

19 January 2009

**Social Platform contribution
to the Informal EPSCO Council
Luhacovice, Czech Republic, 22-24 January 2009**

Social Platform is an alliance of 40 Pan-European NGO networks fighting for social justice

On the economic and social crisis

What we think

- Although we welcome a debate on mobility, a social crisis is currently developing. This will require upfront leadership from European employment and social affairs ministers, and must be given absolute priority.
- We support the direction of the December EPSCO Council's conclusions, and welcome the call to extend the European Economic Recovery Plan to include considerations on social protection and inclusion.
- Europe's strength when confronting the economic crisis is indeed its social model: Social protection systems, services of general interest, employment protection, and social and civil dialogue provide a cushion as well as a springboard for people and country affected by the crisis.
- It is crucial that the EU has an ethical global perspective. It must be at the forefront of driving forward a new financial regulatory framework and a better articulation between economic and social/employment objectives.

What we propose

To the EPSCO Council in March

- Call for social protection and social inclusion to become pillars of the revised European Recovery Plan that will be adopted during the Spring Council 2009.
- Establish a roadmap for the implementation of the active inclusion recommendation through the Open Method of Coordination and the European Employment Strategy.

To Member States

- Establish or reinforce adequate minimum income schemes, irrespective of people's chances of participating in the labour market. This is vital to enable people to survive during the current economic crisis, when many are losing already precarious jobs, often without adequate compensation or protection.
- Focus attention and efforts on people with low skills and those with temporary contracts. These people are most affected by the economic crisis, and often are the first to be ejected from the labour market or have the greatest difficulty in entering it.
- Don't backtrack on the commitments you have made on social, health, housing and education expenses: these are investments not costs.
- Launch a broad stakeholder debate at national and EU level, including associations of people facing exclusion and discrimination, to ensure the design and implementation of effective recovery packages.

To the European Commission

- Ensure that the European Social Fund supports social inclusion projects rather than focusing only on narrow labour market oriented projects. This means, for example, supporting projects in relation to the three pillars of the recently-adopted recommendation on active inclusion.

On the Working Time Directive

What we think

- We disagree with the compromise reached by the Council under the Slovenian Presidency, as it allows for the possibility of an increase above 48 weekly working hours. This jeopardizes the reconciliation of work and family life, equality between men and women the health of the working population, and deepens social inequalities.
- We welcome the European Parliament's vote in plenary of December 17, 2008, where it was decided that there should be no exceptions to the 48-hours maximum working time.

What we propose

To the EPSCO Council

- Work closely with all relevant stakeholders, including civil society organisations, to ensure that the directive improves the quality of jobs, guarantees work life balance and equality. Particular attention should be paid to care workers who reside at work, to ensure that the directive applies to them while keeping in consideration the situation of elderly people or people living with disabilities that require constant assistance.

On mobility

What we think

- For many people, moving is not a choice but a necessity driven by economic hardship. This is particularly true for EU Member States with no adequate minimum schemes, high unemployment and/or poor employment standards.
- Mobility is experienced differently depending on gender, age, socioeconomic background and level of qualifications. Mobility does not only impact people that are moving but also their families and community.
- The absence of a defined minimum set of rights across Member States and the complexities in transferring rights (e.g. pension) remain a core obstacle to the mobility of people. In particular the gap in the length and payment of maternity leaves is extremely wide across member States.
- Moving to a different country may mean leaving children in the country of origin. An increasing number of children are growing up without their parents (the so-called “de facto orphan”): in a major emigration country like Poland, in the last two years 140,000 children have been placed in social orphanages. 500,000 couples are living apart in different countries.
- A serious “brain drain” in the EU’s health workforce is taking place from Eastern to Western Europe, while the increasing demand for these services due to social and demographic changes is felt across the whole continent.
- Roma communities are highly mobile throughout Europe, but suffer everywhere from segregation and discrimination.
- The impact of the crisis is squeezing migrant workers’ rights – with the first rounds of redundancies, priority is being given to keeping national workers. The first to be hit are third country nationals, then EU migrants, forcing them to return home with worsening conditions. An alternative risk is of further undercutting wage levels.
- Associations are often on the frontline to support the arrival and integration of people in host societies and explain to them how to access their rights. This includes the dissemination of information but also advocacy work to combat discrimination on the basis of nationality.

What we propose

To the European Commission

- Make a public list and take actions against countries that do not provide adequate minimum income scheme and decent/quality work in breach of the international and EU human rights and social *acquis*.

- Provide figures on: the “brain drain” phenomenon in social and health services, the increase in demands in the EU 27 linked to social and demographic changes and the workforce that will be needed. Make recommendations on a strategy for this sector underlining its growth, jobs and social cohesion potential.
- Promote the mobility of all socio-economics groups and expand the scope of mobility programmes accordingly (e.g. providing opportunities for people in vocational training, volunteers, entrepreneurs, employees or artists - as recommended by the Commission’s High Level Expert Forum on Mobility)

To Member States

- Establish or reinforce adequate minimum income schemes and improve access to jobs and the quality of those jobs, so that people do not need to migrate to get a decent life. This is particularly true for Roma communities.
- Provide support for partners and all forms families that are relocating (EU and third-country nationals) e.g. via language courses, access to education, life-long learning training, care services for dependent relatives.
- Recognise and support the role of associations that are supporting EU and third-country nationals in understanding and accessing their rights.
- Adopt directives that contribute to establish a ‘floor of rights’ to benefit European citizens or/and ensure transferability of their rights i.e. the directive on maternity leave, directive on the fight against discrimination, directive on equal treatment between men and women for self-employed workers and assisting spouses, directive on parental leave and the portability of pensions’ rights directive.
- Develop and strengthen access to social security systems throughout the EU through analysis of the eligibility criteria (which vary in different Member States, for example in relation to maternity leave provisions) with a view to removing barriers to mobility.
- Allow access to emergency services (such as hostels for the homeless) to EU and third-country nationals that have lost their workers’ status and find themselves in a situation of severe exclusion.

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