in poverty. Alex Tennant, head of policy and research at Save the Children, Northern Ireland is convinced that 'the media is important in informing people who are not poor about poverty... to bring the reality of poverty into people's houses.'

The Rowntree Foundation, Media Trust and Society of editors have developed a guide, 'Reporting poverty in the UK, a practical guide for journalists' (<http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/reporting-poverty-uk-practical-guide-journalists>) which explores the question of how the media can approach the subject. The guide suggests that while the subject of poverty may not often make the headlines, it provides plenty of opportunities for features and documentaries. A story on poverty can also add another dimension to reports on other social issues which attract more frequent coverage such as standards of schools and housing, health problems, substance abuse or violence.

One of the best ways to convey the reality of poverty is to give voice to the people who experience it. Case studies are one tool which can really bring stories about poverty alive. If you actually have cases and concrete examples, illustrating the impact of social exclusion on a family becomes at once easier and more effective. Examples enable the reader, viewer or listener to engage with an individual set of circumstances and may help them to understand the impact of low income better than a set of statistics or reports, which is where government's expertise lies.

There is a key role for public administrations in working to convey messages about social exclusion and disadvantage. NGOs have long worked effectively with the media to get their messages across, but administrations are sometimes more wary. Action to combat poverty can be much more powerful when it is reinforced with strong communication. At the recent conference on the communication challenge, Anne Joubert, Head of the Unit "integration and access to rights policy" of the French Ministry of Labour talked about the need for officials to overcome any reluctance or fears about developing their use of communication tools. She explained that if we want to engage the public, it is not enough to act. Administrations need to build relationships with the media to convey what they are doing.

It is hoped that the European Year 2010 will prove a decisive turning point in the struggle against poverty and social exclusion. Building trust between public administrations and journalists is crucial and will enable both to become partners in building a fairer society. Informed coverage can shed light on the issues, encourage the public to take an interest in the situation of poor people and engage them in the debate about how we can build a more inclusive Europe where everyone is able to make a contribution to society.



Putting Europe back on track

Newly launched Europe 2020 strategy aims at smart, sustainable and inclusive growth

The European Commission has unveiled a new strategy which aims at turning the European Union's economy around, getting out of the crisis and laying the foundations for a return to growth and prosperity. It may seem as a rather tall order, given the havoc wreaked by the crisis on EU growth and jobs. The steady gains of the last decade have been all but wiped out, with GDP falling by 4% in 2009 and unemployment reaching 23 million – or 10% of the active population. Which is why Europe needs to act, and to act boldly, if it is to avoid slipping into stagnation and decline – into a “lost decade”, in the words of Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso.

The Europe 2020 Strategy therefore sets out a vision for Europe's social market economy over the next decade. It revolves around three key features that will be decisive in determining Europe's future success: growth must be “smart”, developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation; it must be sustainable, promoting a more

efficient, greener and more competitive economy and, last but not least, it must be inclusive, fostering high-employment and delivering territorial and social cohesion.

In practical terms, the Commission proposes that by the year 2020 the EU should increase its employment rate from 69% to 75% of the population aged 20-64, increase investment in research and development from 1,9% of EU GDP to 3%, and increase the share of 30-34 year-olds with a university education from 31% to at least 40%, while the share of early school leavers should be reduced from the current 15% to under 10%.

The seven flagship initiatives of Europe 2020

- “Innovation Union” to improve framework conditions and access to finance for research and innovation.
- “Youth on the move” to enhance the performance of education systems and to facilitate the entry of young people to the labour market.
- “A digital agenda for Europe” to speed up the roll-out of high-speed internet and reap the benefits of a digital single market for households and firms.
- “Resource efficient Europe” to help decouple economic growth from the use of resources, support the shift towards a low carbon economy, increase the use of renewable energy sources, modernise our transport sector and promote energy efficiency.
- “An industrial policy for the globalisation era” to improve the business environment, notably for SMEs, and to support the development of a strong and sustainable industrial base able to compete globally.
- “An agenda for new skills and jobs” to modernise labour markets and empower people by developing their skills throughout the lifecycle
- “European platform against poverty” to ensure social and territorial cohesion so that the benefits of growth and jobs are widely shared and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are able to live in dignity and take an active part in society.

The strategy proposes reducing the number of people at risk of poverty by 20 million. It also reiterates the EU's goal of reducing its carbon dioxide emission by up to 30% compared to 1990.

Some of these targets will sound familiar to those acquainted with the Lisbon strategy, originally launched in 2000 with the stated aim of making the EU "the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010, and indeed the Europe 2020 strategy builds on what has been achieved by Lisbon and the lessons learned from it.

In this respect, the Commission is adamant that for Europe 2020 to be a success, member States must take ownership of the strategy and make it their own. To ensure that each Member State tailors the Europe 2020 strategy to its particular situation, the Commission proposes that EU goals are translated into national targets and trajectories.

The targets, defined by President Barroso "ambitious but attainable", are representative of the three priorities of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth but they are not exhaustive: a wide range of actions at national, EU and international levels will be necessary to underpin them. The strategy identifies seven "flagship initiatives" that the EU should take to boost growth and employment, including an "Agenda for new skills for new jobs" and a "European platform against poverty". These seven flagship initiatives will commit both the EU and the Member States. "Our new agenda requires a co-ordinated European response, including with social partners and civil society, said President Barroso. If we act together, then we can fight back and come out of the crisis stronger."

"An Agenda for new skills and jobs"

At EU level, the Commission will:

- define and implement the second phase of the flexicurity agenda, together with European social partners;
- adapt the legislative framework, in line with 'smart' regulation principles, to evolving work patterns (e.g. working time, posting of workers) and new risks for health and safety at work;
- facilitate and promote intra-EU labour mobility and better match labour supply with demand;
- strengthen the capacity of social partners and make full use of the problem-solving potential of social dialogue at all levels;
- give a strong impetus to the strategic framework for cooperation in education and training involving all stakeholders;
- ensure that the competences required to engage in further learning and the labour market are acquired and recognised throughout education and develop a common language and operational tool for education/training and work: a European Skills, Competences and Occupations framework (ESCO).

At national level, Member States will need to:

- implement their national pathways for flexicurity and facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life;
- review and regularly monitor the efficiency of tax and benefit systems;
- promote new forms of work-life balance and active ageing policies and increase gender equality;
- promote and monitor the effective implementation of social dialogue outcomes;
- give a strong impetus to the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework, through the establishment of national qualification frameworks;
- ensure that the competences required to engage in further learning and the labour market are acquired and recognised throughout all forms education;
- develop partnerships between the worlds of education/training and work.

"European Platform against Poverty"

At EU level the Commission will:

- transform the open method of coordination on social exclusion and social protection into a platform for cooperation, peer-review and exchange of good practice, and into an instrument to take concrete action, including through targeted support from the structural funds, notably the ESF;
- design and implement programmes to promote social innovation for the most vulnerable, to fight discrimination, and to develop a new agenda for migrants' integration;
- undertake an assessment of the adequacy and sustainability of social protection and pension systems, and identify ways to ensure better access to health care systems.

At national level, Member States will need to:

- promote shared collective and individual responsibility in combating poverty and social exclusion;
- define and implement measures addressing the specific circumstances of groups at particular risk;
- fully deploy their social security and pension systems to ensure adequate income support and access to health care.



Tackling the health gap

Commission unveils plans to address health inequalities among and within EU countries

Last October the Commission announced a set of actions to help Member States and stakeholders tackle the health gaps 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 persist, both between and within Member States, and in some cases the gap is widening. As an example, a woman born in France can expect to live 7 years longer on average than a woman born in Lithuania. Differences in life expectancy at birth between different EU countries can be of up to 8 years for women and 14 years for men. 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. 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. This demonstrates how health is closely dependent on its social determinants, from education and poverty levels to urban planning and access to green spaces.

A low socioeconomic status means poor education, lack of amenities, 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. But health inequalities do not only affect the less well-off. These variations in health exist in a social gradient across the population, affecting everybody, 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 by issuing a Communication on Action to Reduce Health Inequalities. 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. The Commission also 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 its own policy evaluation procedures, the EU will work with Member States and stakeholders to identify and use 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. It will also help Member States to obtain EU funding for improving the health of disadvantaged people and narrow health gaps between regions.



ESF in Luxembourg – Learning to live with pain

Otilia Marques was just 22 when she left her home in Ansião, Portugal, to join her sister and brother-in-law in Luxembourg. Like many Europeans, she moved to a new country in the hope of finding work and making a new life.

Then, in 1975, she married her husband Manuel Augusto in Portugal. The following year he joined her in Luxembourg, where he now works for a building materials supplier. At the same time, Otilia started a new job as a cleaner for the post and telecoms company P&T. With the birth of their daughter Alexandra three years later, things seemed set fine for the future.

But Otilia was barely into her 30s when she became conscious of the rheumatic pain in her back, which grew more intense when she suffered a slipped disc. As a cleaner in the company changing and washroom area, she takes obvious pride in the shining mirrors and spotless tiles. Her tasks include scrubbing out showers, climbing ladders to dust lockers, carrying buckets full of water and emptying rubbish sacks..... it's hard physical work. "Sometimes you can make the wrong movement and it hurts even more," she explains. "But there's no-one else to do it, so I have to manage." And when the technicians

come back from laying telecom cables in muddy trenches, especially in the winter, there is plenty to clean up.

So in September 2007, the company offered Otilia time off to attend a two-days-a-week training course over five weeks, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, to help her manage the pain. By coincidence, her daughter Alexandra was by then working for the Service de Santé au Travail Multisectoriel (STM – the government department responsible for health in different labour sectors) which organised the course, and she encouraged her mother to take up the opportunity.

Otilia found out how the back works, the risks of damage, and what to do to protect it. The trainers demonstrated exercises to build up her leg muscles, relaxation techniques to avoid strain, and even the right diet to improve her general health and strength. She discovered how to lift loads correctly, and move safely to avoid pain. "Thanks to the course, I know now that I have to get down on my knees – I can't bend down, for example – and I take care not to fill the rubbish bags too full. I have learnt how to control my movements so I have less backache at work each day, and even at home. The training helped me because it

explained what to expect." There were even psychologists on hand to talk through participants' problems.

For Otilia, daily life is a question of controlling the pain and reducing it to a manageable level. She refused surgery when she found it offered only a 20% chance of success. Instead, she has regular massage sessions, and once a year undergoes intensive therapy in the local spa town of Mondorf-les-Bains. She tries to avoid painkilling drugs. "I have treatment to try and stop the arthritis developing any further, because once that happens there's nothing to be done," she explains.

She hopes to be able to continue working until she reaches retirement age. "We'll see how long it can go on," she says philosophically. "It will take courage. I still feel pain, and sometimes I'm a bit depressed. It varies with the weather – when it rains it gets worse. But one has to try to keep going. You can't always complain. You have to live with it."

Nadine Sadler, from P&T's health and social affairs service, says about 20 staff members a year undertake the back-pain training. "It really works," she says. "I hope it will help Otilia to lengthen her working life."



New rules to help Europe strike better work-life balance

© Belga Pictures

Existing rights to parental leave to be broadened and strengthened

In a bid to help EU citizens juggle their work and family commitments, the European Commission has adopted a proposal to revamp existing rights to parental leave. Parental leave offers time off from work for mothers and fathers so they can look after their children for a certain period of time. It is not the same as maternity leave or paternity leave, which are specifically designed to give people time off for the birth or the adoption of a child.

Besides helping people balance their professional lives with the needs of their children, parental leave also encourages men to share domestic responsibilities with women. Working parents were given the right to parental leave back in 1995 through an agreement between European employers and trades unions, which was given legal status by the EU. But since EU legislation only provides minimum standards, the application of parental leave rules varies across Member States in terms of entitlement, duration and payment.

In June 2009 the European social partners agreed a new proposal on parental leave which was adopted by the Commission a month later. If passed into law by the EU, it will

extend existing rights while strengthening protection against discrimination. The proposal will increase the minimum parental leave period from three months to four months for each parent per child. To encourage fathers to take up more family responsibilities, the fourth month of leave is strictly non-transferable between parents.

Employers would have to consider requests from parents returning from leave who ask for temporary changes to their working hours or patterns of work. The new rules will apply to all employees regardless of contract type, which means parental leave would become a right for part-time, fixed-term and

agency workers. The proposal also provides greater protection for workers against dismissal and all forms of discrimination that can affect promotion or salary prospects. If approved by Member States, these new rules would come into force in 2011, thereby setting new minimum levels of protection across the EU.

The proposal stems from broader reviews of gender equality legislation and work-life balance that are currently being undertaken by the EU. The Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men 2006-2010 aims to introduce gender mainstreaming into all EU policy areas and activities while developing specific measures to combat inequality. In 2008, the Commission introduced a package of proposals to improve work-life balance, which includes initiatives to strengthen maternity leave rules and extend social security coverage.

Parental leave entitlement in the EU

Rules covering parental leave vary widely across Europe, which is one reason why the Commission wants to introduce new minimum standards.

Slovenia and Denmark provide parental leave with benefits equivalent to full pay (though the latter only pays full earnings up to a maximum ceiling). Many other EU countries offer lower earnings-related rates, while parental leave is unpaid in Ireland, Spain, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

The flexibility of parental leave schemes also varies across Europe. In some countries (e.g. Estonia, Greece, Poland, Spain and Sweden) parents can choose whether to take leave in one continuous block or in several shorter periods. Some schemes offer the opportunity to take leave on a full-time or part-time basis, for instance in France and Portugal.

Some countries – such as Finland, Germany and Sweden – have introduced economic incentives to encourage fathers to use their full parental leave entitlement.



What the 2010 EU Year against poverty and social exclusion can deliver at EU level

The focus that the 2010 Year will bring on tackling poverty and social exclusion should deliver a strong EU policy

Poverty and social exclusion need to be clearly identified as one of the main challenges to be addressed EU 2010-2020 strategy. EU leaders are still reluctant to make this commitment despite the reality that nearly 80 million people in the EU live in, or at risk of, poverty and that recent Eurobarometer surveys show that 73% of Europeans consider poverty to be a widespread problem.

However it is not enough just to tackle poverty. We must also tackle the *causes* of poverty and to make it understood that the reduction of inequalities in income and wealth through effective redistribution mechanisms is a prerequisite for delivering a better, fairer EU. 2010 is a chance to get across the message that **more equal societies are better for everyone**.

We need **political leadership** to move forward in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. 2010 must be the occasion when the EU Heads of States and Governments make a solemn declaration, drawn from the obligations in the EU Treaties and commitments made in international Human Rights instruments, and commit to concrete steps to make progress in the fight against poverty and inequality.

We need **effective instruments** at EU level to move from words to delivery. Now there is much more awareness of the shortcomings of GDP as a measure of the well being of the society. Work that has been done to develop measures beyond GDP, including at risk of poverty and inequality indicators and targets, must now be used systematically to measure progress under the EU 2020 strategy.

The **EU Strategy to fight poverty and social exclusion** (called the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on Social Protection and Social Exclusion) must no longer be the EU's best kept secret. 2010 must be the occasion to re-launch a tougher more effective version of this strategy which includes National and EU level targets to reduce poverty and inequalities. Opportunities and support for real participation in the strategy must be promoted and monitored through guidelines, indicators and benchmarking.

Progress on areas of policies where commitments have already been made at EU level is also possible during 2010. The follow up of the Recommendation on Active Inclusion which commits to "implementing an integrated and comprehensive strategy... combining adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access

to quality services" must be a top priority. Follow up of this commitment must ensure monitoring progress on the adequacy of *minimum income schemes* in the Member States and progressing a framework directive in this area. Attention must also be directed to reversing the trend towards 'working poor' which is an increasing problem in the EU as well as progressing the EU Framework Directive aimed at guaranteeing the right to affordable quality services.

2010 must also see real commitments to follow up on the thematic years within the EU Inclusion strategy on child poverty (2007) and housing and homelessness (2009). A further challenge at policy level is to mainstreaming equality and anti discrimination in anti-poverty policies and programmes.

In 2010 **financial commitment** must be made to match the narrative about the importance of the participation of people experiencing poverty. It is time to commit to a future EU poverty and social inclusion programme which also includes funds to build the capacity of anti poverty NGOs within Member States and enhances their ability to engage in relevant EU debates and policy dialogues. This commitment should also ensure that EU Structural Funds can be accessed by anti poverty NGOs using technical assistance and global grants mechanisms and that programmes funded under the structural funds really deliver the social inclusion agenda.

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



INTERVIEW

László Andor European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Speaks to Social Agenda

Your entire professional life has been dedicated to European integration and now, as European Commissioner, you are in a position to shape the development of EU policy directly. How do you see your task?

President Barroso has given me responsibility for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. The focus of my work must now be jobs. My task will be to work closely with Member States, workers and business to tackle unemployment and help the jobless back to work, preventing further poverty and social exclusion. As this Commission's mandate takes off, I believe we have a great opportunity for change. We must draw on the benefits of the Lisbon Treaty – the new "social clause" means social issues will be taken into account in shaping and implementing all EU policies. The Charter for fundamental rights will offer better protection for citizens through its new status, and is an important step towards the better protection of workers.

What are your priorities for the next five years?

My top priority will be of course to tackle the consequences of the crisis on the employment and social situation in the EU. This means preventing further job losses and creating jobs. It also means addressing social exclusion and the concerns of the most vulnerable. Other priorities are the European

social dialogue, which I intend to renew and intensify, and workers' mobility, where we need to tackle the remaining obstacles to the free movement of workers within the EU by improving the co-ordination of social security schemes and the portability of pension rights.

A Eurobarometre survey on European citizens and the crisis published last July revealed widespread pessimism, particularly as concern jobs. What measures do you plan to take to promote employment?

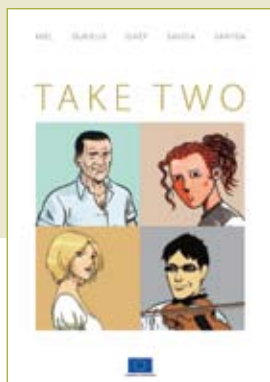
There are several elements to that: we need to rethink the European Employment Strategy, with the goal of creating greater employment opportunities for all; we must deal with the critical situation of youth unemployment; encourage governments to promote a flexicurity agenda in order to provide employment security for workers, with easier job transitions and life-long learning. We must ensure that workers gain "New skills for New Jobs", including green jobs, which will also improve Europe's competitiveness and raise productivity; we must help keep older workers in employment and support active ageing, and continue promoting equality between men and women in the workplace. I also intend to support Member States' recovery efforts by making full use of the European Social Fund and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund. We will hopefully have

the new micro-financing facility soon too. Beyond that, we need to strive for dynamic, sustainable and inclusive economies and labour markets in the long-run. The crisis offers us the opportunity to develop a competitive and sustainable economy that deals with environmental and social policy challenges in an efficient manner. New sources of growth, such as the green economy and healthcare and social services need to be considered.

2010 is the European Year for Combating poverty and social exclusion. The European Strategy against poverty and social exclusion launched in 2000 has fallen rather short of expectations. How can EU action have a significant impact on the eradication of poverty and exclusion?

I am determined to promote as a matter of priority policies to support vulnerable groups and address the root causes of poverty and social exclusion, including issues such as child poverty and multiple discrimination, or the alarming development in the situation of many Roma people. 2010, the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion is an important opportunity to raise citizens' awareness in this respect. We need to seize the opportunities in the 2010 European Year and encourage involvement and political commitment from all partners in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

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Take two

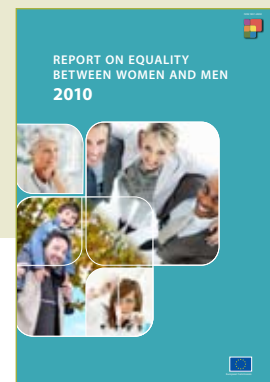
Julie, Viktor, Pedro and Fianne do not believe in giving up! Find out how these four individuals succeeded in picking themselves up and moving on thanks to the support they received from Europe. Inspired by true events, these four stories in comic strip format show that we can all bounce back with a little support and perseverance. You could easily find yourself in their shoes! Illustrated with tact and sensitivity by Vanyda, Durieux, Savoia and Gihe and based on a text by Rudi Miel, 'Take two' is a comic strip published by the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the European Commission, on the initiative of the European Social Fund. The comic strip is only available in French for the moment (KE-32-09-164-FR-C); the other 22 official languages will be available in May/June. You're welcome to reserve your copies on <http://surveys.publications.europa.eu/formserver/rebonds>



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The recent financial crisis has brought to light the lack of women in economic decision-making positions in Europe. In banking, business, politics and public administrations men continue to outnumber women in senior positions despite the increased number of women among university graduates and in the labour market. This report examines the current situation and trends and also considers ways in which the advancement of women can be supported and accelerated to get more women in senior positions. This publication is available in printed format in English, French and German.

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Report on equality between women and men 2010

At the request of the European Council, the European Commission reports each year on progress towards gender equality and presents challenges and priorities for the future. This publication gives an overview of recent developments as regards the situation of women and men in the EU with relevant data and policy presentations. The 2010 report addresses more particularly the shorter-term and longer-term challenges for gender equality in the context of the economic crisis. It also focuses on challenges relating to work/life balance, poverty and social inclusion and violence against women. It is available in English, French and German.

Catalogue No.: KE-AU-10-001-**-C

Useful websites

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

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

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

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



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