

Network news



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Editorial

Flexicurity: The social security side needs to be secured!

The Lisbon Agenda of 2000 set out the economic goal of the EU as full employment based on economic growth, competitiveness, higher quality jobs and greater social cohesion.

It has been obvious for some years that these goals are not being reached. Unemployment remains high and economic strategies focused on competitiveness have failed to impact on social exclusion. In fact, in the years since Lisbon poverty levels in the EU have remained unacceptably high.

Reviews of the Lisbon Strategy have continued to focus on achieving competitiveness and have tended to blame excessive social provision for the failure to achieve the Lisbon goals.

In this policy impasse, Flexicurity is now being promoted as a solution which neatly combines a radical liberalisation of the labour market with the maintenance of the European Social Model.

Where there is a strong social security system, as in Denmark, the home of Flexicurity, there is much merit in the argument. But the public debate on flexicurity has identified at great length the flexibilities which need to be introduced in the labour market, while being much less precise on the social security elements which need to be strengthened and built upon.

The fact remains that "securing transitions" between jobs, from education to work, or from unemployment to work, will be determined by the strength of the social security system in each Member State. These will have to be negotiated and secured at each stage. Until clear direction emerges on the social security side of the flexicurity equation, trade unions, social NGOs and others will be well justified in their resistance to engaging with a process that seems so much like the old liberalisation agenda dressed up in social model clothing.

*Philip O'Connor
Chair of the EAPN Employment Task Force*

AN INCLUSIVE LABOUR MARKET?

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Employment in the European Union: towards participation by Social NGOs?

How does EAPN deal with employment issues?

Because EAPN is wedded to the belief that poverty and social exclusion are multidimensional, employment has been central to its agenda since the network was founded. A task force on "access to employment" for people experiencing poverty was set up in the network's earliest years. Over time, its horizons have broadened towards the more general linkage between social inclusion and employment, and exactly how employment policy helps further social inclusion.

The Employment Task Force now links together 17 correspondents in EAPN's national networks - all active in fields like job search, training, the social economy, etc. - and three representatives from European organisations appointed for three years. The members meet about three times a year, either as a full or core group, and work by e-mail in between times.

Its activities are split between exchanges of experiences and expertise, and work to inform both European and national employment policy-making. It pools this work with that of other task forces on inclusion policies and the Structural funds to feed into the network's general policy positions. The group regularly gives its analytical input to the employment strand of the Lisbon Strategy, but also develops its own initiatives, like the "Voices from the Poverty Line" book of personal accounts of employment by people facing difficulties.

Claire Champeix
EAPN Policy Officer

More information on the EAPN website, The European agenda/Employment

E APN is today engaged in big European debates about the "modernisation" of labour markets, marked by a clash of visions on the headline issues of globalization and inequalities within the EU, different ways to prevent and tackle poverty and social exclusion in our societies. While employment is still a mainly national responsibility, the terms of the European debate are bringing to light overarching trends in Europe, and policy convergence.

The Open Method of Coordination on Employment under the Lisbon Strategy is shaping the exchanges, and bringing national policies to prominence. It should also enable all the actors concerned to stand back and question the policy directions taken, even if it does not always happen.

But there is now a recognition that employment and social policy must be dovetailed together if the approaches developed are to work. This helps give social sector NGOs a voice, informing employment issues both with their know-how on making things work, and their demands on respect for fundamental rights.

The Commission is readying a communication on "flexicurity" for the end of June 2007 that will map out a purposive strategy to strengthen both labour flexibility and job security, and is planned to encourage Member States to agree a set of common principles by year-end. The Commission is likely to propose a balanced approach. But how will the Member States implement it in face of pressure for deregulation and something-for-nothing deals on enforced flexibility? Will they be able to help those who find it hard to access jobs, or who are working but still poor and excluded? Both EAPN and the European Platform of Social NGOs have taken a stand in response to the March 2007 Green Paper on modernising labour law, but also on flexibility more generally, calling for the enforcement of fundamental rights and a wide-ranging debate.

Active labour market policies, or activation policies, are also looming large in Member States' discussions. Back in 2005, EAPN laid down the criteria for "sound activation" that plays effectively into and promotes the delivery of social cohesion, in which the social economy plays a big part. What we do not want is "activation" policies that merely stigmatise and exclude the unemployed.

These concerns owe something to the "active inclusion" concept floated by the European Commission in 2006¹, which combines "a link to the labour market through job opportunities or vocational training; income support at a level that is sufficient

for people to have a dignified life; and better access to services that may help remove some of the hurdles encountered by some individuals and their families in entering mainstream society". We support this integrated approach, but demand that each of these component aims be set high and

Employment and social policy must be dovetailed together if the approaches developed are to work

rights-based.

The traction that we have in these debates will depend on how our European- and national-level activities hang together, our ability to be the voice of those affected, and an organised civil dialogue that plays into the social dialogue on employment issues.

Claire Champeix
EAPN Policy Officer

¹ Communication from the Commission concerning a consultation on action at EU level to promote the active inclusion of the people furthest from the labour market. COM 2006 44 (Final)

European social dialogue, driving modernisation and change

Social dialogue is a fundamental element in the European social model that has enabled significant progress on many employment-related issues. Where does it stand today? We talked to John Monks, General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).

What has the European social dialogue achieved so far?

What has the European social dialogue (ESD) brought many agreements. The first three framework agreements on parental leave (1995), part-time work (1997) and fixed-term contracts (1999) were incorporated into Community law via Council Directives. In 2002, the European social partners concluded the first autonomous agreements, implementation of which at the national level was entrusted to the social partners themselves. This fresh approach allowed the conclusion of two important framework agreements on teleworking (2002) and on work-related stress (2004), a framework of actions for the development of lifelong skills and qualifications (2002) and a framework of action on equality between men and women (2005). More recently, (April 2007) the European social partners signed voluntary framework agreement on harassment and violence at work.

Where does the European Trade Union Confederation stand on flexicurity?

JM: The first thing is, what do we mean by flexicurity? It means striking a socially acceptable balance between the welfare of workers and business needs. Flexicurity has been a widely discussed concept of late in debates where the ETUC has given its definition. The ETUC sees seven key

principles as being the basis of any approach to flexicurity:

- the fight against precarious jobs and for quality work;
- “upwards” flexibility and improved work organisation;
- safeguard employment protection laws, complemented with policies promoting upwards mobility;
- a broad approach to balancing flexibility with security, without focusing on a single model of flexicurity;
- improve social security and welfare;
- integrate flexicurity with macro-economic policies that promote growth and new job creation;
- improve social dialogue and collective bargaining.



What themes are set for your 2007 congress?

JM: The banner of the eleventh ETUC congress (Seville, 21-24 May) encapsulates our political priorities “On the offensive – for Social Europe, Solidarity, Sustainability”. The ETUC aims to go on the offensive in order to have a bigger say in the framing of European policies.

Work has focused on giving a fresh impetus to social Europe through full employment, quality in employment, promoting equal opportunities and social protection. We have also made social cohesion a non-negotiable priority, because the EU must put an end to poverty and discrimination to enable its citizens to live decent lives. Sustainable development has also been central to the debate. We want the EU to take forceful measures to tackle climate change.

Interview: Audrey Gueudet

More information on the ETUC: <http://www.etuc.org/>

WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL DIALOGUE?

The European social dialogue (ESD) is written into the Treaty of Rome, and encompasses the discussions, negotiations and joint actions undertaken by the European social partners on a range of employment and social affairs issues.

At EU level, workers are represented by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). Employers are represented by three different organisations: BusinessEurope, the European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest (CEEP) and the European Association of Craft Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (UEAPME). The sectoral social dialogue is carried on by the European Industry Federations.

Social partner consultations are organised via two compulsory phases. First, the Commission consults the social partners on the possible direction of a Community action; then it consults them on the content of that action. If, after each of these phases, the partners fail to reach agreement on the opening of bipartite negotiations, but the Commission still believes that action is desirable, it presents a proposal.

Each year since 1997 the social partners have also been invited to take part in a tripartite social summit made up of representatives of the incumbent Council presidency, the next two presidencies and the Commission. The setting up of the Tripartite Social Summit represented a remarkable political step, for it recognises the role of tripartite consultation at the highest level of European decision-making. The fields covered by tripartite consultation are macroeconomic dialogue, employment, social protection, education and training.

*More information on the social dialogue:
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_dialogue/index_en.htm*

Quality in employment or decent work?

Interview with Ramón Peña-Casas, Sociologist,
European Social Observatory

There are two concepts floating around the European debates today - "quality in employment" and "decent work". What's the difference?

They are completely different concepts in origin, meaning ... and interest to the EU. In 2001, the EU set the aim of examining changes in quality in employment based on a set of specific indicators². Quality and productivity improvement were one of the three cross-cutting employment policy objectives over the period 2003-2005. That set of indicators still exists, but the focus has shifted somewhat from this aspect nowadays. "Decent work" is a concept developed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as part of a general approach to globalizing the principle, which refers back to the ILO's international agreements. This approach is less multidimensional than the European one as it is based on more limited and vague indicators for which there is no political consensus.

You argue that the concept of "quality in employment" needs to be kept alive. Why?

The EU is right to promote the ILO's decent work agenda from an international standpoint, especially through its commercial and foreign policy. But it is largely irrelevant inside the EU. Most Member States have ratified the relevant conventions and transposed them into national law. Any attempt to frame internationally-relevant indicators results in values that are inevitably very low in European terms. "Decent work" is no replacement for the more ambitious political aim of improving quality in employment. "Decent work" only represents a weaker version of the quality in employment as it is already widely accepted in the EU.

<http://www.ose.be/>

² See the Commission Communication "Improving quality in work: a review of recent progress" COM (2003) 728 final

The UK's flexible labour market – fit for purpose?

The UK is the fourth richest country in the world and has the highest employment rate in the G8 group of countries. At the same time, the UK has one of the worst records in terms of child poverty amongst the western countries and reports draw attention to the UK's income inequality, low wages and high numbers of workless households. What is the possible contribution of the UK's 'flexible' approach to the labour market in delivering these outcomes?

In the UK, many of the poorest people are not in paid work and the means tested income support and job seeker's allowance have amongst the lowest income replacement rates in the EU.

But the UK has surpassed the employment rate target of 70% and aims now for an 80% employment rate. Employment rates are much lower for lone parents, people with a disability and some ethnic minority groups.

The government believes further reform of the working age benefits and work incentives are the key to reduce the number of people on incapacity benefits, to get more lone parents into paid work and to increase the number of older workers.

Some of the problems for the government's 'active labour market' approach are that:

- The poorest people benefit least or not at all from the government's tax and benefit strategy for 'making work pay'.
- Despite the National Childcare Strategy, mothers' ability to take up paid work is severely restricted by lack of good quality affordable childcare.
- Getting into paid work does not guarantee leaving poverty. 1.7m children, half of all those in poverty in 2004/5, belonged to working families and 80% of them lived in two parent households.
- Wage levels have been held down, especially at the bottom end of the labour market, by weak employment protection and by strong inward migration creating competition for low skilled jobs.

- Because some minority ethnic groups face discrimination they are especially vulnerable to income poverty.

The second strand of the government's approach to high employment focuses on 'up-skilling' as a way of diminishing poverty. However UK employers' capacity to operate a 'hire and fire' culture inhibits the incentives to train. Access to often well-qualified young migrants and students prevents any need to focus on other disadvantaged groups as sources of entry level employment.

The UK government has not focused on the quality or sustainability of work

Without the current government's redistribution to families through its child poverty strategy, poverty and inequality would have been even worse. But overall, welfare reform seems to have had more impact on wage competition and on risks of

poverty than in fitting people for a high skill, high value added future. The reliance on voluntary incentives to employers to deliver on investment, skills and house building seems misjudged.

In the 21st century Britain's unbalanced, pollution-rich economy and society may be found, in the typical view of government about poor people and about social systems, 'not fit for purpose'.

Katherine Duffy
De Montfort University
Volunteer for EAPN and chair of the UK Social Policy Task Force

“Hungarian flexicurity” – realities, concerns, lessons to learn

In Hungary, many people, especially long-term unemployed people, consider low-paid and poor quality jobs as a realistic alternative to being a welfare recipient. The concept of “flexicurity” is relevant almost exclusively for these vulnerable groups. What can be done to give them more security and better working conditions? Flexicurity overlaps the issue of making work pay for this lower segment of the labour force.

The traditional Hungarian landscape The three main traditional components of supported employment in Hungary are sheltered employment schemes for people with a disability, public work (“workfare”) programmes and temporary supported work programmes for special target groups like the Roma community and lone parents. Broadly, participants welcome these programmes as offering some income and social status. Participating in these supported schemes is a better option than unemployment. But from a broader perspective, these traditional elements do not seem to be working properly. Sheltered and designated employment programmes are heavily subsidised, and so depend on a finite public budget that benefits only a limited few. In a country with an employment rate below 60%, subsidised programmes protect participants from competition and productivity challenges. Protected employment is regarded as the “second league” of the Hungarian job market, blocking entry to the “premier league”. Useful as protected employment opportunities may be, they offer very poor individual and social prospects.

New prospects – targeted cutting of employment costs for vulnerable groups

A new generation of employment schemes has recently come onto the Hungarian scene. The main concern has been that where the productivity risk of employing disadvantaged persons is too high for employers in open markets, labour policies should share that risk with employers by reducing the costs of employment (e.g., by targeted tax and social security deductions, etc.). The policy conclusion of these concerns led the Hungarian government to introduce new programmes (Start, Start+, Start Extra, etc.) offering tax and social security contribution relief to employers willing to employ return-

ing new mothers, long-term unemployed “older workers”, school-leavers from depressed regions and trades, etc. The new initiatives are promising, but evidence on how they are performing is yet to come in.



Outlooks and lessons to learn

Tax relief schemes for new recruitment are likely to have a positive immediate impact on the mass, long-term unemployment situation, but are unlikely to create sustainable jobs, as the new employees are likely to be fired after the subsidized initial period. One key thing to be done is to review employment costs, especially to ease the tax and revenue burden on low-paid jobs. This policy could be said to be one of bringing the costs of legal employment in line with the costs of unregistered employment in low-paid sectors. This interpretation expresses a key approach to improving security for the low-paid: getting illegal low-paid jobs back into the legal mainstream! There are some problem areas which require special measures to be taken. Chief among these are supported mobility and commuting for people living in the most disadvantaged rural areas and the special status of people employed in small businesses and self-employed micro-enterprises.

The most challenging and provoking lesson from Europe is that less-regulated labour markets are not only more dynamic but also more inclusive. In other words: flexicurity should partly involve deregulation (lightening the regulatory burden on work), but should also be combined with greater security for vulnerable workers (not necessarily through labour regulation!). Set against these aims, there are grounds for criticism of the progress achieved so far: Hungary still has several lessons to learn about “flexicurity”...

Dr Balázs Krémer Debrecen University

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN EUROPE IN 2005 (% OF LABOUR FORCE AGED 15+)

	Total	Males	Females
Austria	5,2	4,9	5,5
Belgium	8,4	7,6	9,5
Bulgaria	10,1	10,3	9,8
Cyprus	5,2	4,3	6,5
C. Republic	7,9	6,5	9,8
Denmark	4,8	4,4	5,3
Estonia	7,9	8,8	7,1
Germany	9,5	8,8	10,3
Ireland	4,4	4,6	4,1
Finland	8,4	8,2	8,6
France	9,7	8,8	10,7
Greece	9,8	6,1	15,3
Hungary	7,2	7	7,4
Italy	7,7	6,2	10,1
Latvia	8,9	9,1	10,1
Lithuania	8,3	9,1	8,7
Luxembourg	4,5	3,5	5,8
Malta	7,3	6,5	9
Netherlands	4,7	4,4	5,1
Poland	17,7	16,6	19,1
Portugal	7,6	6,7	8,7
Romania	7,2	7,8	6,4
Slovenia	6,5	6,1	7
Slovakia	16,3	15,5	17,2
Spain	9,2	7	12,2
Sweden	7,8	7,9	7,7
U. Kingdom	4,8	5,1	4,3
EU 27	8,7	7,9	9,7

Flexicurity at the heart of the European debate

The Commission has announced that a Communication on flexicurity will be published to feed into the Lisbon Strategy at the end of June 2007. Flexicurity is defined as a policy strategy to enhance, at the same time and in a deliberate way, the flexibility of labour markets, work organisations and labour relations on the one hand, and security (employment security and income security) on the other. The underlying idea is that flexibility and security should not be regarded as mutually exclusive, but as potentially mutually self-reinforcing.

The Communication is likely to propose a set of pathways by which each Member State can introduce elements of flexicurity in line with its national situations. It will then be examined by the Council of Ministers and European Parliament, and Member States are asked to adopt a set of common principles by the end of 2007.

The discussion entered its first stage in early 2007 around the Commission Green Paper "Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century". Unsurprisingly, the stakeholders are still divided on the challenges to meet and how to go about it. The employers are all for flexibility, while the trade unions focus on security. Social NGOs want a broader dialogue and are calling for the proposed reforms to be guided by a commitment to strengthen social cohesion.

*Claire Champeix
EAPN Policy Officer*

More information on flexicurity:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_strategy/flex_meaning_en.htm
(European Commission)

The stakeholders' positions:

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/socialeurope/labour-market-reforms/article-140843>

The flexicurity debate in two European organisations

With the flexicurity debate in full swing, the European Disability Forum and the European Standing Conference of Co-operatives, Mutual Societies, Associations and Foundations (CEP-CMAF), whose members include the main social economy groups in the EU, give us their take on things ...

"Flexicurity must not spell insecurity"

The social economy accounts for 10% of all European businesses, and employs 9 million workers. It touches almost the entire population of Europe.

Social economy firms work to a different kind of business model to the dominant capital-based company and show that you can square economic, social and environmental considerations. Because of what they are, they practise values of solidarity, social responsibility, freedom of association, democratic management, participation and autonomy.

If flexicurity is the marriage of flexibility and security, more flexibility must not spell less security. The main focus must be on improving working conditions and quality in employment through ongoing social dialogue. CEP-CMAF wants to point out that permanent contracts are the norm in the social economy, although different employment situations may be better addressed by other kinds of contract.

Social economy businesses must show what can be done in the flexicurity debate. All along, they have been a way to combine job creation, quality in work, economic growth, ties to society, competitiveness, strong community attachment and development, and the creation of social capital. What marks them out is their investment in human capital. Their expertise has made social economy firms into key players in maintaining and developing social cohesion in the EU.

Karin Pfluger

European Standing Conference of Co-operatives, Mutual Societies, Associations and Foundations

<http://www.cepcmaf.org>



"Flexibility must be coupled with security to contribute to real inclusion"

Flexibility can be a positive thing for disabled people. Many of them are excluded from the labour market because of a lack of flexibility of the workplace in a broad sense: flexibility of working time for example can allow people with a chronic illness, people with mental health problems, or people that cannot work full time, to benefit from flexible work arrangement, while adaptation of a job description will accommodate a candidate for a job with a disability or of a worker that may have acquired a disability.

On the other side shorter term work contracts can also be an opportunity for starting a career or returning to a job after a disability leave, as they often allow an employee to prove his/her abilities to employers that are often very hesitant to hire a disabled person because of prejudices. However flexibility must be coupled with security to contribute to real inclusion. Flexicurity cannot mean less paid jobs, especially for people that do face extra costs because they live in an inaccessible society. Support in training and in benefits should be available in between jobs.

In many European countries, a disabled person who receives disability benefits and finds a job loses altogether the entitlement for these benefits. Furthermore benefits to cover extra costs faced by a disabled person (for transport, rehabilitation, etc) should be available also when a person is in employment.

Carlotta Besozzi

Director of the European Disability Forum

<http://www.edf-feph.org/>



Poverty in Portugal: "Portugal still lacks a culture of inclusion"

In the European context, Portugal still appears as the country with the worse position in terms of incidence, persistency and intensity of poverty.

Social cohesion in Portugal

continues to be threatened by high poverty levels, inequalities in income distribution, high levels of early school leavers, large numbers of working poor and a significant gender pay gap in the private sector.

In the EU15, Portugal is the country which presents the worse inequality indicators. The 2005 data from EU – SILC indicates a level of risk of poverty of 20%, which represents two 2 million people. Data from ECHP for 2001 shows that the persistent-risk of poverty rate (15%), the persistent risk of child poverty and of elderly poverty were higher than the EU-25's average.

Although the poverty phenomenon is disseminated throughout the whole national territory, we can verify the existence of some particularly vulnerable groups:

- unemployed people;
- workers with low qualifications and low salaries;
- elderly people;
- single-parent families;
- immigrants;
- children and young people at risk;
- homeless people;
- people with disabilities;
- ethnic minorities.

The causes of poverty are various and complex. In the case of Portugal, they are linked to:

- traditional rural poverty;
- failings in the national social protection system and the redistribution mechanism;
- lack of basic skills;
- The emergence of new forms of social exclusion, like urban and suburban growth, and new risk groups (single parent families, drug addicts, ethnic minorities, immigrants).

General outline of the social policy in Portugal

The 2006-2008 National Action Plan has 3 political priorities and common European objectives:

1. Fight the child and elderly poverty through measures that assure their basic right of citizenship.
2. Correct the disadvantages in education, training and qualification
3. Overcome the discrimination, reinforcing the integration of disabled people and migrants.

Most of the current measures are responses to the Community guidelines or modelled on other European schemes to fight poverty and social exclusion. Recently were enunciated various political measures like the Social Development Contracts, which are intervention plans agreed by several restricted partners to develop more inclusive territories, during a specific period of time; the New Opportunities Initiative, to promote the raising of the basic qualification levels of

the adult population; the Solidarity Supplement for the elderly for pensions over 65 years, which ensures an annual minimum income based on a reference poverty threshold that in 2006 was 4.200 euros; the Pilot Project to restore elderly housing, etc.

NGOs are the players more directly involved in implementing these measures on the ground. However, once again, the opportunity to participate in the conception process was a "lost opportunity". EAPN Portugal is concerned and expects that social inclusion policies are well coordinated and counts on the involvement of all levels of government and relevant actors (including people living in poverty).

EAPN Portugal believes that to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion, it is necessary to ensure the promotion of good governance; which means to have a political co-ordination between the different Ministries involved, a coherent and effective articulation between existing policies and to mobilise the participation of all relevant stakeholders. In this field, and beyond words and speeches, Portugal still lacks a "culture of inclusion".

Sandra Aroujo, EAPN Portugal



SPOTLIGHT ON EAPN PORTUGAL

Created in 1991, EAPN Portugal forms today a decentralised structure which is implemented in 18 districts throughout the country and counts 686 members (461 social NGOs and 225 individuals).

This original decentralised form of network creates privileged space allowing civil society to take specific actions at local and community levels, promoting, among others, a culture of change in relation to the way problems are tackled trying to modify traditional approaches, the exchange of knowledge and experience, the creation of conditions to exercise the solidarity as well as the consolidation of participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in the initiatives that are aimed at them.

EAPN Portugal's Activities

Information

To generate and support a structured action and communication field is one of EAPN/Portugal central activities and probably the most important service that the Organization offers to its members.

Publications

EAPN Portugal publishes a wide range of publications, ranging from national and regional information newsletters on current social issues to studies, projects' outcomes and researches.

Training

EAPN Portugal as an entity recognised by the Institute for Quality in Training carries out training sessions based on the diagnosis of local, regional and national training needs and on the definition of goals.

Research & Projects

EAPN Portugal is responsible for the outlining, development and evaluation of different national and transnational projects through which it seeks to deep the Organisation's knowledge on poverty and social exclusion as well as the outlining of more effective strategies to tackle these phenomena.

For more information: <http://www.reapn>.



EAPN Portugal presents the Portuguese Presidency with concrete proposals to reinforce the Social Inclusion Strategy

On 9-10 March 2007, EAPN Portugal, in partnership and with the support of the Portuguese Government, Montepio Geral and Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa, organized the final event of the initiative called "From Lisbon to Lisbon", gathering international and Portuguese experts in the field of poverty and social exclusion. The result of this initiative is a set of concrete proposals aiming at helping the upcoming Portuguese Presidency to put the fight against poverty and social exclusion back at the heart of the European agenda.

General recommendations

1. The reinforcement of the role of the European Union in the fight against poverty in a global context.
2. The reinforcement of the poverty dimension in the National Reform Programmes (NRPs).
3. The Structural Funds should be used as a "driving force" in the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy and the achievement of the overall goal to eradicate poverty.
4. The reinforcement of the participation in order to improve the governance levels.

Specific recommendations

1. The creation of a European anti-poverty structure (Observatory/Agency)
2. The introduction of a new European Anti-Poverty Programme within the framework of the Open Method of Coordination capable of reinforcing the Social Inclusion Strategy and to overcome some of its main handicaps.
3. The development of a "package" of common minimum standards (benefits and services) in order to make social rights effective.
4. The successful preparation, organization and follow-up of the 2010 European Year for the eradication of poverty

The Portuguese Presidency raises great hopes

Since 2000, the European Union has engaged in a process of mutual learning on the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Seven years later, we stand at a crossroads, looking back on past commitments and achievements, facing the ambitions and expected goals ahead and nevertheless

confronted with the daily reality that officially 78 million people in the EU are still facing the burden of poverty and social exclusion, with little evidence of significant improvements in this situation.

And yet, the Portuguese Presidency, due to start on 1st July and end at the end of 2007, raises great hopes. During the next six months, Portugal will be indeed conducting the European Union destinies in an interesting moment where there is a combination of factors that can be extremely favourable to putting social inclusion back at the centre of the European concerns and strategies.

The EU has recently celebrated (25 March) the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome. At the moment, there is a general belief that the "European Project" needs a new drive which should have as the main goal the reinforcement of social cohesion and solidarity.

During the Portuguese Presidency, the debate on the Constitutional Treaty is expected to be relaunched. This will be particular important to the fight against poverty because, no matter what the outcomes are, social cohesion should be one of its focus of attention.

Regarding the Lisbon Strategy, it will be during the Portuguese Presidency that the revision process of the "integrated guidelines" will begin. Certainly, this will be an excellent opportunity to strengthen the social inclusion and the fight against poverty dimensions.

Least but not last, 2007 is the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. This fortunate coincidence should be an additional element to facilitate the progress in policy making and to move forwards on anti-poverty strategies ■ A.G

For more information on the "From Lisbon to Lisbon" initiative:
www.reapn.org

Until clear direction emerges on the social security side of the flexicurity equation, trade unions and social NGOs will be well justified in their resistance.

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Network News aims to generate debates on specific themes. The views expressed are not necessarily those of EAPN. If you want to comment on the content of this issue, send an email to team@eapn.skynet.be


EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

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