

From the Delors White Paper (1993) to the EU Pillar of Social Rights (2016), what future for the fight against poverty in Europe?

EAPN CONFERENCE

Thursday 16 June 2016 – Brussels



Developing an EU response to the Commission Proposal
on our reflections of what is needed coming
from our experience on the ground



Workshop 2: Trends and Priorities

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Progress or Procrastination?

Comments and Questions by EAPN Germany

1. Outline of the Social Pillar
2. Architecture of the Social Pillar
3. Trends and Risks
4. Opportunities
5. EESC Opinion

Outline of the Social Pillar



- Poverty and social exclusion depicted as “bottlenecks” to growth, not an aim in itself; a different point of view is needed and expected from the EU; citizen want a more social Union
- Downward spiral not only a result of the crisis but a consequence of EU policies being predominantly influenced by neoliberal bias since 1990; the crisis as the strongest signal of the wrong orientation that is based on growth at every risk; economic growth and social progress have been uncoupled
- Welfare systems are praised by the EU Commission but dismantled by austerity measures; welfare systems seen as a prerequisite for well-functioning labour markets and as economic stabilizer; not enough, social services and social protection important for wellbeing, equal opportunities and participation

Outline of the Social Pillar



- Social services of general interest need reliable framework that guarantees constant, affordable and fair access on the highest level for all

- EU level: need to look at the Pillar in an EU 28 context; social policy is the domain of Member States (MS) but EU can complement national strategies and activities; changing the treaties is a long-term scenario; what is realistic and feasible within the framework of the current EU Treaties? Soft law initiatives like recommendations and exchange of best practice seem to be most likely but we have to get one step further; how can the participation and obligation of the MS be reinforced? Alternative: Introduction of a reward system (instead of sanctions); Minimum Income Schemes would be a worthwhile approach
- how will the Pillar be linked to existing instruments like the European Semester, the Strategy Europe 2020 and the European Structural and Investment Funds?

- UN Sustainable Development Goals: how will the Social Pillar be linked to them?
- National level: the implementation of the Pillar in the MS is the main challenge but evaluation of standards is only one side of the coin; how will social progress in the MS be measured? What would be adequate indicators? How to promote reforms and higher standards in the MS?
- Dominant imperative of stabilizing public finances, often through austerity policies that undermine social progress; how to strengthen social and employment policies vis-à-vis economic and financial policies? Where is the link to economic and financial policies? (at least) equality of basic social rights and economic freedom and interests; new sources of public income generation are needed; improve fiscal justice and taxation policies

- Inequality is in the EU the most pressing deficit; what can the Pillar do to achieve upward convergence? the poverty reduction aim of the Strategy Europe 2020 seems to be abandoned but has to be relocated in the centre
- A rapid response to the current migration and refugee situation is needed, integration must be promoted; migrants and refugees need access to quality accommodation, health care and education, the labour market and social protection; is the Pillar not applicable to asylum seekers but only to migrants from third countries with a legal status?
- Most vulnerable groups lack participation and equal opportunities; what can be done to reach and support these groups? Marginalized groups need specific support not precarious jobs; obstacles are multifaceted, not only deficits in language skills and insufficient recognition of qualifications...

- ...one-size-fits-all solutions not adequate; the fight against youth unemployment remains a key priority; how to improve employability of the people that are furthest from the labour market? equal access and opportunities in education and lifelong learning
- Labour markets: principle of “equal pay for equal work” in the same workplace; decent labour and social standards must be guaranteed; focus on flexibility must be outbalanced by aspects of security; competition based mainly on labour costs led to precarious jobs, atypical forms of work and “in-work-poverty”; promotion of regular employment with adequate minimum wages; more active labour market policies to improve employability of disadvantaged groups; improving work-life balance a precondition for increased labour market participation of women

- Adequate social protection for all: establish adequate, accessible and reliable Minimum Income Schemes in all MS; integration of social services might be helpful but diversity of services and providers important because competition guarantees quality and free choice of the beneficiaries; health care: additional contribution should be abolished or reduced for people without adequate financial resources; access to essential services: social services be integrated as they are a precondition for participation, equal opportunities and well-being

- The ageing of European societies burdens pension and health systems; it also provides opportunities since elderly people could work or volunteer longer; this requires flexible approaches supporting those who want to work beyond the statutory retirement age
- Migration offers opportunities to rejuvenate the EU population, increase the labour force and elevate taxes and contributions to social security; the challenge being that people need immediate help and support; if investments are not made instantly, the costs will be much higher later
- Digitalization offers opportunities in the fields of networking, communication, development of services etc.; however, still many unanswered questions in the fields of data protection, new precarious forms of employment, equal access to technology and education etc.

- Participation: civil society organizations should actively participate in the consultation and the design, implementation and evaluation of the EU Pillar on the national and European level; NGOs observe the social reality closely and are familiar with the implementation of social policy; more involvement into the exchange of best practice
- Prof. Bernd Schlüter, member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), initiated the Opinion “Principles for effective and reliable welfare provision systems” (SOC 520) that was adopted in September 2015 by the EESC; German welfare organizations, members of EAPN Germany, supported him in elaborating the paper

- Key points: Principle of a social protection floor: basic welfare provision, including subsistence protection/minimum income; Principle of need: provision of modern social/healthcare services for different problems; Principle of accessibility: welfare provision must be affordable, accessible, non-discriminatory; Principle of solidarity: funding of welfare provision should be supported by solidarity-based social insurance systems and fair, solidarity-based tax systems; Principle of participation: services and benefits should help people to play their part in society; Principle of the user's right to decide: users are not passive recipients, but partners in assistance and citizens with entitlements; Principle of legal certainty: services and benefits should be legally guaranteed; Principle of transparency: the use of public funds should be transparent; Principle of quality: social services should be backed up by quality assurance measures...



The European Anti-Poverty Network

Thank you for you attention