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9 out of 10 Europeans want urgent action on poverty

73% of Europeans consider poverty to be a widespread problem in their country while 89% want urgent action by their government to tackle the problem. Those are the key results from a new Eurobarometer survey on attitudes to poverty and social exclusion presented by the European Commission today. The survey is being presented ahead of the 2010 European Year Against Poverty.

"These results show that Europeans are strongly aware of the problems of poverty and social exclusion in today's society and want to see more action to tackle them," said Social Affairs Commissioner Vladimír Špidla. "While most people see their national government as primarily responsible, three quarters also expect the EU to play an important role. Next year's European Year gives us the perfect opportunity to put the fight against poverty centre stage across the EU."

Against a bleak picture of nearly 80 million people – or 16% of the EU population – living below the poverty line, and facing serious obstacles in accessing employment, education, housing, social and financial services, today's survey sheds light on the many facets of poverty and social exclusion.

EU citizens are strongly aware of poverty and social exclusion, with 73% who feel 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%) and addiction (23%) are the most widely perceived 'personal' reasons behind poverty.

Over half of Europeans (56%) believe that the unemployed are most at risk of poverty, while 41% believe that the elderly are most vulnerable, and 31% cite those with a low level of education, training or skills.

Close to nine out of ten Europeans (87%) believe that poverty hampers people's chances of gaining access to decent housing, eight out of ten feel that being poor limits access to higher education or adult learning, and 74% believe that it damages their chances of finding a job. The majority of Europeans (60%) believe that access to a decent basic school education is affected, and 54% believe that the ability to maintain a network of friends and acquaintances is limited by poverty.

On average, 89% of Europeans say that urgent action is needed by their national government to tackle poverty. Across Europe, 53% feel that their national governments are primarily responsible for combating poverty. Even if Europeans do not regard the European Union as primarily responsible for combating poverty, its role is nonetheless seen as important by many (28% see it as 'very important', and 46% 'somewhat important').

The Eurobarometer survey was carried out between 28 August and 17 September 2009. Overall, nearly 27,000 citizens in all EU Member States were interviewed face-to-face, following a random selection of respondents.

Background

Ten years ago, EU leaders pledged to 'make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty' by 2010. Today however, a significant number of Europeans still live in poverty and have limited access to basic services such as healthcare. Poverty and exclusion not only affect the well being of individuals and their ability to play a part in society; they also impair economic development. With this in mind, the EU is stressing the importance of collective responsibility in combating poverty, involving decision makers and actors in the public and private sectors. The 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion will seek to give a voice to those suffering on a daily basis.

Further information

[MEMO/09/480](#)

Eurobarometer survey report

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm

European Year Against Poverty

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=637>

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