

2018 Annual Convention for Inclusive Growth

Side Event

The Future of Work and the European Pillar of Social Rights

How to foster inclusive labour markets to reduce poverty and inequality?

Workshop summary

Chair: Conny Reuter (SOLIDAR)

Speakers: Dr. Katherine Duffy (EAPN UK), Kerrie Marie Friel (EAPN Scotland), Judy McKnight (EESC), Marina Monaco (ETUC), Hubertus Arndt (Sec-Gen).

Conny Reuter (SOLIDAR), Chair, welcomed audience and speakers. He highlighted the importance of debating on the future challenges for the labour market, which currently are an important part of the discussion on the future of Europe. The European Pillar of Social Rights will be the main tool to address these challenges, together with other recently adopted instruments such as the Social Fairness Package.

Dr. Katherine Duffy (EAPN UK), presented EAPN and the EMIN project bus journey. She then presented the present issues: the Europe 2020 target won't be met, social protection efficacy is going down, employment has reached the pre-crisis level but quality of employment has dramatically fallen down, with an increase in involuntary part-time and atypical contracts and an overall low productivity. Some people say this is caused by a change in trade, or new trends brought about by automation, but this holds true just for some countries and/or some sectors: this was policy driven, she argued, by ten years of austerity. The rise in self-employment, platform employment and atypical contract is sometimes enabled by technology, but most of it relies on the deregulation of the labour market carried out in the last decade. She argued that the only way to address these issues properly is to have a strong political ambition, to create an even social floor capable of protecting workers from the "modern slavery" of low wages and low-quality jobs. She also advocated for participation of civil society to be more structured and for adequate funding to be provided to CSOs, arguing that the fight against tax evasion could provide more than enough coverage for increased social investments.

Kerrie Marie Friel (EAPN Scotland), presented her condition of person with direct experience of challenges around in-work poverty. She is a mother-of-four, and also carer for one of them who has special needs. She's been working since she was 13, and at 16 she was working three jobs at a time; twenty years later she found herself a single mother without a job, applying for job offers and not being able to accept most of them because the weekly schedule clashed with her children needs. She shared her willingness to act against poverty (especially child poverty) that pushed her into becoming a volunteer and fight for a fairer society. She shared her conviction of society not being founded on equal grounds for everybody, but she also called on the EPSR to be a meaningful instrument in the fight against all inequalities.

Judy McKnight (EESC), highlighted the need for the Pillar to initiate concrete action leading to tangible improvements to people's lives: the proclamation of the Pillar was a crucial moment of shared political commitment, but right now all stakeholders need to work together to ensure this leads to successful improvements. She underlined the increase in self-employment, as well as that of people willing to work longer hours; on the other hand, 60% of people living under the poverty line live in a household where

at least 1 person works. She argued that initiatives carried out under the EPSR umbrella will carry greater benefits than costs in the long run, but she also called on the Pillar to be adequately funded in order to have concrete effects on the ground. She advocated for fight against tax evasion and taxation on digital profits to be sources of additional investments in social policies. She also argued that the challenge posed by European elections may be a chance for the EU to show that its actions are able to positively affect people's lives and help re-establish people's trust in EU institutions, which is now highly deteriorated.

Marina Monaco (ETUC), underlined the necessity to consider the Pillar as a full package of provisions, since all issues are interconnected: we cannot act on work and employment without taking into account the importance and effects of adequate social protection. Adequacy of social protection is crucial to allow people to live their lives in dignity and protect them from poverty now and in the future. The Social Scoreboard featured in the Semester is incomplete and debates, but it does put a spotlight on a number of issues, for instance the discrepancy between the importance attributed to social protection and the public funding allocated for them, highlighting that the interests of people to be protected from the major risks in life are not adequately funded by Member States. It is also true, she argued, that the Social Scoreboard adds more social to the Semester and to internal market monitoring in general, but it's also true that we need to take the necessary legislative steps to have a more equal society. She argued that work needs to be an effective tool to protect people from poverty, but also to ensure protection and maintenance of living standards, pertaining very much to human dignity.

Hubertus Arndt (Sec-Gen), stressed the importance of European Pillar of Social Rights as a milestone in developing the social acquis. Against the backdrop of legal and political situation, the Pillar represented an important achievement, setting out an ambitious list of rights and principles. He underscored the need for strong follow-up and implementation at both the EU and national level. In respect of the question of funding the necessary policies and measures, he recalled the limited size of the EU budget, pointing to the key role of national budgets. The Commission was working towards making good use of the available EU resource to underpin the implementation of the Pillar. In this context, he referred to the link between CSRs and the programming under the European Structural and Investment Funds. About the future of work, he saw a broad consensus about the importance of the issue. Things were developing quickly indeed and may have sweeping consequences for employment and social policies. However, the precise nature and size of these consequences were not yet clear in full. Some would be positive, others negative. The EPSR played a key role in responding to this challenge, as it set out the rights and principles Europe stands for. The Pillar would offer orientation for the policy direction and for preventing and tackling the negative consequences. After the solemn proclamation of the Pillar in November 2017, the focus now needed to be on implementation. This was a shared responsibility. He also underlined the importance of starting to focus on preventive actions to stop the transmission of poverty from one generation to the following, starting from very young children and investing in people to make them more resilient so that they can effectively cope with difficulties in their lives. The Employment guidelines were at the basis of the Semester. The Commission made a proposal to adjust them to the Pillar. This proposal was currently under consideration in the European Parliament and the Council. One aspect was the involvement of civil society in the European Semester. He recalled that the Pillar only had been agreed in November 2017, i.e. a few months ago, and that the current European Semester was the first one to take the Pillar into account.

Discussion with the audience: What are your messages and proposals for the future of work?

- It would be useful for the EC to provide capacity building together with funding, so to try and ensure better management and strategic planning.
- We have to be sure that every kind of worker has access to training and upskilling, with policies done from learners' perspective taking into account their specific interests and needs, and with special attention to disadvantaged groups.
- The EU should push for national legislation frameworks fostering inequality and putting a stop on outrageous wages inequality.
- The EU should devote more attention to workers with disabilities, that are too often the last to be hired and the first to be fired, with higher risks of poverty.
- The Work-Life balance is a very crucial initiative that needs to be widely supported from institutions and NGOs, since it's a crucial investment for all families.

Speakers remarks

Kerrie Marie Friel (EAPN Scotland), highlighted the importance of profiting of the opportunity offered by the EPSR for civil society to engage and make things happen.

Dr. Katherine Duffy (EAPN UK), called on governments to design good legislation frameworks before the social costs of the changing labour market will be too high. Civil society should engage to push for more social policies and of better quality.

Hubertus Arndt (Sec-Gen), acknowledged the importance of capacity building, including through EU support, but recalled subsidiarity and Member States' autonomy. He underlined that the shared proclamation of the Pillar by the EP, the Council and the Commission signalled the fact that the Pillar and its implementation are not exclusively a task for the European Commission. In view of policy-making, he underlined the strategic importance of strengthening basic skills, which are crucial for finding a good job, for preventing poverty, for personal development as well as for engagement in society and democracy.

Judy McKnight (EESC), underlined the importance of civil society campaigns for concrete actions under the Pillar. She also acknowledged the importance of good-quality information, both in daily lives of people and in policy-making, and the importance to advocate for accurate information.

Marina Monaco (ETUC), highlighted the importance of building on the Pillar to deal with changes in the labour market, to mainstream inclusiveness and sustainability. She also underlined the importance of enhancing participation of civil society in EU governance and policymaking processes.

Conny Reuter (SOLIDAR), drew conclusions from speeches and remarks from the audience. Key messages from the side-event are:

1. The future of employment must ensure meaningful, quality employment and adequate social protection.
2. The EU must work to make sure that technology really improves the quality of employment, and that digital services are at the service of people and not the other way around.
3. The European Pillar of Social Rights is an important opportunity to carry out meaningful actions to guarantee adequate social rights to all people across Europe.
4. Social partners and civil society are vital to push for meaningful action under the EPSR and have the right to be adequately funded.