

Working group 4:

Social inclusion in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy: what is missing?

Background

If the EU is to succeed in reducing the number of people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 20 million, policy actors at all levels need to ensure coherence in implementing the economic, fiscal, social and employment policies they have at their disposal to promote social inclusion. This means that for measures to tangibly address inequalities, implementation will need to involve EU institutions and bodies, Member States and civil society organisations. It will also need to include those who are most affected.

Eurostat data show that the share of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion rose slightly between the time the Europe 2020 strategy was launched in 2010 and 2014. This was partly due to the effects of the economic and financial crisis. Despite high rates of child poverty, the European Semester has, until now, only partially addressed the situation of children. This led the European Parliament and civil society organisations to identify deficiencies in the scope and content of the European Semester. The European Parliament therefore called on the European Commission to make the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion visible and explicit at all stages of the European Semester and to add a child poverty target to the Europe 2020 strategy.

Eurostat data show that 25.4% of women in 2013 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion across the EU compared with 23.6% of men. Already in 2011, the European Parliament recognised “that ‘the feminisation of poverty’ means that women have a higher incidence of poverty than men, that their poverty is more severe than that of men and that poverty among women is on the increase”. According to Eurostat, the population groups most vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion are women, children, young people, people living in single-parent households, less educated people and migrants.

Objectives

The workshop sought to discuss existing initiatives and practices to foster social inclusion in order to identify how to transfer what works best to other settings. In doing so, the working group aimed to clarify the fundamental rights dimension and links that exist between the Europe 2020 strategy, the European Semester, the European Structural and Investment Funds, and the European Pillar of Social Rights. Tackling child poverty and the gender dimension of poverty were used as case studies in this working group.

Speakers

- Beate Winkler, Author, painter
- Therese Murphy, Head of Operations, European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)
- Jana Hainsworth, President, Social Platform – The Platform for European Social NGOs
- Yekaterina Chzhen, Social Policy and economic specialist, UNICEF Innocenti Research Center
- Evelyn Collins, Chief Executive, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- Paul Lindquist, member, Committee of the Regions

Main messages

1. The narrative on poverty in societal discourse need to change. This should be done by making a stronger link to equality when discussing social inclusion. For example, by using language that promotes social progress rather than using language that focuses mainly on the economic crisis.
2. The EU needs to develop more precise and targeted benchmarks in the areas of growth and quality employment, adequate income support, and universal access to quality services if it is to meet the objectives of the “Social Europe”.
3. Those developing social policies, as well as economic and financial policies relevant to inclusion at EU or Member State level should involve concerned parties more directly and meaningfully. For example, children, older people, people in situations of vulnerability, local authorities, equality bodies, etc.

Promising practices

- A study to assess the social care needs to enable it to respond to these needs in a timely fashion, Danish government
- An ex ante impact assessment of legislation that could affect the lives of children, Irish government.

Next steps

- The European Commission should propose strengthening the European Semester through the new European Pillar of Social Rights by ensuring that the pillar introduces new legislation on minimum pay, for example.
- Everyone should help change the narrative on:
 - poverty in societal discourse by making a stronger link to equality when discussing social inclusion. This could include using language that promotes social progress rather than using language that focuses mainly on the economic crisis, for example.

- how age(ing) is perceived in society. This could include how active participation is viewed in society or the relationship between people of different generations.
- The European Commission should introduce ex ante conditionalities for all EU funds, similarly to those for the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF).
- EU Institutions and Member States should involve the private sector more directly in the further development of the “Social Europe”.