

EAPN RESPONSE TO THE EC COMMUNICATION ***A SHARED COMMITMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT***

Context: The European Commission put forward, on June 3rd, a communication outlining the future of European employment policies in the context of economic recovery. This communication largely builds upon the 10 Key Messages of the Employment Summit held on May 7th. EAPN, through the Social Platform, had prepared detailed input for the preparatory workshops of the Summit and has attended two of them. We were disappointed to see that many of our messages did not translate into concrete proposals. This paper builds on our recommendations towards the Employment Summit, and outlines our assessment regarding the extent to which these specific social inclusion concerns are reflected in the Communication *A Shared Commitment for Employment*.

EAPN KEY RESPONSES

1. PUT PEOPLE FIRST

EAPN welcomes the references to the impact of the crisis on people's lives, but the focus remains on "growth and jobs", without fully taking into account the broad social impact of the downturn. We propose the further elaboration of an effective response to the social crisis, by organising a Social Summit or a broad consultation, involving all stakeholders, especially people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and their representatives.

2. IMPLEMENT ACTIVE INCLUSION PRINCIPLES

EAPN appreciates the recognition in the Communication of the Active Inclusion Recommendation and the need for rapid implementation, but we note that no specific recommendation or action is proposed in this regard. The Integrated Guidelines and the Economic Recovery Packages must clearly reflect the Active Inclusion Recommendation, and devise a clear roadmap with measurable objectives for the implementation at the national and EU level.

3. DEFEND QUALITY OF JOBS

EAPN welcomes the mentioning of "sustainable" and "sound jobs", but insists that quality of work needs to be placed at the heart of creating and maintaining jobs, ensuring the protection of employment rights, job security, and human dignity. Moreover, Structural Funds need to be used more to promote decent and sustainable employment, by investing in social economy and providing the necessary legislative and financial framework for it.

EAPN KEY RESPONSES (continued)

4. POVERTY-PROOF THE SKILLS AND MOBILITY AGENDA

EAPN stresses that if upgrading skills and encouraging mobility are put forward as main tools to restore economic and social balance on the labour market, the proposed initiatives need to take into account the specific situation of people experiencing poverty and exclusion, especially vulnerable groups, such as the low-skilled, migrants, minority groups including the Roma, people with disabilities.

5. MICROFINANCE FACILITY

The introduction of an EU microfinance facility could be a positive development, but the reallocation of 100 million euro for this facility from the PROGRESS programme must not result in a reduction of the ability of this programme to support stakeholder involvement in key EU policy-making strategies, or lead to cuts in financial support for transnational exchanges and mutual learning projects.

6. INVITE EVERYBODY TO THE TABLE,

EAPN appreciates the mentioning of an open dialogue involving “all stakeholders”, but no reference to clear mechanisms for effective, on-going dialogue. EAPN would expect this to be done by strengthening the existing mechanisms related to the European Employment Strategy and the National Reform Plans (NRP), as well as through the OMC, to ensure that all stakeholders can meaningfully engage with the preparation of the NAPs/inclusion and the NRPs.

PUT PEOPLE FIRST

We welcome that the Communication clearly spells out that “The main impact of the recession is on people” (p. 1) and that “With the crisis, new types of solidarity will be needed” (p. 9). We also appreciate the mentioning of a need to create “a more cohesive society and jobs responsive to age, gender equality and work/life balance concerns” (p.3). However, **these declarations are not mirrored by concrete actions.**

The focus is on growth, competitiveness and maintaining employment, while the social impact of employment (ensuring a dignified life for workers, as well as their social integration and inclusion) is insufficiently mentioned.

The broader **social impact of the crisis** is also **not sufficiently reflected**, that is, the impact on people who are not able to work or access quality jobs, which, in turn, may affect homelessness and housing exclusion, indebtedness and access to services. **For an effective response, there is a need for a broad stakeholder consultation (for instance, a Social Summit), involving people experiencing poverty and their representatives.**

IMPLEMENT THE ACTIVE INCLUSION PRINCIPLES

EAPN welcomes the recognition **in the Communication** of the **Active Inclusion Recommendation** and its three-pillar integrated approach, supporting access into decent work, adequate income support, and access to quality services. We also welcome the stressing of **the need for rapid implementation**. However, no specific recommendations are then made in this regard. The integrated approach is not mainstreamed through the text, but rather mentioned separately, which reduces the impact of the recommendation. **Adequate minimum income schemes are a vital resource** for people to live a dignified life, particularly in these troubled economic times, as well as for supporting consumer demand. We would wish to see recommendations for strengthening this support, as well as **ensuring affordable access to services, particularly housing, health and education, and supportive pathways into quality work**.

Although inclusive labour markets are mentioned and encouraged, **discrimination is unsatisfactorily tackled**. We welcome, however, the specific mention of vulnerable groups and their complicated access to labour markets, requiring specific pathway approached and tailored support, **although these measures could have been given more focus and prominence** in the text. There are categories at severe risk of exclusion and hardship, such as **ethnic minorities** (particularly the case of the **Roma population**), and **migrants** (especially if **undocumented**), whose problems are not adequately accounted for in the text.

Integrated approaches need to be supported and promoted at the EU and national level. **The Integrated Guidelines and the Economic Recovery Packages need to clearly reflect the Recommendation, and a clear roadmap is needed, with measurable objectives for the implementation at the national and European level.**

DEFEND QUALITY OF WORK

The Communication clearly puts forward bottom lines such as: “In order to alleviate the social impact of the crisis, it is essential to retain and bring more people into the labour market” (p 9), “The best way out of exclusion is employment” (p.9) and “Redundancy should only be the last option” (p.6).

One of our main concerns is the complete **absence of any reference to the quality of employment**. We welcome the repeated use of phrases such as “sustainable jobs” or “sound jobs”, yet there are **no provisions aimed at reducing the increasing number of working poor** (currently 14 million people in the EU) and at ensuring decent working conditions, job security, protection of employment rights, and living wages.

EAPN appreciates that **short time working arrangements are recommended as a temporary measure only**, and that the communication spells out that they should be accompanied by **compensation for income loss and training**. Yet, the main concern of the communication seems to be that these arrangements might undermine labour participation and competitiveness, rather than placing an emphasis of the need for job quality and security!

We welcome the mentioning of the potential of **green jobs**, as well as the skills that are needed. However, it will be important to ensure that such jobs are **targeted on deprived areas and are made accessible to people excluded from the labour market. Another important source of quality jobs** is public investment in **social services**, such as in health, education, housing and **the care sector**, which can also respond to vital needs in society and ensure a meaningful **reconciliation between private and professional life**.

Structural Funds are an **essential tool** which, although increasingly mentioned and targeted at job defending, is not used to its full potentiality They can also be used to **promote social economy**, especially work integration social enterprises (WISEs), which hold a great potential for supporting the socio-professional integration of excluded groups. Through the text **social economy**, although mentioned, **is not given sufficient prominence**, considering its particular pivotal role in helping re-launch the economy and providing sustainable jobs. This is particularly worrying, in a context when self-employment and entrepreneurship are being heftily encouraged and supported by the text.

POVERTY-PROOF THE SKILLS AND MOBILITY AGENDA

For people experiencing poverty, **mobility is not a choice**, but an economic necessity, as people “migrate” in search of a better life for themselves and their families . EAPN highlights the complexity of the issue and the need for a multidimensional policy response to **ensure that human rights, including employment rights, equal access to affordable services and reunification issues are fully taken into account**.

Regarding the upgrading of skills, EAPN appreciates the repeated mention of life-long learning and improving access to training and education on behalf of groups that need it the most. Yet, more attention is paid to the high-skilled segment of the population, while the **barriers to education and employment faced by the low-skilled and people experiencing poverty and exclusion are insufficiently dealt with**.

We welcome the mentioning of **the essential need to recognise the acquisition of non-formal skills and competences**, especially in vital domains such as care, which is traditionally categorised as a “low-skill”.

Young people in poverty are a particularly vulnerable population, as underlined by the communication, especially specific groups such as young migrants, young families, single parents and people with disabilities. **Maintaining them in education for longer or supporting traineeships and apprenticeships** is only a viable option if they are **provided with adequate income support** in the meantime, till they engage into remunerated employment.

People experiencing poverty and exclusion face a multitude of barriers in accessing quality, life-long education and **skills upgrading**, while **mobility** for them is often a last resort option, and it often does not constitute a genuine route out of poverty. **Policies in this field need to be poverty-proofed**, in order to ensure their relevance and effective applicability for vulnerable groups and people living in poverty.

EU MICROFINANCE FACILITY

The introduction of an EU Microfinance facility could be a positive development, but EAPN has some concerns regarding the reallocation of 100 million euro from the PROGRESS Programme for the creation of this facility. The **PROGRESS programme has facilitated stakeholder involvement from the National and EU level into key EU policy making instruments**. It is hard to see how this reallocation will not reduce the potential for future support for stakeholder involvement, or risk to reduce or cancel financial support for future trans-national exchanges and mutual learning projects under the PROGRESS programme. Such a development would **send the wrong message** about the commitment to engage all stakeholders in the development of EU policies and strategies.

INVITE EVERYBODY TO THE TABLE

EAPN appreciates the mentioning of an open dialogue involving “all stakeholders” in several instances, and the mentioning of civil society. However, no mention is made of how this will be done or how the direct beneficiaries of policies, **including people experiencing poverty and exclusion and their NGO representatives**, will be made part of an on-going structured debate, at local, regional, national and European level. The social partners play a crucial role, but the **involvement of people experiencing poverty and of the civil society remains key** for the development of more effective policies to support people excluded from the labour market into decent jobs.

A concrete framework for dialogue needs to be devised, to support participation at the EU and national level, through involvement with the **EU Social Protection and Social Inclusion Strategy, particularly in the NAP Inclusion and NRP negotiations**. The **strengthening of the Open Method of Coordination in Social Protection and Social Inclusion** should also feature highly on the EU agenda, as well as setting up a **broad consultation or Social Summit** where an open stakeholder debate can take place about the impact of the crisis on people on the ground and the way forward.