



Polish Presidency and the European Commission

12 December 2011

**First
Annual Convention
of the
European Platform
against
Poverty and Social
Exclusion**

**17-18 October 2011
Krakow, Poland**

Final Report

Introduction

The Polish Presidency and the European Commission jointly organised the first Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion, which took place in Cracow, Poland on 17-18 October 2011. It coincided with the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17 October).

This First Annual Convention brought together over 400 participants from 38 European countries, including Ministers and State Secretaries, Members of the European Parliament, other policy makers, civil society representatives, journalists, people experiencing poverty and experts coming from the academic world.

If the ultimate aim of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion is to contribute to reaching the EU headline target of lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty and exclusion by 2020, the Convention is the major event of this flagship initiative of Europe 2020 strategy, where the participants can review the situation of poverty in the EU and consider suggestions for future actions.

Opening session

In his opening address Mr. Jarosław Duda, Secretary of State, Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy emphasized the importance to reduce poverty in Europe and the key role the EU can play to reach this goal. Innovative and sustainable social policy initiatives are required to mitigate the negative effects of the economic crisis, austerity measures and budget cuts. The Secretary of State insisted the EU should be brave enough to take significant measures against poverty and social exclusion as it did for the financial system. He also underlined that the European Poverty Platform has an important role to play in supporting the commitments the EU made in the framework of the European year against Poverty in 2010.

According to Mr. Koos Richelle, Director General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion of the European Commission, the Europe 2020 target on poverty and social exclusion are not met. Even though austerity and economic difficulties will make it more difficult to reach our agreed objective in this field, budgetary constraints can not be used as an excuse for non-action. People need to feel protected and current levels of poverty and exclusion are not acceptable in Europe. Movements like the Indignados in Spain and in other countries in Europe are clear evidence of this problem. Mr. Richelle then emphasized that the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and the Social Open Method of Coordination are treasured tools for cooperation on EU level and should be better used to improve cooperation and solidarity, to improve our analytical capacity and to encourage social renewal and innovation on the ground.

Mr. Staffan Nilsson, President of the European Economic and Social Committee stated that organising an Annual Convention for the Platform is positively helping to build a social Europe. The political commitment to a social Europe is as old as the Convention of Rome and getting all stakeholders and representatives from the Member States involved is crucial to secure inclusive growth and implementing the social agenda. He underlined that even though we can analyse, stimulate and develop new approaches at the EU level, the implementation has to be done at the local, regional and national level.

The final intervention of the opening session was Ms. Sonja Leemkuil from the meeting of people experiencing poverty (PEP). She and her family have had to suffer from several health problems which have prevented them from developing their potential both in education and their respective professional lives. Sonja has had to care for family members who suffered from serious illnesses. The financial problems caused by all these setbacks also contributed to mental anguish. Any spare time she had left, she dedicated to the local community and helping those in need. This was not only a very moving and personal speech but it was also a powerful reminder of the sometimes dramatic situations people experiencing poverty have to face. Sonja's message was clearly heard by the participants and was referred to often during the Round table with the Ministers and Secretary of States.

The first session:

Where do we stand on the poverty target at MS level? Round table with the Ministers and Secretary of States.

Twelve European Ministers and Secretaries of State, including some from potential candidate countries, attended the Convention and representatives from nine Member States informed participants about their priorities on the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

It is clear that the current national targets are not ambitious enough to reach the EU headline target by 2020: the national targets – all added up – fall short of the EU target by 5 to 8 million people. The final outcome in 2020 will of course depend on future economic and employment trends, and on the success of anti-poverty strategies.

The nine Ministers and Secretaries of State from the Member States represented (IE, DK, PT, BE, ES, RO, LT, LV and PL) took part in the ministerial “round table”. All agreed that the current economic circumstances have put pressure on the social protection systems and that the social impact of the austerity measures needed to be mitigated, especially for the most vulnerable groups. All the speakers underlined the importance of improving the existing policies aimed at combating unemployment and protecting those at risk of poverty, with a special emphasis on child poverty. They also underlined the vital role of stakeholders, the importance of social economy as well as the need of an integrated approach towards fighting poverty and social exclusion.

Ms Joan Burton, Minister of Social Protection from Ireland, highlighted the current economic circumstances, deterioration of household incomes and significant increases in

levels of unemployment. Under the current circumstances, Ireland's priorities are to restore economic and employment growth, to expand active labour market measures and protecting the most vulnerable from bearing the brunt of fiscal consolidation.

Ms Karen Haekkerup, Minister of Social Affairs and Integration from Denmark, declared that the new government of Denmark has a totally new agenda and emphasized that poverty is also a matter of finance and that areas such as education, health or better solutions for homeless people should also be considered.

Mr Pedro Luís Mota Soares, Minister of Solidarity and Social Security of Portugal, underlined that in August 2011 a new 4-year programme had been launched in Portugal, with the aim to mitigate the social impact of austerity on most vulnerable groups. Other existing measures introduced so far, have already resulted in some positive results, such as a decrease in risk-of-poverty level during last decade.

Mr Philippe Courard, acting Secretary of State for Social Integration and Combating Poverty in Belgium, pointed out that the actions undertaken so far will not be sufficient to achieve the poverty reduction objectives. He mentioned that Belgium had established its national antipoverty platform along the lines of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and is applying a similar participative approach. He called on the other Member States to do the same in order to achieve the objectives of poverty and social exclusion reduction.

Ms Isabel Martinez Lozano, Spanish Secretary General for Social Policy and Consumer Affairs stressed that "the European Platform against Poverty is a commitment to some of the founding values of Europe, part of our collective identity". She also recalled the importance of addressing the unique challenges presented by the European social model without compromising the label that distinguishes it and proposed "to promote decentralization of social protection programs and the combination of institutional and social actors to implement inclusive policies".

Mr Valentin Mocanu, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection in Romania, highlighted that based on the analysis of the situation in various sectors we can conclude that social inclusion and active employment policies crosses the traditional boundaries of „economic“ and „social“ and are no longer limited to the traditional division of vulnerable groups or sectors concerned.

Mr Dalius Bitaitis, Vice-minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania, highlighted measures introduced regarding the reform of social insurance and pensions, reorganisation of the cash social assistance system and labour market flexibility. He also stressed the contribution of NGOs to growth and the development of voluntary activities.

Mr Ingus Alliks, Deputy State Secretary at the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia, admitted that the at-risk-of-poverty rate in Latvia is one of the highest among the EU Member States. Latvia experienced the worst recession in the EU. A great number of people lost their jobs and many of them fell into a situation of (extreme) poverty. Therefore the main priority of the government is to provide at least the minimum income for everyone. Latvia has defined the reduction of income inequality as the main measure to reduce poverty. The measures introduced will lead to changes related to the personal income tax (such as raising untaxed minimum of personal income tax or raising personal income tax relief rate for dependent persons).

Mr Jarosław Duda, Secretary of State at the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, drew attention to the fact that generally all the countries are facing similar problems, which are related to economic crises. Therefore the main challenge is to set the right priorities. In times of austerity, decision-makers have to use limited financial resources in a very smart and effective way whilst guaranteeing appropriate protection for the most vulnerable remains the primary objective. Mr. Duda also highlighted the importance of using the potential of cooperation with NGOs and to look at the potential for employment creation in the social economy, as well as effectively using the cooperation with different partners.

In his conclusion, the chair of the Social Protection Committee, Mr. Lauris Beets confirmed that the economic and financial situation is grave in most Member States but that ordinary citizens, the people experiencing poverty in particular, should not pay the price for the crisis. Our social protection systems have proved rather resilient against the ravages of the economic crisis but it is imperative that we improve these systems and that we keep our focus on employment as a tool to get people out of poverty and social exclusion.

The EU target of lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020 will not be reached based on current national targets. According to a first preliminary estimation of the cumulative ambition around 12 million people would be lifted out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020. If spill-over effects of strategies focusing on, for example, combating child poverty or reducing long-term unemployment are taken into account, this number can be increased by 25%. However, this would still fall short by at least 5 million or 25% of the EU headline

Therefore, the national poverty targets will need to be re-examined over the next years hopefully resulting in upward adjustments bringing us close to the target set in the Europe 2020 strategy. This was strongly emphasised at the Convention.

Second session:

What are the main activities of the European Platform on Poverty and Social Exclusion as coordinated by the European Commission in 2011?

Mr. Egbert Holthuis (Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion) emphasized that economic and social cohesion is at the heart of the Europe 2020 strategy. However, there is mounting evidence that both income-poverty and severe material deprivation represent an increasing challenge in several Member States. As long term unemployment shares rise and social protection systems are facing heavy pressure both in terms of budget reductions and increased levels of benefit seekers, there is a risk of lower government transfers and thus a decline of disposable income affecting also low income earners. This calls for urgent, coordinated response to address fiscal imbalances, support job creation and ensure that social protection systems can prevent people from falling through the safety nets

Although combating poverty is primarily the responsibility of national governments, the EU can play a coordinating role as Member States are facing similar challenges. In this context the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion can be a valuable asset in areas such as labour market access, modernisation of social protection system (ensuring sustainability and adequacy), essential services (e.g. healthcare, housing) and education. To do so the European Platform has to be a basis for a supportive and active constituency that cuts across various policies and institutions, levels of government and civil society actors. The Platform can also give fresh impetus to social innovations and play a role in improving the effectiveness social policy reforms and harnessing the potential of the social economy.

Ms. Ilona Negro (DG Justice) presented the EU framework for Roma integration. The situation of the Roma is deteriorating despite the existence of national integration strategies covering education, employment, health and housing. EU funds such as the European Social Fund (ESF) can provide support for national Roma inclusion policies. It is up to the Member States to take the appropriate initiatives, to set achievable goals (and develop monitoring mechanisms) to close the gap between the Roma and the rest of the population.

Mr. Angelos Agalianos (DG Education and Culture) addresses the issue of inequality and education, especially the battle against early school leaving. The issue of educational success and failure still lies at the heart of the social divide in the EU and inequalities persist in all European education and training systems reflecting wider socio-economic inequalities. Since 2006, a whole series of European initiatives have encouraged Member States to develop more inclusive, accessible and equitable education systems and in 2011 a Commission "package" on combating early school leaving led to a Council Recommendation on this topic. The Commission has also put forward a Communication on early childhood education and care and a proposal for a Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning will be put forward at the beginning of 2012. In the mean time, the work continues towards a new Commission's initiative on education and inequalities planned for spring 2012 which will highlight concrete policies and practices that work to disrupt or prevent educational disadvantage.

Mr. Philippe Pellé (DG Internal Market and Services) covered the issue of access to basic banking services. He started by pointing out that about 30 million adults in the EU are without a bank account at a time when electronic payments are increasingly replacing cash payments for reasons of cost, efficiency and security and, as far as e-commerce is concerned, convenience. This makes access to basic payment services a sine qua non condition to full participation in society. People on low or irregular income, or who may have met financial difficulties in the past as well as students, pensioners or migrant workers who may want to open a bank account are most likely to be affected by difficulties of access to basic banking services. In this context, the European Commission has invited Member States in a Recommendation 18 July 2011 to guarantee a general right of access to a basic banking account to all European citizens. This basic bank account should include a debit card and be offered at an affordable price, if not for free. The situation will be reviewed around summer 2012 and, if need be, further action will be envisaged.

The final speaker from the European Commission was Ms. Hana Horka (DG Health and Consumer Affairs) who covered the issue of social inclusion of people with mental health problems. There is clear evidence that poverty, unemployment and social exclusion are a major risk factor for mental health problems. Conversely, mental health problems often lead to social exclusion, unemployment and poverty. The EU has given attention to these issues and following a series of thematic conferences organised between 2009-2011 under the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being a number of priorities were identified that could be addressed through cooperation with other EU-policies.

The Commission also proposed to include the set up of a Joint Action on Mental Health and Well-being into its 2012 work plan for the EU-Health Programme containing key priorities such as the de-institutionalisation and promotion of modern community based settings for people with mental health problems.

Third session:

Convention suggestions* for actions in 2012 and beyond

Finally, the Annual Convention meeting offered the possibility for participants to make suggestions for future actions. To this end, **six parallel sessions** allowed the pooling of ideas and the sharing of good practices, followed by a report back to the closing plenary session. Each session was prepared with the stakeholders, had a similar format and permitted an open and interactive debate despite too short time for real discussions.

Workshop 1: Breaking the cycle of poverty through integrated family and child-centred policies

General introduction

More than 20 million children are at risk of poverty throughout the European Union. The risk is particularly high among children living in lone parent or large families, jobless households, institutional care settings, or having a migrant or Roma origin. There are also signs that the number of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion is on the rise as a result of the crisis.

Europe's social and economic future greatly depends on its capacity to tackle child poverty and to break the transmission of disadvantage across generations. The issue features high on the agenda of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

The workshop aimed to contribute to the preparation of the future European Commission (EC) Recommendation in 2012 by providing space for discussing key priorities and ways to enhance the impact of the EU's efforts in the eradication of child poverty.

Key messages:

- Protect children and families against the adverse effects of the crisis:
 - Long-term investment into the future to avoid a "lost generation".
- Put child and family poverty and well-being at the heart of Europe 2020 Strategy:
 - Adopt a Commission Recommendation on child poverty in 2012;
 - Define child poverty sub-targets.
- Address child poverty through an integrated approach:
 - Access to adequate resources;
 - Access to quality services and opportunities;
 - Children's participation.

* The main conclusions presented here are the result of the discussions taken place among the stakeholders participating at the workshop session and it does not necessary reflects the position of the European Commission.

Concrete suggestions for future actions:

- Introduce regular monitoring and reporting of child poverty in the EU to meet the Europe 2020 Strategy's poverty headline target:
 - Regular reporting at EU level;
 - Develop better indicators;
 - Develop an implementation programme (next Trio Presidencies).
- Enhance mutual exchange and learning:
 - Acknowledge richness of practices and knowledge;
 - Provide adequate education and training for professionals;
 - Scale up, transfer and disseminate best practices.
- Invest funds and resources in preventing and tackling child poverty:
 - Better use of the Structural Funds (current and next multi-annual financial framework).

Within the framework of an integrated, 3-pillar, multidimensional approach:

- Ensure access to adequate resources:
 - Providing adequate income support;
 - Supporting quality job, which respects work-life balance.
- Ensure access to quality services and opportunities:
 - Developing quality child care facilities and services;
 - Early intervention, prevention and childhood support;
 - Need for community-based services, involving and supporting parents;
 - Following an integrated approach covering all dimensions of child poverty, i.e. social, health, education, transport, housing services;
 - Addressing the separation of children from their parents due to poverty;
 - Promoting de-institutionalisation.
- Support children's participation:
 - Need for inclusive vision and structures for participating in decision making and in society;
 - Active participation starts in family and continues in social, recreational, sport and community activities;
 - Parents' involvement is essential.
- Ensure special targeted attention to children at high risk, i.e. children living in or leaving institutions, children with migrant or minority background including the Roma, children with disabilities.

For further information:

The booklet on good practices:

http://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/Events/2011/10_EPAP%20Convention/BOOKLET%20best%20practices%20EN.pdf

Workshop 2: Leaving no one behind: young people not in education, employment or training

General introduction

Due to their lack of experience and the structural problems of labour markets, young people face serious problems when entering employment. Their situation could be characterised as “last in – first out” (i.e., they are the first who are laid off when companies should reduce their staff). Young people are overrepresented in temporary jobs, mainly in cyclical-sensitive sectors (e.g. in construction, where many young men are employed without proper education). Four groups of young people can be identified:

- 1) High performers (no need to worry much about them);
- 2) Poorly integrated new entrants (a lot to be done to improve their situation);
- 3) Youth left behind (so-called NEETs: not in education, employment or training);
- 4) Those, returning to education.

The NEETs are the most vulnerable and they usually have an unprivileged social background. NEETs are not a homogeneous group. This "label" covers diverse groups with diverse needs. At EU level, their average rate stands at around 13%, but in some Member States it is close to 20%. No one should be left behind, but at least, in line with the EU 2020 Strategy, the rate should be reduced to 10%. “Youth Guarantee” schemes, meaning that everyone has the right for education, up-skilling and employment within 4 months after having left school or having become unemployed, should also help improving the NEETs' situation. Such schemes exist in the United Kingdom and are incorporated in the Norwegian and Austrian education systems.

Key messages:

- In all Member States, governments should commit to promote and implement Youth Guarantees.
- NEETs' issues should be addressed as part of poverty and social exclusion policies.
- Young people should be involved in policy-making at all levels, especially at regional and local level: "Nothing about us, without us".

Concrete suggestions for future actions:

- Actions in education and vocational training:
 - Investing in basic (compulsory) education by bringing innovation in education curricula, reflecting young people's needs and developing more technical/practical skills (to cope with “real life”), valuing more vocational training;
 - Developing dual training and “Workshop Schools”: good practices should be identified and then transferred, where possible, to other Member States;
 - Setting-up mentoring schemes for youth with disadvantaged backgrounds;

- Enhancing the role of teachers in all the above (too much administrative burden on them).
- Actions on social and cultural barriers:
 - Parenting support is needed – awareness raising (family education) to motivate parents on how helping their children to acquire good quality education/training;
 - More focus on disadvantaged groups (economic policy should focus on them even when job creation is in focus);
 - Adapting all planned programmes/schemes to the diverse realities in Member States (e.g. rural/urban divide);
 - Duties and obligations for/from both sides (i.e. for/from the young people themselves) should be clearly outlined in all planned programmes/schemes.
- Other actions:
 - Minimum income for young people, in particular with disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. how young people in training can support themselves?);
 - Projects funded by Structural Funds (in particular European Social Fund), which include support to youth employment or job creation for youth should ensure sustainability of these schemes;
 - Promote well-being and prevent mental health problems, in particular for NEETs who are most at risk of living in bad conditions and of being hit by mental diseases.

For further information:

Youth neither in employment nor education and training (NEET). Presentation of data for the 27 Member States. European Commission:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=6602&langId=en>

Workshop 3: Social Innovation for Active Inclusion

General introduction

Innovation is a priority of the Europe 2020 Strategy, reflected in several of its flagship initiatives. Promoting evidence-based social innovation including social experimentation was identified as an action area of the European Platform against Poverty. Three examples of social innovations in the established social services sector, for which there is some evidence they work and could be generalised across the EU, were presented and discussed. This resulted in a vivid discussion on how innovative practices can be evaluated, scaled up, generalised and mainstreamed to ensure evidence-based policies. Two questions were discussed more in-depth: What kind of social innovation for active inclusion in Europe 2020 Strategy: How to fully exploit the expertise and role of the social service sector? How to strengthen the evidence base for innovative social practices/policies and scale them up?

Key messages:

- Go beyond traditional mutual learning by evidence based social innovation.
- Strengthen the evidence base for social innovations by:
 - Supporting a stakeholder approach in design, monitoring, evaluation of social innovation, especially users;
 - Promoting diverse methods to evaluate the evidence of innovation (i.e. randomised trials or peer review at EU level);
 - Ensuring evidence to show why approaches work and not just tell that they work. Important for transferability. Develop evaluation that includes indicators/measures of quality of life.
- Build evidence-based social innovation with the established service sector.

Concrete suggestions for future actions:

- Promote a long-term approach and sustainable financing of research, pilot projects, monitoring and evaluation of existing and new innovation.
- Involve stakeholders in the design, monitoring and evaluation of innovative projects: social service providers, Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs), public authorities, users.
- Strengthen innovators and administrations' capacity for evaluation of social innovations. Ensure social innovation is a key element in EU Structural Funds Policy.

For further information:

European Commission:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/innovation/policy/social-innovation/social-inno-event_en.htm

Workshop 4: Fighting poverty and social exclusion of older people

General introduction

The successful reduction of poverty among older people is not only directly correlated with employment during working lives, but also depends to a high degree on the adequacy of pensions and minimum old-age schemes and access to and affordability of services during retirement.

Moreover, the analysis of measures to prevent old-age poverty should not be limited to the capacity of social protection systems to cover replacement of working-age income. The aim must be to take into account the fact that adequacy of income and social services apply for a longer period of life as a pensioner i.e. sometimes more than 40 years is spent in retirement. It is also important to look at the overall well-being which depends on access to community services and avoiding isolation.

Key messages:

- Because EU countries differ considerably in terms of poverty risks among older people, it is crucial to use different methods of poverty measurement which can help to capture different facets of poverty and social exclusion among older people.
- Whilst both older women and men suffer from inequalities in terms of social protection, women are additionally affected by their fertility history, as well as by informal caring responsibilities which restrict their access to good quality employment.
- Adequacy of pensions has to remain the key objective of further social protection reforms to guarantee a decent life throughout retirement i.e. many of those who retired with an adequate pension then slip gradually into poverty as a result of lack of adequate pension indexation.
- The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and the European Year 2012 will create a momentum to enhance social inclusion for all population groups and help create an age-friendly environment across EU.

Concrete suggestions for future actions:

- Measuring poverty:
 - Need to define and develop measures of adequate standards of living - particularly by using national budget standards;
 - Monetary poverty indicators should be supplemented with non-financial wider measures of social exclusion, such as access to quality health and long-term care, decent housing, transport, long-life learning, social or civic participation, etc;
 - Better evidence towards poverty of the most vulnerable groups such as migrant older people, Roma people in particular.
- Labour market:

- Improve employers' attitudes in hiring and retaining older workers and provide training opportunities and appropriate age management in work;
- Provide compensation for family care duties in accumulating pension rights;
- Develop an index on active ageing measuring the evolution in people's needs and aspirations and working capacities (in market and non-market activities) as they age.
- Pension systems:
 - Old-age minimum income schemes should prevent poverty and be provided as necessary social safety net with due regard for dignity and avoiding stigma;
 - In times of austerity public statutory pensions need appropriate indexing to maintain purchasing power in line with society's progress and to prevent poverty trap as a result of the erosion of their income over time;
 - Sufficient contribution credits for career breaks due to care responsibilities, bared mainly by women, should be provided together with measures facilitating return to formal work.
- Social inclusion:
 - Individual well-being and quality of life in old age should be strengthened through universal access to essential services i.e. based on quality standards for health and long-term care;
 - Fight against isolation and loneliness among older people through social integration measures in communities should be among priorities for social inclusion strategies;
 - Housing, urban planning, technology and mobility plans are also essential when promoting social inclusion of an ageing population.

For further information:

www.age-platform.eu (in particular the section on social inclusion)

Workshop 5: Building dynamic national, regional and local engagement in the fight against poverty

General introduction

Both the Europe 2020 strategy and the European Platform against Poverty have made a strong commitment to the partnership principle involving relevant stakeholders in the development and implementation of its objectives and targets. The European Platform against Poverty offers a key mechanism to contribute to this stakeholder engagement representing a "new partnership between EU institutions, Member States and all European, national and regional stakeholders"¹ and stresses the importance of strengthening existing partnership and involving new actors in a regular dialogue. Embedding regular structured dialogue and partnership approach with regional and local authorities, social partners and all relevant stakeholders, including NGOs and people with direct experience of poverty, can help ensure that the EU anti-poverty and social inclusion agenda and targets are effectively attained. However, the question to be discussed is how an increased multilevel and multi-stakeholder involvement in the policy making and implementation of Europe 2020 can be achieved.

Key messages:

- Structured dialogue at EU and national levels between public authorities and relevant stakeholders are essential to the success of Europe 2020. They bring expert knowledge, different perspectives and solutions from partners experienced in dealing with poverty and exclusion. The proposed dialogue should respect diversity among Member States according to their institutional architecture (e.g. national, regional and local governments) while ensuring involvement of governments (at all levels) and a wide range of stakeholders including people experiencing poverty.
- Increasing the capacity building of stakeholders, should allow regular meetings within permanent and visible structures and make their engagement successful. The proposed structure should be supported by adequate funding.
- This dialogue between civil society, NGOs and decision makers will increase mutual understanding and should propose realistic solutions based on stronger analysis.

Concrete suggestions for future actions:

- Social inclusion policies need to be delivered beyond social policy. Other ministries than social affairs and/or employment, therefore need to be engaged in the debate on solutions, and social ministries in debates on other areas. Key responsibility for coordinating such an integrated approach could be assigned, for example, to the cabinets of Prime Ministers.
- To encourage public debate and more democratic legitimacy to Europe 2020, the national parliaments should become more involved as well as the European Parliament.

¹ EC (COM/2010/0758): European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A European Framework for social and territorial cohesion.

- To promote productive mutual learning on effective stakeholder involvement, for example by studies and peer reviews through OMC tools. Points to be addressed:
 - Exchange of good practices of effective stakeholder engagement and its added value;
 - To enhance the debate on governance issues, including evaluation and measurement of effectiveness;
 - To analyse the obstacles to stakeholder involvement.
- Evaluate the processes, results and impact of stakeholder engagement by establishing clear indicators for effective participation.

Further information:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=961&langId=en>

Workshop 6: Poverty, employment and the role of social economy

General introduction

The social economy enterprises show a better resilience to the present economic and financial crisis compared to conventional enterprises. Their resilience is a good indicator of their capacity to sustain their economic activities and jobs even in time of crisis or to engage in markets with a growth potential. They create and maintain sustainable enterprises and thence contribute to local development and social cohesion. The emphasis on the long-term sustainability of entrepreneurial activities and employment shows that the social economy does not only “cure” social exclusion but effectively prevents it.

The main objective of the workshop was to discuss the impact of the social economy on creating and maintaining quality jobs as a key element of combating poverty and social exclusion both at European and local level in different aspects: prevention of poverty and social exclusion; social integration through work; qualifying and “springboard for employment” provided by social economy enterprises.

Key messages:

- Recognition of the role of social economy enterprises.
- Development of favourable environment for social economy enterprises.
- EU guidance on existing applicable rules (e.g. public procurements, State Aid, Structural Funds) and further adaptation to the specificities of social economy.

Concrete suggestions for future actions:

- Development of favourable environment:
 - Developing a coherent legal framework at appropriate levels (not just European);
 - Adapted access to finance (e.g. Structural Funds, etc.).
- Strengthening dialogue and partnerships between public authorities, social economy actors, and other businesses at all levels.
- Improving mutual learning:
 - exchange of best practices;
 - data collection;
 - impulse given by the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) through the Social Protection Committee (SPC) in collaboration with the Employment Committee (EMCO).
- Long-term political support at all levels: strategies, actions plans, etc.

Many of these proposed future actions are part of the Social Business Initiative Communication "Creating a favourable climate for social enterprises, key stakeholders in



the social economy and innovation" adopted by the European Commission on the 25 October 2011 (COM(2011) 682/2).

For further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/social_business/index_en.htm

<http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/promoting-entrepreneurship/social-economy/>

<http://www.socialeconomy.eu.org/spip.php?article1663>

Evening Session

The Polish presidency invited all participants for a dinner in the Wieliczka Salt Mine near Krakow. Mr. Jarosław Duda, the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was accompanied by Commissioner Lazlo Andor, the Polish Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Mrs. Jolanta Fedak and the three members of the European Parliament who attended the plenary session of the Convention, Mr. Frédéric Daerden (EP-PES), Mrs Jean Lambert (EP-Greens) and Mrs Emilie Turunen (EP-Greens).

Minister Fedak, Commissioner Andor and Mrs. Lambert (MEP-Greens) gave speeches at this occasion and reiterated the importance of the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the light of the EUROPE 2020 Objectives and the consequences of the financial crisis and austerity measures.

Site Visits

The Polish Presidency organised a selected number of site visits in Krakow and surroundings (see Annex), in order to present to the participants, Commissioner Andor and Minister Fedak in particular, different institutions and organisation active in the field of combating poverty and social exclusion with the focus on innovation and cooperation.

Commissioner Andor and Minister Fedak visited the three-star Hotel and Restaurant "U Pana Cogito (At Mr Cogito's), a social enterprise, employing 21 persons suffering from psychological disorders, mainly schizophrenia and the Social Integration Club (KIS -Klub Integracji Społecznej) a system project implemented by Local Centre of Social Assistance in Krakow, in the framework of "Human Capital" Operational Programme 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund.

Closing Session

The closing session of the Convention saw speeches by Mr. Frédéric Daerden (EP-PES), Commissioner Lazlo Andor and Minister Jolanta Fedak who presented their closing remarks and suggestions for the future.

Mr Frédéric Daerden, member of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs of the European Parliament and Rapporteur for the Report on the European Platform against poverty and social exclusion thanked the Polish Presidency for hosting the Convention and expressed his hope that the next Convention would be longer to allow more debate and exchanges of good practices. He then proceeded to give an overview of the main points of the EP report. He called for accurate monitoring to support the achievement of the Europe 2020 targets and the involvement of stakeholders, social partners and decision makers at all levels. In addition to this he stated that the economic crisis should not be used as an excuse to reduce efforts for employment and social protection. Instead adequate spending should be foreseen for the fight against poverty and social exclusion and a solution for the problems surrounding the food aid programs should be found. He

concluded by stating that the European parliament calls on the Council to adopt the anti-discrimination Directive and asks the Commission to take legislative initiatives regarding the access to social services and minimum incomes.

The following speaker was Commissioner Lazlo Andor who started of by expressing his gratitude for having been able to visit a number of projects dedicated to helping people in situations of poverty and social exclusion. He underlined that the EU has contributed significantly to social inclusion policy and is determined to continue to do so, including through the EU financial instruments. He told the participants that on 6 October the Commission had put forward a proposal for legislation on Cohesion Policy for the period 2014 to 2020 to ensure that after 2013 the European Social Fund should grow by at least €84 billion for the seven-year period 2014 to 2020 and thereby allocating at least 20% of their Social Fund spending on "promoting social inclusion and combating poverty".

He stated that the conclusions of the Annual Convention would be presented to the College of Commissioners and to the Employment and Social Affairs (EPSCO) Council on 1 December 2011 in Brussels and proceeded to list the key points he would take home from the Convention:

The first point was that initiatives had to be taken to mobilise in support of the national targets set and that it is not acceptable that they fall short of the EU headline target.

The second point was to promote employment as probably the most effective route out of poverty. He also said the Commission would focus on the situation of young people in its country-specific recommendations for next year.

He also reminded the audience of the Communication on the Social Business Initiative along with a paper on corporate social responsibility and the presentation of a comprehensive report on the implementation of active inclusion strategies.

The third point involved stepping up our efforts to prevent the transmission of poverty across generations and child poverty in particular. He reminded the audience that 2012 would be the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations.

Following this he emphasized the need to promote evidence-based innovation in social policy, including the use of scientific methods to test and assess policy change.

Finally he underlined the need to work for the social and economic inclusion of disadvantaged groups, and in particular Roma, and calling for joint efforts by national and local authorities, civil society and the EU institutions.

The last speaker to take the floor was Minister Jolanta Fedak. She started of by thanking the guests for participating in the Convention.

Minister Fedak underlined the interdisciplinary nature of the actions aimed at reducing poverty and exclusion, both at the European Union and at national level. Both the commitment of different sectors and the cooperation of different institutions, coming not only from the traditional "social sector", but also from the more distant fields of social life, is needed.

This applies also to support from the European Union funds. We are aware of the progress made in the field of social policy thanks to support from the European Social Fund.

Minister Fedak emphasized the importance of an innovative approach towards social policy, especially as the smart way of implementing saving programmes, so that they can be sustainable and protect the weakest.



Minister Jolanta Fedak concluded by reminding that Poland has had high unemployment rates and serious structural problems but “thanks to the European Union policy and our own efforts we managed to go through these difficulties in the course of last 20 years. Today we can recommend this “solidarity method” to all in Europe.”.

Annex: List of Site Visits

Participants could choose to visit the following sites:

Site visit 1 “Małopolska Social Policy Observatory” and „Academy of Social Economy Development”

Host/Organiser: Regional Centre of Social Policy (ROPS- Regionalne Centrum Polityki Społecznej) in Krakow.

Venue: Hotel Kossak, Plac Kossaka 1, Krakow

The aim of the project is the integration of different stakeholders and communities around the idea of social economy, as well as creation of conditions for the development of the social economy sector and improvement of social policy efficiency by facilitating access to information. The project is co-financed by European Social Fund within “Human Capital Operational Programme 2007 -2013”. Participants of this site visit will have possibility to receive information on main ideas and practices of the network “Małopolska Regional Development Observatories” and to meet the team implementing project „Academy of Social Economy Development”.

Site visit 2 “The Life Farm”

Host/Organiser: Community of Hope Foundation (Fundacja Wspólnota Nadziei).

Venue: Więckowice, ul. Ogodowa 17, Bolechowice

The main objective of the project is complex support system for adults with autism spectrum and related disorders – persons who are threatened with, or indeed suffer from, social exclusion. The Life Farm is a centre for permanent housing, work, therapy, rehabilitation and vocational activation but also ecological farm. Participants of this site visit will see The Farm Life Centre in Więckowice (ca 15 km from Kraków), where the disabled persons work on the ecological farm and have possibility to take part in different training and therapy activities.

Site visit 3 “Precious Gift” and “Academy of the Future”

Host/Organiser: Spring Association (Stowarzyszenie Wiosna).

Venue: ul. Starowiślna 21/3, Krakow

Stowarzyszenie Wiosna (literally: Spring Association) is a non-profit organisation and its mission is to promote solidarity with person experiencing poverty or social exclusion, to mediate in the organization of assistance and creating of a civic society. The association operates mainly through volunteer work – in 2010 they cooperated with over 6,000 volunteers and community leaders.

„Szlachetna Paczka” („Precious Gift”) is a nationwide campaign of Christmas aid organised since 2001. „Akademia Przyszłości” („Academy of the future”) is a yearlong program of educational meetings for individual children growing up in difficult conditions who also have problems at school.

Site visit 4 “U Pana Cogito(At Mr Cogito’s) – Hotel and Restaurant”

Host/Organiser: Association of Families „Mental Health”(Stowarzyszenie Rodzin “Zdrowie Psychiczne”)

Venue: ul. Bałuckiego 6, Krakow

This site visit will allow participants to see an example of social enterprise, i.e. the three-star hotel and restaurant, employing 21 persons suffering from psychological disorders, mainly schizophrenia. The enterprise provides employment and professional training opportunities in the hotel business for mentally ill persons. The entire income is allocated for rehabilitation of the workers, subsidised medicines, rehabilitation camps, and additional training sessions. "At Mr Cogito's" is also an example of inter-sector cooperation – in view of organisational issues, as well as financing of different activities.

Site visit 5 Com-Com Zone Development Centre

Host/Organiser: Siemacha Association (Stowarzyszenie Siemacha)
Venue: ul. Ptaszyckiego 6, Krakow

Com-Com Zone is an example of social enterprise combining statutory (free of charge) and commercial services in Nowa Huta district of Krakow. Com-com Zone Development Centre has its premises in the modern sport facility, with swimming pool, gymnasium, sports hall and sports fields.

It is an innovative project gathering in a single location three important functions and combining three types of care centres, focused on socio-therapeutic work, psychotherapy, and sport activity, respectively. The main objectives of the project are to create modern and open space for informal education, provide help for people in crisis, develop social skills and natural talents of children and youth, combat the stereotypes about NGO and socially excluded persons, as well as promote healthy lifestyle. Siemacha Association, the project promoter, is a non-governmental organisation providing every day professional help for over 1000 children.

Site visit 6 Local Activity Programme (PAL – Program Aktywności Lokalnej)

Host/Organiser: Local Centre of Social Assistance (MOPS - Miejski Ośrodek Pomocy Społecznej) in Krakow
Venue: Osiedle Łęg, ul. Sikorki 15, Krakow

This Local Activity Programme is part of the system project implemented by Local Centre of Social Assistance in Krakow, in the framework of "Human Capital" Operational Programme 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund. The main activities of this project consist of a complex support and assistance provided by local animator to the inhabitants of a social housing building (212 persons). The main objective of the project is to reduce the level of social exclusion of the project's beneficiaries and to improve their living conditions and participation in community life.

Site visit 7 Professional activation of mentally disabled persons – Occupational Therapy Workshops and Local Centre of Social Services

Host/Organiser: Association of Social Assistance "Gaudium et Spes" (Stowarzyszenie Pomocy Socjalnej "Gaudium et Spes")
Venue: os. Górali 19, Krakow

During this site visit two activities realised by the Association of Social Assistance "Gaudium et Spes" will be presented: Occupational Therapy Workshops os. Górali in Krakow and Local Centre of Social Services. The main objective of this project is social and professional activation (and therefore: inclusion) of mentally disabled persons. The activities offered within the project enable the beneficiaries to participate in community life, to develop self-reliance and resourcefulness, as well as to gain necessary skills for further professional training or employment.

Site visit 8 Social Integration Club (KIS -Klub Integracji Społecznej)

Host/Organiser: Local Centre of Social Assistance (MOPS – Miejski Ośrodek Pomocy Społecznej) in Krakow

Venue: os. Słoneczne 15, Krakow

Social Integration Club in Nowa Huta (one of Krakow districts) is part of the system project implemented by Local Centre of Social Assistance in Krakow, in the framework of "Human Capital" Operational Programme 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund. The main objective of the project is social and professional integration of the long-term unemployed. Social Integration Club has its premises in two different building in Nowa Huta districts, providing space for several workshops and trainings activities.

Site visit 9 Café Hamlet

Host/Organiser: Krakow Foundation Hamlet (Krakowska Fundacja Hamlet)

Venue: ul. Miodowa 9, Krakow

Cafe Hamlet is a social enterprise, located in historic district Kazimierz in the centre of Krakow and run by persons suffering from mental disorders. It has been established in 1994 as an independent social firm, providing rehabilitation, professional training and supported employment for the mentally disabled persons. This Cafe is a model project accessible for the external clients. It enables the employees to get new professional qualification, to improve social competences as well as to improve material status by earning money. During site visit the detailed information on the scope and forms of activities of Hamlet Foundation will be presented, especially in the field of social economy, as well as social and professional integration.

Site visit 10 "Therapeutic day centre for Roma children and youth"

Host/Organiser: Małopolska Provincial Office (Małopolski Urząd Wojewódzki) in Krakow and Roma Association in Krakow (Stowarzyszenie Romów w Krakowie).

Venue: os. Złotej Jesieni 6/33, Krakow

This is a project aimed at Roma community integration, run by Małopolska Provincial Office in Krakow and Roma Association in Krakow. The main objective of the project is to provide support to education and social integration activities for Roma children and youth, in the framework of the day centre. In the scope of the project various forms of leisure activities are also proposed for children and young people. During this site visit participants will have opportunity to get more details about the Programme for Roma Community, about Roma Organisation (including meeting with teachers and Roma assistants), organisation of activities within the project as well as see the presentation of Roma tradition and culture.