

OPENING  
CONFERENCE

2010

European Year  
for Combating  
Poverty and  
Social Exclusion

*Building together a society for all*

Madrid, **21-01-2010** (Spain)

Auditorium. Ministry of Health and Social Policy

CONFERENCIA INAUGURAL

**Año Europeo de Lucha contra  
la Pobreza y la Exclusión Social**

Salón de Actos del Ministerio de Sanidad y Política Social

CONCEPT NOTE

*eu* 2010.es





## I. BACKGROUND

Despite the fact that the European Union (EU) is today one of the wealthiest regions in the world, **nearly 80 million EU citizens, or 16% of the population, live below the poverty line**, and many face serious obstacles to access employment, education, housing, social and financial services. The period of economic upsurge that the EU experienced over the past decade (averaging 2.2% real GDP growth between 2000 and 2008 for the EU-27 area) did not foster any significant reduction in poverty rates.<sup>1</sup>

According to a **Eurobarometer survey** carried out in September 2009,<sup>2</sup> high unemployment rates (52%), insufficient wages and salaries (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%). At the same time, a lack of education, training or skills (37%), as well as 'inherited' poverty (25%) and addiction (23%) constitute the most widely perceived 'personal' reasons behind poverty. Over half of Europeans (56%) believe that the unemployed constitute the group that is most at risk of poverty, while 41% believe that the elderly are most vulnerable, and 31% see individuals with low levels of education, training or skills as most at risk.

**The Lisbon Objectives, agreed in 2000, fixed the objective of 'making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty' by the year 2010.**<sup>3</sup> The launching of the European Social Inclusion and Social Protection Process, the successive rounds of National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAPS Inclusion) developed by Member States, and the initiatives related to the Open Method of Coordination, allowed to maintain inclusion strategies on the political agenda. They also contributed to improving knowledge on the physiognomy of poverty, to deepen understanding of the key problems at hand, to identify priorities and coming challenges, and to promote mutual learning. Despite these advances though, **poverty levels have remained stable since 2000. Furthermore the financial crisis is having a severe impact by increasing unemployment rates, as well as putting social protection systems under increasing pressure. Groups such as youth, atypical workers, non-EU nationals and the long-term unemployed are particularly exposed.**

**European citizens demonstrate an acute sensitivity to the consequences poverty and social exclusion have on people's lives and opportunities.** Nine out of ten Europeans (87%) believe that poverty hinders people's chances of gaining access to decent housing; eight out of ten feel that poverty limits people's access to higher education or adult learning, and 74% believe that it undermines job opportunities. The majority of Europeans (60%) consider that poverty affects people's access to a decent basic school education, and 54% believe that the ability to maintain a network of friends and acquaintances is limited by poverty.

The aforementioned Eurobarometer survey indicates that **EU citizens are deeply aware of poverty and social exclusion and claim for further action**: 73% feel that poverty in their country is widespread, and a further 89% want urgent action by their government to tackle the problem. Across the EU, 53% feel that their national governments are primarily responsible for combating poverty. Europeans tend not to regard the EU as primarily responsible for combating poverty, but its role is nonetheless considered important by a significant proportion of the population (28% see it as 'very important', and 46% as 'somewhat important').

<sup>1</sup> Source: Eurostat. Available at: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&code=tsieb020>; and [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/structural\\_indicators/indicators/social\\_cohesion](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/structural_indicators/indicators/social_cohesion)

<sup>2</sup> *Eurobarometer Survey on Poverty and Social Exclusion 2009* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union). Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_321\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_321_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Steps must be taken to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty' by 2010. Paragraph 32, *Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000 Presidency Conclusions*. Available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm)

The EU has regularly demonstrated its commitment to social inclusion and cohesion. In his Policy Guidelines for the next Commission, José Manuel Durão Barroso emphasised the need for a:

*"much stronger focus on the social dimension in Europe, at all levels of government. Immediate action will be required to fight unemployment today, but also to look ahead to those facing long-term structural barriers to employment, such as the young and low skilled. At the same time, we need to remember the needs of our ageing population and the most vulnerable in our society. This is the only way for us to ensure strong social cohesion as the hallmark of the European model of society"*<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the instruments and policy measures taken at various levels have been insufficient to achieve these objectives. The EU is at a crossroad. The entering into force of the new Treaty embraces the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, making it legally binding (with some exceptions). The institutional reforms mandated by the Treaty, the new powers assigned to the recently elected European Parliament and the new team of Commissioners that will soon take office, allow the commencement of a new phase of institutional development with greater ambitions.

Furthermore, the EU institutions are currently working on the EU 2020 objectives, which, according to the proposal from the European Commission, should put a strong emphasis on "empower people in inclusive societies".<sup>5</sup>

**The year 2010 is therefore an ideal moment to renew our commitments to the fight against poverty and exclusion, with the aim of fixing ambitious objectives for the coming decade, and to assign the required means and resources to achieve it.** This commitment must originate primarily from public administrations, but ought to be able to mobilise all stakeholders and achieve an active civil participation by triggering, encouraging and incorporating initiatives.

The construction of a society founded on social inclusion and on poverty reduction is one of the essential priorities of the EU. In accordance with the principles of solidarity and social justice the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion will focus on four policy priorities:

#### **Recognition of rights**

*Recognising the fundamental right of people in a situation of poverty and social exclusion to live with dignity and to participate fully in society.*

#### **Shared responsibility and participation**

*Increasing public ownership in social inclusion policies and actions, emphasising both collective and individual responsibilities in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, as well as the importance of promoting and supporting voluntary activities.*

#### **Cohesion**

*Promoting a more cohesive society by raising public awareness of the benefits for all of a society where poverty is eradicated, fair distribution is enabled and no one is marginalised.*

#### **Commitment and concrete action**

*Reiterating the strong political commitment of the EU and the Member States to have a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion and promoting this commitment and actions at all levels of governance.*

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<sup>4</sup> José Manuel Durao Barroso, *Political Guidelines for the Next Commission* (Brussels, 3 September 2009): 15.

<sup>5</sup> *Consultation on the future "EU 2020" strategy*. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat\\_general/eu2020/consultation\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat_general/eu2020/consultation_en.htm)



## II. OPÈNING CONFERENCE

### AIMS

The opening conference is an ideal moment to raise awareness and to motivate all key actors to act against poverty. It will bring together more than three hundred participants, coming from the whole of the EU, Iceland, Norway and candidates countries. They will **discuss ways to convert the European Year into a milestone to invert existing tendencies.**

In more concrete terms, the conference will serve the purpose of:

**Deepening our understanding** of the principal problems of exclusion evidenced over the past few years.

**Sending a clear political and social message** on the need to correct inequalities in Europe and to place the fight against exclusion at the centre of the agenda.

**Proposing long term objectives** for the fight against exclusion in the future 2020 EU Strategy.

**Encouraging stakeholders and relevant actors to take initiatives** within the framework of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

### OPENING SESSION (09:30–10:10)

The Spanish Minister of Health and Social Policy, Trinidad Jimenez, will welcome the participants, inviting them to an active participation; she will briefly explain the actions planned by Spain within the framework of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion and introduce the President of the European Commission and the Spanish President who will take the floor in this order.

It is expected that the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Durão Barroso will speak on the planned objectives of the new Commission in the field of social exclusion and their place within the future EU 2020 strategy. In its recent Communication launching a consultation on the issue, the Commission identified *Empowering people in inclusive societies* as one of the key future drivers.

It is expected that the President of the Spanish Government and acting President of the EU, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, will use the inauguration act to send a clear message regarding the ways that the Council will address the issue of exclusion during the Spanish Presidency. Important issues will be included on the agenda of the Spanish Presidency, such as the entering into force of the Treaty or the discussion of the future objectives of the Union, which will include social protection and inclusion.

### KEYNOTE SPEECHES

After the Opening Session the Spanish Minister of Health and Social Policy, Trinidad Jimenez, will introduce the next two speakers.

#### **The Social Europe we want: the challenges of poverty and inequality (10,00–10,45)**

The former President of the Spanish Government and current Chair of the Reflection Group on the Future of the European Union, Felipe González, will reflect on the idea of a Social Europe and the challenges ahead to reduce inequalities and eliminate poverty. It is expected that he will reflect on questions such as:

- What are the social challenges for Europe in the medium and long term, in a context of diverse traditions and social models but of shared principles in the Treaty?
- What are the consequences of new phenomena of globalisation, demographic change, economic crisis, migratory processes for the European Social Models?
- Is it possible to maintain and deepen the levels of social protection in Europe in the current international context, while maintaining competitiveness and the creation of wealth, ensuring a decent income and better life for all?
- What measures ought to be taken on the European stage so that the reduction of poverty and inequalities can be placed at the centre of the EU's political agenda?

## Presentation of the European Year (11,15-11,45)

The Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Vladimír Špidla, will present the objectives pursued by the European Union during the European Year, as well as the key developments and activities. It is expected that he will also reflect on the main advances and challenges facing the EU and Member States in the field of social inclusion.

## ROUNDTABLE I (11,45-13,15)

### Testimonies of persons experiencing poverty and social exclusion

The European strategy of social inclusion has insisted particularly on the need to give a voice to persons suffering from poverty and exclusion, so they can play an active role in the design and implementation of the policies that impact on them. The voice of persons struggling to promote themselves and overcome exclusion will be given a privileged role in the conference, because their testimonies and points of views are fundamental to understand and initiate effective actions. The institutions must not *work for*, but *work with* excluded persons, in order to help them to be protagonists of their own promotion.

This roundtable will be organised by the EAPN (European Anti-Poverty Network) and will be chaired by the Director of the European Platform Social of Social NGOs, Roshan di Puppò.

It is expected to promote the voices of persons experiencing social exclusion around Europe. Participants will include persons experiencing poverty from different countries and backgrounds: Zoltanne Szvoboda (Hungary), Mirko Grga (Italy), Geneviève Baert (Belgium) and Idriss Sadi (Spain).

The roundtable will be organised in an interactive way. Following the testimonies of the four speakers, the audience will be organised into buzz groups in order to discuss the interventions. Four questions or comments of the audience will be collected, that the panellists will address subsequently.

*A detailed paper on the working method and contents has been prepared for this session.*

## ROUNDTABLE II (15,00-16,15)

### What the Lisbon Strategy has meant for the target of poverty reduction

This discussion panel, moderated by the President of the Committee for Social Protection, Aurelio Fernández, will present the views of key public actors from five Member States on the progress and limits of the European Inclusion Strategy.

Participants in this panel will represent the Member States constituting the Trio of Presidencies: Francisco Moza, General Secretary for Social Affairs and Consumption (Spain), Philippe Courard, Secretary of State for Social Integration and Combating Poverty (Belgium), László Herczog, Minister of Social Affairs and Labour (Hungary); and two other Member States: Jetta Klijnsma, State Secretary of Social Affairs and Employment (Netherlands) and Martin Hirsch, High Commissioner for Active Solidarities against Poverty and High Commissioner for Youth (France), and Benoist Apparu, Secretary of State of Housing and Town Planning (France).

### Each panellist will reflect on one of the following issues:

- Francisco Moza: elderly people, personal autonomy and active aging.
- Philippe Courard: child poverty.
- László Herczog: the inclusion of ethnic minorities.
- Benoist Apparu: social exclusion.
- Jetta Klijnsma: the promotion of inclusion through employment and health.
- Martin Hirsch: active inclusion.

**It is expected that the panellists will produce an assessment of achievements and failures in the Lisbon Strategy, as well as lessons learned from the experience of the past ten years for future action in the aforementioned fields.** A more detailed list of themes and questions will be prepared for this panel, but in principle they will focus on the following issues:

- Knowledge and measurement of poverty: indicators, quantification, qualification.
- Progress and limits of the Open Method of Coordination.
- Progress and limits of the NAPS Inclusion.



- Relationship between and processes involved in combating poverty (social inclusion) - social protection - employment - Lisbon Strategy.
- Use and effectiveness of the Community mechanisms and instruments, in particular of the Structural Funds in poverty reduction.

The panel will develop in the form of a debate open to the interventions of attendees.

*A detailed paper on the working method and contents has been prepared for this session including a set of questions for each issue.*

### ROUNDTABLE III (16,15–17,30)

#### Challenges in the Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion and Future Commitments post-2010

The third roundtable will be moderated by María Joao Rodrigues, Special Advisor on the Lisbon Agenda, European Union. It will present the points of view of key stakeholders on the challenges ahead in the European Union, and will therefore be organized as a prospective debate.

Robert Verrue, the General Director for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in the European Commission; Ludo Horemans, the President of the EAPN; John Monks, the General Secretary of the ETUC; and Emmanuel Julien, the Vice-Chair of BUSINESSEUROPE Social Affairs Committee will participate in this roundtable.

**It is expected that panellists will identify, through their different perspectives, the key challenges facing the EU and Member States in the fight against exclusion in the Future EU 2020 Strategy.** A more detailed list of issues and questions will be prepared for this panel, with some issues put forward for discussion by all panellists and other questions addressed specifically to each panellist. The general questions raised will focus on the following issues:

- One of the key drivers of EU 2020 will be *Empowering People in Inclusive Societies*. What does this signify for panellists?
- What are the priority policy areas that the Inclusion Strategy must focus on?
- How can the recommendation on active social inclusion achieve its goals? What forms and mechanisms are needed?
- Is it possible to fix quantitative objectives in the coming years in the fight against exclusion? What kind of objectives in this case?

The panel will develop in the form of a debate open to interventions by attendees.

*A detailed paper on the working method and contents has been prepared for this session including a set of questions for each issue.*

### CLOSING SESSION (17,30–18,10)

The closing session will be chaired by the Spanish Minister of Health and Social Policy, Trinidad Jiménez, who will present the personalities at the table. This session will include brief final interventions by relevant personalities, including Miguel Angel Moratinos, Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs; also Ministers of States participating in the EY 2010 will speak in this Closing Session, it is expected that speakers will highlight a key message related to European Year within the framework of the opening Conference.

### OUTPUTS

Immediately following the opening conference, **a concluding document will be elaborated**, which will include a summary of each intervention, key ideas, conclusions and proposals for action resulting from the Conference. In this sense, a **summary note** will be produced to present the **political proposals** and messages emerging from the latter.