SOCIAL JUSTICE IRELAND

working to build a just society

Consultation on European Pillar of Social Rights

Submission to the European Commission

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We hope that this submission can make a timely and significant contribution to the launch of the consultation on a European Pillar of Social Rights. The aim of the European Pillar of Social Rights is to take account of the changing realities of Europe's societies and the world of work. Our research has consistently shown that a more integrated social dimension across the European Union is required to ensure the European Social Model can meet the challenges of new realities and that the damage to social cohesion across the Union caused by the crisis can begin to be repaired.

Our experience, however, if that for several decades the European Union has consistently failed to deliver a balanced policy approach that recognised the importance of providing a balance between economic and social policy across the European Union. Focusing on this century alone we see that the original Lisbon Strategy also known as the Lisbon Agenda or Lisbon Process, was deemed to be such a failure that it had to be revised half way through its ten-year lifespan. The revised version eliminated the social aspects of policy that had been a feature of the original iteration of the Lisbon Strategy. This seemed to suggest that it was the social aspects of policy that were holding back the economic priorities of job creation. This analysis in turn proved to be false as the Lisbon Strategy in its second iteration also was deemed to be a failure.

In 2010 the Lisbon Strategy was replaced by the Europe 2020 strategy. In practice this, too, has had little positive impact on social aspects of policy that it is meant to address. Of particular significance is its total failure to reduce poverty or to even make any progress towards reaching the target set. The European Union is strong on rhetoric but weak on delivery where the social aspects of policy are concerned. *Social Justice Ireland* believes the European Pillar of Social Rights has the potential to make a major difference to the lives of millions of vulnerable European citizens. However the reality will have to match the rhetoric and not fail to do so as in the past. Having had their concerns ignored for decades, millions of people are hoping that this initiative will, in fact, reverse the emphasis of recent decades and, instead, provide a balance between economic and social policy. Failure to do this will have major implications for the future of the EU as it will strengthen the growing conclusion that it is not a democratic project but is, rather, focused on delivering outcomes that favour the economically powerful.

This submission points to the need to examine alternatives and to develop a social welfare and support system that can adapt to changing realities and withstand future shocks. Minimum income schemes, the Living Wage, Basic Income schemes, the changing nature of work, adequate investment, access to quality services, representation and sustainability are policy areas which are discussed and examined in this research. We present this research as part of our ongoing contribution to the European policy process.

Social Justice Ireland welcomes this opportunity to submit our views on the aspects of the European Pillar of Social Rights are relevant for inclusion in Ireland's response. We outline each of the areas below and our reasons for identifying them. These areas are all interconnected and all have an impact on our society and economy. These are also areas that will require Government investment in the coming years.

The most recent publication in our European Research Series, 'Europe: A Union for the Powerless as well as the Powerful?'[1] forms the basis of this submission and accompanies this submission for information purposes. Our European Research Series is designed to contribute to the debate and discussion on policy issues that affect all members of the European Union. To date this research

[1] http://www.socialjustice.ie/content/publications/europe-union-powerless-well-powerful

series has produced comprehensive reviews of Ireland's performance towards its Europe 2020 targets and a comprehensive examination of the impact of policies pursued by the European Union and its members states after the financial crisis of 2008. This research focussed on those countries most affected by the crisis. *Social Justice Ireland's* European Research Series provides a comprehensive and detailed analysis of key issues, and it also makes a series of policy proposals at local, NGO, national and EU level. These proposals are aimed at ensuring a more sustainable and inclusive future for European citizens.

1. Introduction

The financial crisis from 2008 led to the sharpest contraction of European economies since the Great Depression. In 2009, for example, the economic output in the countries of the European Union shrank 4.5 percent, the largest reduction in GDP since its creation (Sundaram et al 2014). The crisis led to a rapidly dis-improved social situation across Europe in which more than 6 million people lost their job. This, and a range of austerity measures, led to increases in poverty and social exclusion, growing inequalities and divergences between countries. These are the issues, along with access to key services, with which this report is mainly concerned.

1.1 Background

The background to the global economic crisis is associated with bad regulation and bad financial practices in the United States, which in turn affected the entire world. These practices can be linked to attempts to maintain and to boost demand in an economy in which poorer people were encouraged to keep borrowing and spending and which led to a massive debt finance bubble (Stiglitz 2009). The distinguished economist and philosopher Amartya Sen is amongst many distinguished economists and others pointing out that what began as a clear failure of the market economy (particularly associated with financial institutions) was soon interpreted as a problem of the overstretched role of the state leading to a prioritisation of austerity policies (2015).

Amongst the responses in Europe was an initial expansionary fiscal approach attempting to mitigate the effects of the crisis. However, as the crisis spread a series of measures were adopted including

- Consolidation and Adjustment- reducing deficits throughout the EU through fiscal consolidation along with lending to distressed countries with requirements to undertake structural adjustment programmes and austerity policies;
- Fiscal Supervision - creating supervisory structures to enable the European Commission and other member states to monitor the budgets of individual states through new fiscal governance mechanisms, and the enshrining of fiscal rules into the law of each member state (through the Fiscal Compact).

The new governance provisions seek to limit budget deficits to no more than 3% of GDP (within that to target a structural deficit of below 0.5%), which means that governments now have little scope to slow the pace of consolidation or to undertake investment policies that support growth. This limits the scope for Keynesian-style strategies to combat recession and thus penalises or rules out the use of some of the most effective weapons in any governmental toolkit for combating unemployment in a recession. The economic justification for the current EU approach remains hugely contested.

Another policy was to bolster the Euro currency and to ensure that no bank should fail as this risked collapsing the European financial system. A 'no bond holder left behind' policy resulted in a massive socialisation of the debt accumulation of private banks in the peripheral countries – meaning that citizens were forced to adopt - the debts accrued by financial institutions. The ongoing lack of acknowledgement that creditors and debtors alike contributed to the crisis and are responsible for their actions makes the situation even more difficult for many debtor countries. This has led to a situation where a perception of a democratic deficit at the heart of the EU has been reinforced and citizens of many countries experience a sense of powerlessness.

More recently (March 2015), the European Central Bank launched a programme of quantitative easing intended to last until 2016 and designed to stimulate the economy by encouraging banks to make more loans. (Many other central banks had already done this during the recession).

Sen (2015) argues that the austerity approaches adopted both deepened Europe's economic problems, and did not help in its objective of reducing the ratio of debt to GDP to any significant extent – in fact, sometimes quite the contrary. Sen concludes that:

"If things have started changing, over the past few years, even if quite slowly, it is mainly because Europe has now started to pursue a hybrid policy of somewhat weakened fiscal austerity with monetary expansion. If that is a half-hearted gesture towards Keynes, the results are half-hearted, too."

Sen is also critical of the policy leaders of Europe for not allowing more public discussion, which he argues might have prevented policy errors through the standard procedures of deliberation, scrutiny and critique.

Thus in recent years, the European political discourse has been dominated by issues of budgetary consolidation, economic recovery and protecting the euro. The union, especially the currency union, is often seen as a question of signing up to rules, as if central bankers and not the elected representatives of member nations should make the fundamental decisions in any kind of democratic confederation (Mazower 2015). Against this backdrop people affected both by the economic crisis of 2008 and by subsequent austerity measures have become disenchanted with the European project in many countries. Opposition to austerity policies has been most visible in Greece throughout 2015, but the European elections in May 2014 had already confirmed voter discontent across Europe with mainstream politicians, voting instead for Eurosceptics, populists and the far-right and also (in Greece) for anti-establishment parties from the left.

Even in strict economic terms, as the European Commission has noted, unemployment, poverty and inequalities undermine sustainable growth by weak¬ening demand in the short term and by affecting potential macro-economic growth in the longer term through reduced access for many households to education and health services and 'hence to sub-optimal use of human capital' (2015a:15). In its review for 2014, the Commission Directorate for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion concludes that, while there are improvements, Europe is facing an uncertain outlook (2015a).

1.2 The Crisis and its Aftermath

The OECD has described the economic crisis following 2008 as having cast long shadows on people's future well-being and pointed out that some of the social consequences of the crisis (such as in family formation, fertility and health) will only be felt in the long term (OECD, 2014). They instance cut-backs on essential spending by families, including on food, which is detrimental to their current and future well-being.

The European Commission has noted that during the crisis following 2008, the reduction in social spending was stronger than in past recessions (2014). They attribute this partly to fiscal consolidation (2014). While social expenditure on things like unemployment benefits, pensions and health helped maintain aggregate demand in the early years of the crisis, their capacity for stabilisation weakened over the prolonged recession due to factors such as increasing numbers of long-term unemployed people losing entitlements, austerity measures that meant cuts in public expenditure, and also due to the phasing-out of early stimulus measures taken to counter the crisis (European Commission 2015a). A EUROMOD analysis from 2014 illustrates the impact of measures introduced from 2008 to mid-2013 in twelve European countries, taking account of changes in taxes and social contributions and in cash benefits (pensions and others) – but not cuts in services (De Agostini et al, 2014). It found that the impact of these measures on household incomes was particularly strong in Ireland (-17 percentage points), Greece (-14 percentage points), Portugal, Spain and Lithuania.

While the Europe 2020 Strategy is focused on achieving high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion, it is well recognised that social cohesion is declining or at least under new pressure (Eurofound and Bertelsmann Stiftung 2014). This is due not only to the economic and employment crisis but also due to longer-term trends such as growing inequality, immigration and increased cultural diversity and also increasing social disparities in relation to issues of poverty, labour market access, health and equitable education.

The Bertelsmann Siftung foundation carried out a cross-country comparison in relation to social justice and found that social justice exists to very different extents within the EU, with countries varying a lot in their ability to create an inclusive society . They also found that rigid austerity policies and structural reforms pursued during the crisis have had negative effects on social justice in most countries (Schraad-Tischler Kroll, 2014). Using a composite social justice index, they found an overall negative trend since 2008 in all but three countries of the EU (those being Poland, Germany and Luxembourg) and that the social justice index has decreased most obviously in Greece, Spain and Italy and also in Ireland and Hungary (Schraad-Tischler Kroll, 2014). They also found that opportunities for every individual to engage in broad-ranging societal participation are best developed in Sweden, Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands. Overall they conclude that some countries that perform in a middling way in economic terms, notably Czech Republic, Slovenia and Estonia, still demonstrate a comparatively high degree of social justice, while other countries, notably, Greece, Spain, Italy and Ireland, have a comparably high GDP per capita but a relatively low ranking on social justice and they recommend that these countries now plan not only for stable growth but also for improved participation opportunities for a broader portion of the population.

The capacity of national unemployment benefits to stabilise income when faced with an unemployment shock varies across countries and is limited in some member states. These include Italy, Greece, Slovenia and Estonia (where it is less than 10%), but this contrasts with the situation in continental and Nordic countries (where it is up to 25%) (Dolls et al, 2012 cited in Maselli and Beblavy 2015). Thus an issue that the crisis of 2008 and the subsequent years has highlighted is the significant shares of unemployed people not covered by standard safety nets, such as unemployment benefits or social assistance income or schemes of 'last resort'– even in some of the 'older' countries of the EU. For example,

- Italy does not have a minimum income scheme at a national level although there are some regional/local schemes that can be piecemeal or partial (Social Protection Committee, 2014) and there have been some income support measures introduced since 2008 (Bouget et al 2015);
- Greece lacks a comprehensive minimum income scheme although a scheme is being implemented and a national roll-out is proposed; in Greece, people who are long-term unemployed also lost their health insurance cover - in 2013 800,000 were estimated to be affected (Social Protection Committee, 2013).

The share of the labour force covered by some form of unemployment insurance can be anywhere in between 50% and 100% in Europe, and replacement rates over the previous salary also vary a lot (ranging between 20% and 80% of the average gross wage) (Strauss et al, 2013 cited in Maselli and Beblavy 2015). In 2013, a very low share of long-term unemployed people were receiving unemployment benefits or assistance in Italy (2%), Croatia (10 %), Bulgaria (1%), Latvia (3 %) or Estonia (4 %) all of which also have higher than average shares of discouraged workers (European Commission 2015a). Analysis by the European Commission from 2014 seeking to quantify those people (aged 18-59) falling outside of social security safety nets (by, for example, being out-of-work but not eligible for unemployment benefits because they have never worked or have not worked long enough to be eligible) found that 15% of those living in (quasi-) jobless and households at risk of poverty receive no more than 10% of their income from social benefits. The share of individuals not receiving income support is especially large in Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Bulgaria and Portugal, where more than 40% of those living in (quasi-) jobless and poor households receive only up to 10% of their income from social transfers (Social Protection Committee, 2014a). Lack of coverage of these people would suggest a lack of effectiveness of the benefit system in reaching the most vulnerable. Access to the schemes in other countries, including Spain and Ireland, are considered complex.

The minimum income schemes that exist in European countries are often insufficient to lift the recipients out of poverty (Bouget et al 2015). But reforms have taken place of minimum income schemes in some countries since 2010 (including Austria, Germany, Spain, Portugal and others) or reforms have been announced or are being piloted (including Greece and Italy)

In recent years, the EU has become synonymous with issues of budgetary consolidation, economic recovery and protecting the Euro but efforts to create a more socially just society 'have remained rather feeble, at least as perceived by the general public' (Schraad-Tischler Kroll, 2014: 85).The European Union has set specific goals in the area of social policy and we will look at these below. However, it is argued that despite the formulation of specific social policy objectives at the EU level – for example, the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy and the associated European Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion – there is as yet no integrated EU strategy that consistently and comprehensively combines the two key objectives: growth and social justice (Schraad-Tischler Kroll, 2014).

One influential commentator has called for a new deal for Europe, recognising that the social and economic policy challenge is to make social investments and fiscal consolidation mutually supportive and sustainable, through improved macroeconomic governance requiring a more realistic (slower) pace of fiscal adjustment coupled with productivity-enhancing social investments (Hemerijck 2014; 2013).

The EU Commission President, Jean-Claude Junker, in his opening statement to the European Parliament in July 2014 acknowledged that during the crisis mistakes were made, that there was a lack of social fairness and that democratic legitimacy suffered – and it is hoped by many that this signals the beginning of a new approach in Europe. There is now also an investment plan worth €315 billion. However, almost simultaneously, the position in Greece became critical during 2015 throwing into relief the question of whether the currency union can survive and indeed whether the EU in its present form has a future.

1.3 EU – Some Key Social Policy Responses

The global financial crisis provided the background in which the European Council adopted the Europe 2020 Strategy in 2010, which set out to develop a more balanced and sustainable approach for the future and was designed to address the economic and financial crisis that had wiped out 'years of economic and social progress', while also exposing what were considered to be structural weaknesses in Europe's economy (European Commission 2010). The strategy is seen as a major step forward in the development of EU policymaking, because it recognised the importance of social issues and opened the way for a more coordinated approach to economic, social, employment and environmental governance (Frazer et al. 2010). The strategy committed member states of Europe to work toward targets in a range of areas including on poverty and social exclusion – and established an agreed set of indicators designed to measure progress toward meeting those targets.

In 2011, the European Parliament called on the European Commission to launch a consultation to explore initiating legislation to provide a sensible guaranteed minimum income system across Europe and similarly a related Opinion was passed by the European Economic and Social Committee (in 2013). The European Commission has concluded that addressing excessive inequality in Europe requires adequate levels of social investment, investment in lifelong learning, and social expenditure that is more responsive to the economic cycle (that is, periods of growth and periods of recession) and integrated welfare reforms supported by well-functioning labour markets (2015a).

The European Commission is now working on a common methodology for developing reference budgets (which define the basis of a basket of goods/services considered necessary to reach an acceptable standard of living in a given country) and has referenced a potential initiative for a Social Protection Floor (European Commission 2015b). The Employment Commissioner has said that sustainable social protection systems need 'upwards social convergence' based on minimum standards of social protection across member states to show citizens that the EU is not just an "economic" project, something that would mean minimum unemployment benefits, a minimum income, access to child care, and access to basic health care in all 28 countries (Mahony 2015). These developments are welcome. They reflect what Claus Offe indicated more than a decade ago - that maintaining popular support for the European project, requires that the EU must be able to present itself to citizens as a credible institution of protection against economic insecurity and not as a threat to care, cohesion and solidarity (2003).

Social investment implies policies that 'prepare' individuals and families to respond to new social risks of the competitive knowledge society, by investing in human capital from early childhood on, rather than simply to 'repair' damage after moments of economic or political crisis (Hemerijck 2014). Adopted in 2013, the European Commission's Social Investment Package argues that well-designed social policies can contribute to economic growth as well as protecting people from poverty and acting as economic stabilisers. It calls for social protection systems that guard against risks across the lifecycle, emphasising the need for well-targeted, comprehensive and enabling benefits and services. It stresses that welfare systems fulfil three functions: social investment, social protection and stabilisation of the economy. The social investment approach relies on the assumption that social and economic policies are mutually reinforcing and that the former, when framed in a social investment perspective, represents a "precondition" for future economic and employment growth. The Social Investment Package aims for quality employment for those who can work and for resources sufficient to live in dignity for those who cannot (2013b). It refers to the use of European structural and investment funds for Member States in implementing the strategy set out in the package.

The Social Investment Package proposes that financing decisions for social policy be based on analysis in advance of their likely impact, intended to ensure that the longer-term outcomes of social investment be taken into account from the start (2013b). This would be a departure from many of the policy-making approaches that have occurred since 2008, where significant, ad hoc cuts have been made to social programmes like welfare, education and health without any analysis of long-term effects on people or on finances – and where the social impact of 'reforms' was not in general considered in advance by the Troika of the EU, ECB and the IMF in countries in receipt of assistance programmes (see Bouget et al 2015 and Leahy, Healy and Murphy, 2015 and other reports in the same series from Caritas Europa).

For *Social Justice Ireland* every person has seven core rights that need to be part of the vision for the future: the right to sufficient income to live with dignity, to meaningful work, to appropriate accommodation; to relevant education, to essential healthcare, to real participation and the right to cultural respect. These rights should form the basis of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

2. Alternatives for Discussion and Consideration for the proposed European Pillar of Social Rights

2.1 Introduction

As discussed in the introduction, a country's success in macro-economic terms does not automatically lead to a just society. One review of social justice in European countries across a range of domains found that some countries with a comparably high GDP per capita (notably, Greece, Spain, Italy and Ireland) have a relatively low ranking on social justice (Schraad-Tischler Kroll, 2014). Working to create greater equality through improved participation opportunities (in areas such as education, health, labour-market) is recommended for these countries. The same report found that in some respects the policies pursued in countries that are poorer in economic terms (notably, Czech Republic, Slovenia and Estonia) show a comparatively high degree of social justice.

Wellbeing is a fundamental objective of EU policies: Article 3 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states that the Union's aim is to promote 'the well-being of its peoples'. The Europe 2020 strategy aims to put people first to create 'more jobs and better lives'. But rising inequality and widespread poverty put the Europe 2020 strategy, adopted in 2010, as an 'inclusive growth strategy' in serious jeopardy (Hemerijck 2014). The European Commission acknowledges that countries providing high quality jobs and effective social protection as well as investment in human capital have proved more resilient in the economic crisis (European Commission 2015a).

As already alluded to, during the recent crisis years the political discourse at European level has focused on fiscal consolidation and economic recovery as well as on protecting the euro. People in many countries have been affected by the economic crisis followed by harsh austerity policies and they associate this with the European Union. Meanwhile talk of an economic recovery has yet to be experienced by many people in Europe and the EU's efforts to create a more socially just Europe, have not been as comprehensive, visible or as effective.

This is the context in which the future of the EU must be decided – and in the opinion of Social Justice Ireland, it must be one in which it is recognised that economic development, social development and environmental protection are complementary and interdependent. This means that Europe must be seen as not only concerned with the goal of budgetary consolidation and the resolution of the debt crisis, but also with promoting justice and promoting equality and social inclusion. Action to achieve this is required at European level.

As we outlined earlier, for *Social Justice Ireland* every person has seven core rights that need to be part of the vision for the future: right to sufficient income to live with dignity, to meaningful work, to appropriate accommodation; to relevant education, to essential healthcare, to real participation and the right to cultural respect. In the accompanying report, we have looked at how these rights are currently being realised or otherwise in the areas of income, work, education and healthcare. In this Section, we wish to discuss some current debates and to point to some potential policy alternatives in the areas of income, work and service-provision. Our intention is not to prescribe any particular approaches, but rather to outline some pointers toward strategies that are currently being employed or are currently the subject of increasing debate and consideration.

2.2 Right to Sufficient Income

Good social protection systems are vital not only to social wellbeing but also to economic development. The EU's active inclusion strategy envisages that the individual's basic right to resources and social assistance sufficient to lead a life that is compatible with human dignity is part of a consistent drive to combat social exclusion (2008). According to the International Labour

Organization, effective social protection floors can be afforded by countries whatever their level of economic development (2013).

Debates about how to achieve adequate income often involve discussions of (1) minimum wage, and increasingly the living wage, (2) minimum income schemes, something that is now garnering increased support in Europe, and (3) basic income schemes. We will briefly discuss each of these approaches.

Minimum Wage and Living Wage

As part of its Decent Work Agenda, the International Labour Organization encourages the use of a minimum wage to reduce working poverty and provide social protection for vulnerable employees (2013). A minimum wage is the lowest remuneration (set hourly, daily or monthly) that employers may legally pay to workers. It is recognised that setting minimum wages at appropriate levels can help prevent growing in-work poverty (European Commission, 2012). Most Member States of the EU have binding minimum wages in place although their impact can differ considerably, and cuts to the minimum wage occurred in some countries following the economic crisis. There are different opinions on the usefulness of minimum wages, one criticism being that they only apply to those in paid employment, not self-employed or those doing family work or caring (International Labour Organization, 2013). Despite limitations, the International Labour Organization has concluded that they remain a relevant tool for poverty reduction.

The Living Wage assumes that work should provide an adequate income to enable people to afford a socially acceptable minimum standard of living. It differs from the minimum wage approach, in being an evidence-based rate grounded in consensual budget standards based on research to establish the cost of a minimum essential standard of living. It provides an income floor, representing a figure that allows employees to pay for the essentials of life. The concept is derived from the United Nations Convention on Human Rights which defined the minimum as 'things which are necessary for a person's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social well-being'. A Living Wage is intended to meet physical, psychological and social needs, at a minimum but acceptable level (Living Wage Technical Group, 2014). Earning below the living wage suggests that employees are forced to do without certain essentials to make ends meet.

The cost of a minimum essential standard of living or minimum income standard will vary by household type and composition, location, and employment pattern. Its calculation follows clearly stated and transparent processes specified for specific household compositions and situations (Living Wage Technical Group, 2014).

The Living Wage idea is not a new one, but recent campaigns have attracted research on it and support for it. For example, in the UK, KPMG recently reported that raising the Minimum Wage to the Living Wage would take just 1.3% of the national wage bill and lift six million people out of poverty (KPMG 2015). The website of the Living Wage Foundation lists employers that have adopted it. They include over 1,500 employers such as Santander, Barclays, Aviva, ITV, Transport for London, Oxfam and UNICEF, and, recently, IKEA, the first large retailer in the U.K. to commit to the living wage for its workers. The Conservative Government in the UK has in 2015 announced that it will become mandatory.

Minimum Income Schemes

Minimum income schemes are protection schemes of last resort aimed at ensuring a minimum standard of living for people of working age and their families when they have no other means of support. They vary in coverage, comprehensiveness (that is, their availability generally to low-income people) and effectiveness. Recent years have witnessed a tendency to tightened eligibility conditions (Frazer & Marlier, 2009). Lack of adequate minimum income schemes in several countries has been highlighted since the crisis in Europe, and we have illustrated this in our introduction to this report. In many European states they play an important role in reducing the depth of poverty and social exclusion, but in some countries there are still many people on low incomes who cannot access them and some are set at a low level which does not lift people out of poverty.

Concerns about minimum income schemes focus on affordability and about fears that they will disincentivise work. However, according to the Independent Network of Experts on Social Inclusion, in countries with the most generous and effective minimum income schemes, there is also a clear recognition that they play a vital role in ensuring that people do not become so demoralized and excluded that they are incapable of participation in active inclusion measures and in seeking work (Frazer & Marlier, 2009).

The issue of a minimum income scheme across Europe is now receiving attention at European level, partly influenced by events of recent years. In particular, the establishment of an imperfect monetary union within the Eurozone has meant that a common nominal interest rate has had different impacts on countries at different stages of the economic cycle, and has contributed to the amplification of booms and recessions in member states. A Communication from the European Commission on the issue of strengthening the social dimension of the EMU raised the issue of a stabilization scheme to absorb shocks - an insurance system to pool the risks of economic shocks across member states (2013d). In June 2015, the Employment Commissioner has said she wants to see minimum unemployment benefits, a minimum income, access to child care, and access to basic health care in all 28 countries (Mahony 2015).

There are many variants possible in the approach taken; one option being discussed is the creation of an unemployment benefit system for the Euro area, which in effect, would involve shifting some of the unemployment expenditure to the 'federal' level. Those critical of this approach are likely to argue that the existence of such a scheme would cause countries to rely on it as a backstop and defer essential reforms. However, this approach is considered capable of providing better stabilisation in the event of future economic/unemployment shocks at relatively low cost (Marselli and Beblavy 2015).

Social Justice Ireland believes that this initiative by the EU Commission is very welcome in terms of refocusing on social Europe, and looks forward to hearing more of the detail proposed.

Basic Income Schemes

The inability to tackle unemployment with conventional means has led to the idea of a basic income being discussed throughout Europe and more widely. A basic income is very different to a minimum income. A minimum income seeks to ensure a minimum standard of living for people of working age and their families with no other means of support. By contrast, a basic income involves giving everyone a modest, yet unconditional income, and letting them top it up at will with income from other sources (Van Parijs, 2000). It is paid directly with a smaller payment for children, a standard payment for every adult of working age and a larger payment for older people. It is never taxed but in essence replaces tax credits (for those with jobs) and social welfare payments (for those without jobs). Additional payments would be maintained for those with particular needs (such as those who are ill or have a disability). As defined by the Basic Income Earth Network, a basic income is: 'an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement. It is a form of minimum income guarantee that differs from those that now exist in various European countries in three important ways:

a) it is being paid to individuals rather than households;

b) it is paid irrespective of any income from other sources;
c) it is paid without requiring the performance of any work or the willingness to accept a job if offered'.

If social policy and economic policy are no longer conceived of separately, then basic income is increasingly viewed, according to the Basic Income Earth Network, as the only feasible way of reconciling two of their central objectives: poverty relief and full employment. Every person receives a weekly tax-free payment from the Exchequer while all other personal income is taxed. The basic income would replace income from social welfare for a person who is unemployed and replace tax credits for a person who is employed (Healy et al, 2012).

Amongst its advantages is lack of stigma - there is nothing stigmatising about benefits given to all as a matter of citizenship, something that cannot be said, even with well-designed processes, about benefits reserved for 'the needy, the destitute, those identified as unable to fend for themselves' (Van Parijs, 2000). So it helps to overcome the problem of non-take-up of benefits which is observed in some EU countries. For example, Eurofound found that groups in vulnerable situations sometimes do not receive the benefits they are entitled to (relating to public pensions, to support for over-indebtedness, and healthcare) (Eurofound 2015). It also removes unemployment traps because it does not cease if someone takes up employment – one is bound to be better off working as you can keep the basic income and earnings on top of it - and it incentivizes increasing one's income while employed. It promotes gender equality also because everyone is treated equally and it respects forms of work other than paid work – like work in the home or informal caring. It is also considered more guaranteed, simple and transparent than current tax and welfare systems (Healy et al, 2012).

There are a range of basic income proposals. They differ in many respects including as to the amounts involved, the source of funding, the nature and size of the reductions in other transfers. They differ too in how they are financed. Some propose financing through tax and welfare systems. In practice this would mean that those on low and middle-income would see net gains while the richest would be required to pay more tax as many tax breaks would be removed. Others propose that a Basic Income be financed by environmental taxation or a financial transactions tax.

Proponents of basic income see it as an inclusion measure to address the problem of large numbers of people excluded from modern economies, including people who do not have paid work and in a world where paid employment cannot be permanently guaranteed for everyone seeking it – thus it is intended to provide meaningful participation by moving beyond a wage-based society.

Opponents of basic income focus on perceived restrictions of freedom or on a perceived high tax rate to finance it and one of the features of the international debate revolves around the role of society as against the role of markets (Government of Ireland, 2002).

Current discussion is focusing increasingly on so-called partial basic income schemes, which would not be full substitutes for present guaranteed income schemes but would provide a low - and slowly increasing - basis to which other incomes, including the remaining social security benefits and means-tested guaranteed income supplements, could be added. According to the Basic Income Earth Network, many prominent European social scientists have now come out in favour of Basic Income - among them two Nobel laureates in economics.

A range of countries have introduced basic income schemes (or partial schemes). For example, a partial basic income system has existed for decades in the US state of Alaska financed by taxes paid on oil produced in the State. In 2012 The World Bank published a detailed study which identified

123 Basic Income systems in various parts of Sub-Saharan Africa (Garcia and Moore, 2012). Recent developments in Europe include the new Finnish government committing to a Basic Income pilot as part of its programme for government (in 2015). In the Netherlands twelve municipalities are preparing to pilot a basic income. For full details of these pilot schemes and a fully costed proposal for Ireland see Healy and Reynolds (ed), 2016

2.3 Right to Meaningful Work

The dominant policy framework in Europe and elsewhere in response to persistent high unemployment focuses on the notion of full-employability and understands unemployment in terms of skills shortages, bad attitudes of individuals and/or disincentives to work that exist in welfare systems or other alleged rigidities like minimum wages or employment legislation (Mitchell and Flanagan 2014). Thus it is a supply-side understanding, which can be considered to ignore other causes – such as lack of jobs and spatial spill-overs (Mitchell and Flanagan 2014).

Progressive approaches to jobs policy are investigating how to achieve full employment, as a key to well-being (there being evidence that high well-being is associated with low levels of unemployment and high levels of job security), something that involves satisfying work in the right quantities within a broader economy that respects environmental limits (Greenham et al, 2011).

Thus basic questions are now being asked about whether the market economy, with its move away from industry and manufacturing towards a 'knowledge economy,' is capable of delivering what is now needed. Can the 'trickle-down effect,' that is, the wealth and job creation potential of entrepreneurs and wealthy individuals, really deliver even full employment?

One of the debates that arises in this context is the need to recognise and value all work. Another relates to government guaranteeing work as a response to widespread unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment which has damaging consequences for individuals and for the wellbeing of society. A further approach relates to reductions in hours worked by everyone. Finally, the need for investment by government will be considered.

Valuing All Work

Ideas about who we are and what we value are shaped by ideas about paid employment and the priority given to paid work is a fundamental assumption of current culture and policy-making. Other work, while even more essential for human survival and wellbeing, such as caring for children or sick/disabled people, often done by women, is almost invisible in public discourse. But because well-being relies on work and relationships (and other things), there must be a fair distribution of the conditions needed for satisfactory work and relationships – and this is particularly important for gender equality.

There is a need to recognise all work, including work in the home, work done by voluntary carers and by volunteers in the community and voluntary sector. Their contribution to society is significant in terms of social and individual well-being, and in economic terms. The European Commission estimates that the time spent on housework and care per day could represent +/- 830million hours per day in the EU or nearly 100 million full-time equivalent jobs (European Commission, 2012a). Research from the UK suggests that if the average time spent on unpaid housework and childcare in 2005 was valued in terms of the minimum wage it would be worth the equivalent of 21% of GDP (Coote et al, 2010). Introduction of a basic income (see above) is one means of enabling the recognition of all meaningful work in practice.

Jobs Guarantee Schemes

Many job guarantee proponents see employment as a right. Economist/Philosopher Amartya Sen supports the right to work because of the enormous economic and social costs of unemployment (1999). Unemployed people cannot find jobs that are not there, notwithstanding activation measures. Thus thinking has been developed around the idea of jobs guarantee schemes. High levels of unemployment co-exist with significant potential employment opportunities, especially in areas such as conservation, community and social care. A jobs guarantee scheme involves government promising to make a job available to any qualifying individual who is ready and willing to work. Jobs guarantee schemes are envisaged in different ways with the most broad approach being a universal job guarantee, sometimes also called an employer of last resort scheme in which government promises to provide a job to anyone legally entitled to work. Apart from a broad, universal approach, other schemes envisage qualifications required of participants such as being within a given age range (i.e. teens or under, say, 25), gender, family status (i.e. heads of households), family income (i.e. below poverty line), educational attainment and so on.

The concept involves government absorbing workers displaced from private sector employment. It involves payment at the minimum wage, which sets a wage floor for the economy. Government employment and spending automatically increases as jobs are lost in the private sector.

Amongst those championing the idea is the Centre of Full Employment and Equity, University of Newcastle, Australia. Based on an analysis across countries, they argue that the private sector has always only been able to employ around 77% of the labour force; unless the public sector provides jobs for the remaining workers seeking employment, unemployment will remain high (Centre of Full Employment and Equity, undated). Costs of Jobs Guarantee Schemes have been calculated for a number of countries and it is considered relatively cheap, in comparison with the costs associated with unemployment . It also results in a multiplier effect from the contributions to the economy of the workers concerned (Centre of Full Employment and Equity, undated). Furthermore, such schemes are considered to promote economic and price stability, acting as an automatic stabilizer as employment (within the scheme) grows in recession and shrinks in economic expansion, to counteract private sector employment fluctuations (Wray 2009).

The Job Guarantee proposal acknowledges the environmental problem and the need to change the composition of final economic output towards environmentally sustainable activities. The required jobs could provide immediate benefits to society, and are unlikely to be produced by the private sector - they include urban renewal projects and other environmental and construction schemes (reforestation, sand dune stabilisation, river valley erosion control and the like), personal assistance to older people, assistance in community sports schemes, and many more (Centre of Full Employment and Equity, undated).

Such schemes are not intended to subsidise private sector jobs or to threaten to undercut unionised public sector jobs. Any jobs with a set rate of pay or in the private sector should not be considered. Only those jobs that directly benefit the public and do not impinge on other workers should be considered. Neither is a Job Guarantee Scheme intended to replace other social programmes. However, Job Guarantee Schemes could complement a social support system such as a Basic Income scheme (see above).

Job creation schemes have been implemented in different parts of the world, some narrowly targeted, others broadly-based. Examples include, the 1930s American New Deal which contained several moderately inclusive programmes; a broad based employment programme existed in Sweden until the1970s; Argentina created Plan Jefes y Jefas that guaranteed a job for poor heads of households; and India also has a scheme (Wray 2009). The EU Youth Guarantee scheme, in which member states committed to ensure that all young people up to the age of 25 receive a high-quality offer of a job, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education is an example of a partial jobs guarantee scheme. While a valuable initiative, one problem that arises in schemes such as this, often introduced in difficult economic times, is that the additional resources required to be provided at national level are often taken from other services that may well have been supporting other unemployed or vulnerable people who were long-term unemployed or were outside the age group to whom the new initiative applies. The end result may not reduce the overall problem of unemployment or social exclusion.

Shorter Working-Week

The starting point for debates about shortening the working week is that there is nothing 'normal' or inevitable about what is considered a typical working day today, and that what we consider normal in terms of time spent working is a legacy of industrial capitalism that is out of step with today's conditions. A number of proposals exist. The New Economics Foundation recently proposed a rebalancing of work and time involving a new industrial and labour market strategy to achieve high-quality and sustainable jobs for all, with a stronger role for employees in decision-making and a gradual move towards shorter and more flexible hours of paid work for all, aiming for 30 hours (4 days) as the new standard working week.

These proposals are intended to address problems of overwork, unemployment, over-consumption, high carbon emissions, low well-being, entrenched inequalities and lack of time to live sustainably, to care for each other or to enjoy life. Crucial to this kind of proposal is that made already about moving toward valuing both paid work and unpaid work; it is intended to spread paid work more evenly across the population, reducing unemployment and its associated problems, long working hours and too little control over time. It is also intended to allow for unpaid work to be distributed more evenly between men and women, and for people to spend more time with their children and in contributing to community activities.

Mexican telecoms billionaire Carlos Slim (often identified as one of the richest people in the world) is amongst those who have expressed support for this, suggesting that a new three-day working week could and should become the norm as a way to improve people's quality of life and create a more productive labour force. A UK doctor, John Aston, President of the UK Faculty of Public Health (a body that represents over 3,000 public health experts in the UK), also called for a four day week to deal with the problem of some people working too little others too much and to improve the health of the public (Guardian, 2014).

Investment

Keynesian economic policies require active government intervention in ways that are 'countercyclical'. In other words, deficit spending when an economy suffers from recession or when unemployment is persistently high, and suppression of inflation during boom times by either cutting expenditure or increasing taxes: 'the boom, not the bust, is the right time for austerity at the treasury.'

With many European countries still implementing austerity measures and growth levels still subdued and unemployment still high in many countries, there is a need for policy-makers to consider investment on a sufficiently large scale to create growth required to generate the jobs. Many observers believe Europe's nascent recovery is far too feeble to seriously overcome the dramatic social crisis that Europe is confronted with today (Hemerijck 2014).

Due to the new EU governance rules, any such investment might now have to come from off-balance sheet sources (such as Commercial Semi-State borrowing or European Investment Fund or pension fund investments). The areas for investment would need to be carefully chosen aiming for job-intensive investment in essential sectors with potentially substantial returns. Examples include building new infrastructure and facilities, which might include social housing, better public health or education facilities, investment in key infrastructure like water or in sustainable energy sources. Substantial investment of this kind would of itself lift economic growth rates and there would be a multiplier effect by creating further economic activity and growth, increases in taxes and decreases in social welfare spending.

It should be possible for the European fiscal governance rules to accommodate and indeed to encourage, when appropriate, investment of this nature as a basic tool of economic policy within the capacity of governments.

2.4 Right to Access to Quality Services

Access to high-quality 'services of general interest' is an important aspect of social protection, contributing to 'inclusive growth', a main objective of the Europe 2020 strategy. At least five types of welfare system are recognised as operating in Europe and change happens all the time (Abrahamson, 2010). General trends that have been observed include expansionism (from the 1950s to the 1970s) followed by uncertainty and challenge associated with neo-liberalism and a newer trend, which can be described as 'productivist' (Taylor-Gooby, 2008). The 'productivist' approach, called a 'new social investment state' is promoted by the EU and the OECD and emphasises social investment with a desire to maintain the range of mass services but with pressure for cost-efficiency (Taylor-Gooby, 2008).

Following the economic crisis, policy-makers in Europe have sought to learn from the experience. Amongst the positives that have emerged is the commitment to the Social Investment Package as well as further debate about a genuine 'social' dimension to the EMU. We have discussed the Social Investment Package in Section 1.3 of this report, Typical social investment policies include gender-related child and elder-care, family-friendly labour market regulation, allowing especially women to move back and forth between full-time and part-time employment in relation to evolving informal care responsibilities (Hemerijck 2014). Social investment is not, however, a substitute for social protection and adequate minimum income protection is a critical precondition for an effective social investment strategy as a 'buffer' helping to mitigate social inequity while at the same time stabilizing the business cycle (Hemerijck 2014).

Ongoing challenges exist regarding quality and equity of public services, including healthcare, and to their sustainability. European population ageing, increased expectations of citizens, and other factors impinge on demand for services and require a range of responses across the life-course. Similar investments by different countries have different outcomes in terms of poverty, employment and health suggesting that there is variation in the ways that resources are used (European Commission, 2013e).

Some of the issues that are informing current debates include the following:

Securing Adequate Investment? Support for social investment in recent decades is based on the aspiration of men and women of all socio-economic backgrounds to be employed and to raise children. Consequently, they have been willing to provide the investment required to provide services capable of making that possible. In difficult economic times, however, there is more and more scrutiny of social spending. In the years ahead there is a real danger that in hard-hit countries there will be a growing marginalization of social spending. This danger is exacerbated in the Eurozone because national and EU monetary authorities have very little room for manoeuvre. The emphasis is on deficit reduction, which will continue to starve social provision of the financing required for ongoing development. There is a strong risk that support for social investment will decline. This situation is worsened as electorates seem to forget that the crisis of recent years originated in the excesses in deregulated financial markets, not in excess welfare spending. This leads to a rejection of welfare spending because they misunderstand it as being the cause of the crisis which it wasn't.

Who Provides? Public services are not synonymous with the public sector. A wide range of actors are now involved in service provision and the mix differs from country to country (and has done so historically). As well as the public sector, these include:

- people and families,
- non-profit organizations and social enterprises, and
- the private sector.

While it is considered that there is now more scope for private and civil society to be involved in service provision, the state is still in charge of regulation and to a large extent also in the financing of social entitlements (Abrahamson, 2010). In relation to the private sector, the European Commission notes that there needs to be encouragement to use the potential of social investment more through on-the-job training, in-house childcare facilities, health promotion and family-friendly workplaces (2013o).

Public Value? The central plank of the influential 'public value' approach to the public sector is that public resources should be used to increase value not only in an economic sense but also in terms of what is valued by citizens and communities. It is associated with Moore, who argues that public services are directly accountable to citizens and their representatives and it requires ongoing public engagement and dialogue as well as rigorous measurement of outcomes (1995). The approach involves the following building blocks:

- providing quality services for users, which are cost effective,
- ensuring fairness in service provision,
- concentrating more on the outcomes as well as on the costs and inputs,
- building trust and legitimacy by convincing people that policy is geared toward serving the overall public interest (NESF, 2006).

These building blocks are linked and the improvement of public services is intended to generate support for them amongst users and others who pay for them indirectly through taxation. User satisfaction is shaped by factors such as customer service (that is, how well they are treated), information, choice, availability and advocacy (that is, knowing that the services will be available to them when needed and that they will be supported in getting access to them).

Social wage: Public services such as healthcare and schooling, childcare and adult social care, can be said to comprise a 'social wage' that helps to determine how much earned income people consider 'enough' (Coote et al 2010). The extent to which these services relieve pressures on household income depends on their accessibility, reliability, quality, and overall affordability. In recent times in many countries, public services have been curtailed/targeted and in some countries stripped to essentials by outsourcing and competitive tendering, or have had some costs transferred to the user – as is the case in relation to healthcare costs in some European countries (European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2012). While there are different definitions, discussions of the 'social wage' generally define it as disposable income plus public provision of goods and services (such as health care and education). It is sometimes used in discussions of government spending and it can be a way of characterising the contribution that public services make to individuals and households. For example, the South African National

Development plan (to 2030) references the social wage and characterises is as complementing employment earnings and contributing to more equitable and inclusive economic growth (South African National Planning Commission, 2012).

It is a measure of how much better-off individuals are with the provision of publicly funded welfare services than they would be without these 'in kind' benefits (i.e. if they had to pay the full cost of these services). Thus the value of services such as health and social care, education and housing can be thought of as an income in-kind – or a 'social wage' – that represents a substantial addition to people's cash incomes (Sefton 2002). Although most measures of poverty and inequality do not take account of the value of these kinds of benefits in kind, their inclusion is potentially significant in monitoring the impact of public policies on the poorest households (Sefton 2002).

Reduced public spending and a corresponding diminished social wage require individuals/households to spend on essential services and this increases barriers to access for poorer people (McCarthy 2015). Obviously, maintaining the social wage requires the state's revenue base is protected. More, better and free public services – for everyone, not just the very poor – would certainly make it easier to live on lower levels of earned income, but this would depend very largely on increasing tax revenues (Coote et al 2010) in many countries.

2.5 Other Key Issues

There are other issues of overarching importance that we are not focusing on in this report. However, we wish to refer to two of them briefly - the need for greater representation in policy-making and the need for environmental sustainability.

Representation: Any new policy directions are affected by the fact that Europeans are experiencing a sense of frustration with consequent risks of alienation and social disruption. There is evidence of declining trust in public institutions and increases in social tensions and increases in euro-scepticism. Many voters felt that the EU's dominance of national economic policy in the crisis meant they could change government but not policy (Leonard & Torreblanca, 2013) and this lesson has been underlined by events in Greece following the referendum in July 2015.

Ways of addressing this are associated with the concept of 'deliberative democracy' which champions informed debate, emphasising politics as an open-ended and continuous learning process (Held, 2006). The Europe 2020 Strategy envisages a partnership approach that would aim to foster joint ownership and there is some evidence of a renewed commitment to dialogue with social partners. For example, in March, 2015, the European Commission organized conference 'A new start for social dialogue', bringing together leaders of European and national employers' and workers' organisations, and others. But the views of the weaker stakeholders must be able to be heard and be capable of influencing decisions and results.

Potentially very valuable is the Charter on Shared Social Responsibilities which argues that having a well-defined deliberative process can ensure, among other things, that individual preferences are reconciled with widespread priorities in the field of social, environmental and intergenerational justice. It can also reduce the imbalances of power between stakeholders (Council of Europe, 2014).

Sustainability: As already stated, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that the future must be one in which it is recognised that economic development, social development and environmental protection are complementary and interdependent. Pollution and depletion of resources have thrown into doubt the reliance on untrammeled market forces as the key driver of wellbeing for everyone. The current approach is patently unsustainable and economic policy must be designed to prevent catastrophe. Indeed several of the alternatives that we have outlined above have been developed taking account of environmental limitations.

A successful transition to sustainability requires a vision of a viable future societal model and also the ability to overcome obstacles such as vested economic interests, political power struggles and the lack of open social dialogue (Hämäläinen, 2013). A number of approaches to a sustainable economy have been outlined, all involving transformative change (for example the 'performance economy' associated with Stahel and the 'circular economy' associated with Wijkman). Another is the concept of the 'Economy of the Common Good', based on the idea that economic success should be measured in terms of human needs, quality of life and the fulfilment of fundamental values (Felber 2010). This model proposes a new form of social and economic development based on human dignity, solidarity, sustainability, social justice and democratic co-determination and transparency and involving the concept of the common good balance sheet showing the extent to which a company abides by values like human dignity, solidarity and economic sustainability.

All three pillars – economic, social and environmental - must be addressed in a balanced manner if development is to be sustainable and sustainability must be a criterion for all future public policies.

3. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1 Summary of key challenges facing Europe

Europe has moved further away from the poverty-reduction target it set itself in 2010 under the Europe 2020 Strategy and now needs to lift some 25 million people out of poverty or social exclusion by 2020 in order to achieve the target set – something that is not considered likely. Impacts have been especially marked on the working age population and as a consequence on children.

Overall Europe is also very far away from achieving the 75% employment target set in 2020 and employment levels in 2014 are still below pre-crisis levels. Several countries, including Sweden, Germany, United Kingdom, Netherlands and Denmark have exceeded or are very close to the 75% employment target, while other countries, especially in the south and periphery of the EU are very far away from achieving it. While there have been very welcome improvements in relation to employment rates in recent times, large numbers are still affected.

Some key Statistics:

- 123 million people (EU-28) or 24.5% of the population of the EU (that is, almost 1 in 4 people) are at risk of poverty or social exclusion and those affected have increased by over 6 million people (in EU-28) between 2008 and 2013 (2013 being the latest year for which rates are available across Europe).
- 26.3million children (under 18) or 27.7% (thus approaching 30% of the children of Europe) are at risk of poverty or social exclusion and their numbers have increased by over 1 million since 2008.
- Some 23.5 million people are unemployed in the EU-28, of whom 4.7 million are young people aged under 24 (Eurostat 2015 - April).

This review identifies a number of worrisome trends in Europe between 2008 and 2014. In terms of overall developments concerning adults, these include:

- An increase in poverty or social exclusion in 19 member states (to 2013);
- An increase in both the risk of poverty rate and the severe material deprivation rate in 15 member states (to 2013);
- Increases in unemployment in almost all countries in EU-28 with the highest rates in 2014 in Greece, Spain, Croatia, and Cyprus;
- Extremely high rates of youth unemployment especially in Spain, Greece, Croatia, Italy and Cyprus. These countries were also the countries where the rate disimproved most, 2008 to 2014; Germany was the only country in which it improved;
- Half of unemployed people in EU-28 are long-term unemployed (that is, for a year or more) (at end of 2014) and the share of long-term unemployment is extremely high within some countries; long-term unemployment is associated with risk for poverty and social exclusion;
- Deterioration in many of the new dashboard of indicators (SPPM) developed by the Social Protection Committee especially in some countries, notably those at the periphery of Europe.

In recent months, very long-term unemployment (for 2 years or more) has continued to increase, while overall unemployment has declined somewhat.

The working poor – those who have a job but still live in poverty – represent one third of working-age adults who are at risk of poverty. Many of the new jobs created recently are temporary or part-time and job instability has increased especially for men and young people.

It is generally accepted that the consequences of childhood poverty are extremely serious both for individuals and for the future of societies and economies. And yet this review finds the position of children to have worsened greatly since 2008. For example, between 2008 and 2013, there have been increases in:

- the poverty or social exclusion rates for children in 20 countries (out of 27);
- the risk of poverty rate for children in 17 countries (out of 28);
- the rate of severe material deprivation for children in 19 countries (out of 27);

Furthermore, there were only 8 countries in 2013 in which the poverty or social exclusion rate was lower for children than for the general population. The negative implications of such high levels of child poverty, social exclusion and deprivation are well recognised, as is the fact that they pose a challenge for the longer-term future of European countries (Social Protection Committee 2015a).

During the recession, pensions operated as a very welcome stabilising factor in the economies of many countries especially where payments were not cut. In Greece there are many reports of whole families being supported on the modest pension of grandparents. That being said, 16.4 million older people (or nearly 1 in 5) are affected by poverty or social exclusion. There is great variation between countries in the rate, with many of the newer accession countries having extremely high rates. There have been increases in the severe material deprivation rate of older people in 12 countries between 2008 and 2013.

Financial distress of households (defined as the need to draw on saving or to run into debt to cover current expenditures) is running at relatively high levels, affecting just under 15% of the population and with a big range between different countries.

Financial distress is much higher for low-income households than in the highest income households and again there is much variation in rates between countries.

Income inequality (according to the S80/20 ratio) is particularly high in many southern and eastern European countries and while improvements have occurred in some countries, this is often in countries that continue to be very unequal.

Where education is concerned, progress is in evidence in many countries in relation to the two high level targets set in the Europe 2020 strategy (on tackling early school leaving and promoting third level attainment), but often progress is seen more in countries that are already performing well. Meantime, average levels of adult literacy remain at a relatively low level in some countries – even amongst the original members of the EU. There is also great variation between countries in relation to adult participation in lifelong learning, with Denmark, Sweden and Finland demonstrating high levels of participation and some other countries – especially amongst the newer accession countries – demonstrating very low levels indeed. Member States where lifelong learning was already the highest in 2008 have been the ones that have tended to increase participation rates since. There are several original member states which continue to have low levels of participation, notably Greece, Ireland and Belgium.

The countries hardest hit by the economic crisis have seen the greatest health expenditure cuts in recent years. Notably, Greece and Ireland have experienced the sharpest declines in per capita health care spending and spending drops in Portugal and Spain were also greater than the OECD average decline. By contrast, in Germany and Hungary growth rates have remained relatively steady. The perception of unmet need (due to problems with access) has risen amongst all income groups (quintiles) across Europe between 2009 and 2013, but it has been most felt amongst the poorer groups. According to one measure of social justice within health systems, a deterioration is noted in 12 countries amongst the 19 for which comparison is possible with 2008 (Schraad-Tischler Kroll, 2014).

Overall very big discrepancies exist between member states and between different groups as analysed under many of these indicators, such as in relation to poverty or social exclusion, severe material deprivation, income inequality and financial distress and also in relation to unemployment, education and lifelong learning and health.

Here we refer to just a few examples of the wide discrepancies between states:

- Severe material deprivation: This is not significant in Scandinavian countries but affects large percentages of the population in the Eastern European countries of Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Latvia and also in Greece. It also affects very large percentages of older people in some of these countries (notably Bulgaria), whereas the percentages of older people affected in other countries (Sweden, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark and Finland) are quite low.
- Unemployment: A gap of nearly 20 percentage points exists between the country with the highest rate of unemployment (Greece) and that with the lowest (Germany) (April 2015). Very high rates of increase in the unemployment rate between 2008 and 2014 are seen in Greece, Spain, Cyprus, Croatia, and Italy, but there was a slight improvement in Germany, and a marginal one in Malta and Hungary.
- Youth Unemployment: There have been very steep increases in many countries in youth unemployment since 2008. A gap of approximately 45 points exists between the countries with the highest rates of youth unemployment (Spain and Greece) and that with the lowest (Germany). The NEETS rate (young people neither in employment nor education/training, age 15-24) also varies a lot between countries, as does the rate at which it has increased since 2008; some of the countries worst affected by youth unemployment also have the highest NEET rates.

One of the most serious divergences between European countries that the crisis and the years following it have highlighted is that there are serious gaps in the social welfare systems of many European countries, which often leave people who are unemployed or long-term unemployed with little or no safety net and cause great hardship in some countries, typically in the south. European leaders must address this problem and recent signs of an initiative in this area are welcome.

We also looked at total taxation in EU-28 countries (including social security contributions) and noted that, in broad terms, countries with rates of taxation above the 35% mark (of GDP) tend to also be amongst the countries with the most developed social investment approaches, do better in terms of prevention of poverty or social exclusion and also (but slightly less strongly associated) in terms of prevention of unemployment.

Divergences in Europe's social situation bring risks of a breakdown in social cohesion both within and between countries. Great disparities in wealth and power divide society into rich and poor, powerful and powerless, and this weakens the bond between people and divides society between the lucky and the left out. As one review of developments in social justice in the EU has argued, the gap between opportunities to participate in society in still-wealthy countries of northern Europe and in the crisis-struck southern nations has widened creating a 'highly explosive situation with regard to social cohesion and social stability within the European Union,' one which if it continues threatens the viability of the entire European integration project (Schraad-Tischler Kroll, 2014).

3.2 Conclusions and Recommendations

There has been a subdued recovery in Europe since 2013 along with welcome improvements in the employment situation. However, rates of poverty and/or social exclusion are still very high. Unemployment, especially youth unemployment, is also very high in many countries and at the same time key public services have been under pressure and there has been a lack of public investment which is detrimental to sustained economic improvement.

Millions are unemployed and many more millions live in poverty and/or social exclusion. In some countries, gaps in protection systems leave many people in extreme situations, while, in addition, cuts to public services disproportionately affect lower-income groups. There has also been a rise in precariousness of working conditions for many people. The life-chances of many children are adversely affected by more precarious working situations (of their parents), cutbacks in benefits and reductions in key services. Very great divergences exist and have worsened in many cases between member states of the EU and between different groups within countries, something that undermines trust and cohesion. The people affected are not the people who benefitted from the unsustainable debt levels amongst private banks that led to the crisis of 2008. This situation is very far from the inclusive growth approach to which the Europe 2020 Strategy commits the EU.

A fair solution to the debt crisis has not yet been found, and turning banking debt into sovereign debt is still to be recognised as having been unfair and unsustainable for all affected countries. Furthermore, if Europe is to avoid repeating mistakes made already, the issue of moral hazard must be addressed within banking. In other words, the financial system must not be insulated from risk, with the consequent incentive to reckless behaviour.

Past experience shows that improvements in the labour market do not necessarily lead to a reduction in poverty. This implies that, independent of any improvement in the economic and employment outlook, a combination of effective policy interven¬tions is required. The likelihood of escaping poverty on a last¬ing basis when moving into employment depends on the quality of jobs, including decent pay and sufficient working hours to earn a living, and also on measures supporting households that are increasing their level of labour market participation (for example, taxation for the second earner, childcare and other measures) (European Commission 2015a). The OECD argues that maintaining and strengthening support for the most vulnerable groups must be part of any strategy for economic and social recovery and fiscal consolidation measures must be designed in a way that demonstrates that poor people may suffer more from spending cuts than from tax increases (OECD, 2014). Similarly the Social Protection Committee has called for a focus on policies that foster growth and facilitate the creation of more and better jobs and fight against poverty and social exclusion (2014).

In Europe, economic priorities dominate social priorities. The dominant narrative and the policies coordinated from Europe and enshrined in Europe's new governance structures prioritise austerity approaches and suggest that more austerity is what is required - but when the situation of vulnerable people of Europe is considered, this is not acceptable. Austerity continues to be prioritised, even though widely contested as an economic approach, and despite evidence that it has exacerbated both economic and social problems caused by the economic crisis and notwithstanding the very great reaction against those policies by many citizens, most strikingly in recent times in Greece. There is a perception the European technocrats are insulated from the experience of the poorer people of Europe – something that is corrosive of trust in the whole European project.

As already mentioned, the European Commission has concluded that addressing excessive inequality in Europe requires adequate levels of social investment, investment in lifelong learning, and social expenditure that is more responsive to the economic cycle (that is, periods of growth and periods of recession) and integrated welfare reforms supported by well-func¬tioning labour markets (2015a). Thus there are signs that there is an understanding amongst some EU leaders of the need to reprioritise social objectives. But the current EU policy approach is characterised by its inconsistency - demonstrating a knowledge that social investment is required for sustained economic development and at the same time requiring austerity and short-term reductions in government deficits/debt levels (particularly for programme countries and those subject to the Excessive Deficit procedure) which simultaneously worsen social problems that the targets of the EU 2020 Strategy seek to address.

For *Social Justice Ireland* seven core rights need to be part of the vision for the future of Europe: right to sufficient income to live with dignity, to meaningful work, to appropriate accommodation; to relevant education, to essential healthcare, to real participation and the right to cultural respect.

A more inclusive and sustainable approach requires that European leaders recognise that on its own, focusing narrowly on austerity measures and structural reforms to reduce government borrowing and the debt/GDP ratio within a short time-span is failing in both economic and social terms and that a new strategy is urgently needed. Greater EU-wide awareness is needed of the problems facing certain countries and certain groups (young people, for example) and of the disparities that have arisen and are increasing between countries. This is necessary for a future socioeconomic strategy for the EU that is not only concerned with budgetary consolidation and the resolution of the debt crisis, but also with promoting social justice within the EU. Leadership at EU level in relation to vulnerable groups is critical to this and is increasingly proving critical to the democratic future of Europe.

3.2.1 Recommendations

We make the following recommendations aimed at EU Leaders and EU Institutions in considering the EU Pillar on Social Rights:

1. Ensure Coherence of European Policy and the European Semester by integrating the social objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy in the economic processes of the European Semester. The priorities of Annual Growth Surveys should focus on long-term social objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and on building adequate, effective social systems that include both investment and protection dimensions and are better aligned to the EU Social Investment Package. This could be facilitated by

    - Supporting efforts to promote growth and jobs while meeting deficit reduction targets in the medium rather than the short term.
    - Taking account of the social impact when making Country Specific Recommendations, especially those requiring fiscal consolidation measures.
    - Making country-specific recommendations that seek to achieve reductions in poverty and unemployment where rates are high or rising.

2. Strengthen the EU 2020 Strategy: This requires:
   - Ex-ante appraisals: Fiscal consolidation and structural measures must be designed with ex-ante knowledge of their longer term and cumulative impact on vulnerable groups.
   - Improved Targeting: Incorporate further sub-targets into the Europe 2020 Strategy process. Sub-targets for poverty reduction should be added relative to groups most at high risk of poverty or social exclusion (such as children). Work with member states to ensure that their targets are adequate and to establish national sub-targets for poverty reduction amongst groups most at risk (based on the identification of the most appropriate groups in each country).
   - Further Targets: Consideration should also be given to incorporating further targets relative to unemployment, especially long-term unemployment and youth unemployment, and to address serious problems in some countries in respect of young people neither in employment nor education
   - Ensuring Meaningful Input by Civil Society and Potentially Marginalised people into the framing of National Reform programmes and Social Reports, including for countries in receipt of programmes of financial assistance.

3. Address inappropriate EU governance structures that prohibit or inhibit legitimate investment by national governments.

4. Advance proposals for a guarantee of an adequate minimum income or social floor in the EU under a framework directive, and for minimum standards on other social protection measures (access to child care, access to basic health) across member states.

5. Monitor and Address Child Poverty: Child poverty is such a serious issue that it requires further action. Monitor implementation of the Commission's Recommendation on Investing in Children through a strengthened process established under the Europe 2020 strategy and work with member states with high levels of child poverty to help them access and deploy structural funds to address the issue.

6. Focus on Youth Unemployment: Youth unemployment continues to be a serious problem despite the Youth Guarantee initiative, which requires more resources to make a significant impact.

7. Support Developments in the Social Economy: Leadership and support from the EU for social initiatives would benefit both people in need of support (through health and social care programmes) and societies generally. This would be consistent with the Social Investment Package and could provide valuable employment opportunities for people who are long-term unemployed.

8. Improve Representation: Recent EU Commission initiatives to reengage the social partners are welcome, but it is vital to the future of Europe that EU policy-making engages meaningfully with stakeholders representing poorer people and those most affected by the financial crisis and austerity measures since 2008.

9. Structural Funds: Structural funds must be of a sufficient scale to make an impact and should be given greater priority so as to ensure significant progress is made in bridging the gap between the economic and social dimensions of policy and in promoting a social investment approach to public policies where this is absent or insufficient.

10. Adopt a Human Rights Strategy to prevent the violation of the human rights of Europe's population.

We make the following recommendations for National Governments (and relevant local /regional authorities):

1. Prioritise Investment: Large-scale, investment programmes that operate in job-intensive areas could assist growth and address social and infrastructural deficits. The focus would need to be tailored to each individual country/ region but might include development of renewable energy sources, health and social care infrastructure, housing, education and early childhood care infrastructure. As already stated, inappropriate EU rules currently blocking needed, viable investment need to be adjusted.

2. Strengthen Welfare Systems: Governments now need to introduce social protection schemes that are more resilient and that tackle inequalities within the present systems, ensuring equal access to services and to strengthen social cohesion. Where minimum income schemes do not exist they should be instituted.

3. Adopt Effective Labour Market Measures: Activation measures need to focus on supporting unemployed people, aiming to maintain and develop appropriate skills and to not be accompanied by the threatened loss of welfare benefits or assistance. Employment measures must not be implemented in a way that removes income security and increases in-work poverty.

4. Develop Sustainable Approaches to taxation: Sustainable and inclusive growth requires approaches to raising revenue that generate enough to support vital services and to move to a social investment approach (where that is absent or insufficiently realised). Measures should not disproportionately negatively affect low income groups, which means, amongst other things, avoiding increases in indirect taxes on essential items.

5. Tackle Tax Evasion: Tax evasion and the grey economy are a particular problem in some countries where a disproportionate burden of adjustments fall on compliant tax-payers. Tax evasion must be tackled and fair taxation systems introduced in which all sectors of society, including the corporate sector, contribute a fair share and those who can afford to do pay more.

6. Consider how Government could become an employer of last resort: Given the huge fall in employment and its impact on unemployed people of every age, governments should consider being an employer of last resort through voluntary programmes framed so as not to distort the market economy.

7. Ensure Inclusive Governance: Engage with key stakeholders to ensure that groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion, and unemployed people can influence policy-direction and implementation, and that their experiences become part of the dialogue with European institutions to try and repair social cohesion and political legitimacy.

8. Poverty Proofing and Monitoring: All Government decisions should be subject to a poverty-proofing process that ensures actions taken will not increase poverty under any heading or cumulatively impact negatively on any particular groups. Integrate social assessments of the impacts of cuts to services into decision-making processes that focus beyond short-term cost saving. Use macroeconomic modelling processes to assess the impact of proposed changes in social policies

9. Avail of the social investment aspects of the programming of EU funds, 2014-2020 to fund measures that address the social situation, including support for initiatives set out in the EU's Social Investment Package such as supporting social enterprises or facilitating the implementation of the Recommendation on Investing in Children.

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Social Justice Ireland is an independent think-tank and justice advocacy organisation of individuals and groups throughout Ireland who are committed to working to build a just society where human rights are respected, human dignity is protected, human development is facilitated and the environment is respected and protected.

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