

Poverty in Europe :

A learning and working Europe





# ■ Background Information

## ■ Caritas Europa Poverty Papers 2010

This paper “A Learning and Working Europe” is part of a series of Poverty Papers that Caritas Europa started to edit in the year 2010, European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. The series consists of a core paper called “[Poverty among us](#)” (also available in Bulgarian, Czech, German, Spanish, French, Croatian, Italian, Dutch, Polish, Portuguese, Slovenian and Romanian) and of a number of related papers, like this one. These related papers are downloadable from the Internet. There is also a “How to use” paper called “[Poverty in Europe: Methods for Youth](#)”.

### How to use this paper?

This paper describes the importance of employment and work in the light of Christian social teaching. It deepens the consideration of the core paper regarding the provision of social protection and social welfare through the labour market as one of the three pillars of the social welfare model we are using. Caritas colleagues can use this paper to advocate for (better) policy measures concerning employment (as well as education) in their country. One can select and focus on one or more of the policy areas (work, employment, lifelong learning education, active inclusion, flexicurity, etc) and use the recommendations in one’s advocacy work. The conclusions can be made more concrete by adding practical examples (in relation to those enumerated in the introduction) from any country.

This paper is also part of the Zero Poverty campaign [www.zeropoverty.org](http://www.zeropoverty.org).

The interactive website, the use of promotional materials in the campaign, and the organisation of public anti-poverty events are all activities that can and should be combined with the contents of this paper and its messages.

This paper “A Learning and Working Europe” was written by staff members of the secretariat of Caritas Europa as well as by staff of national member organisations across Europe: Florentina Constantin, Patrick De Bucquois, Sabine Depew, Karolin Hartmann, Adriana Opromolla, Miriam Pikaar, Felix Miguel Sánchez, Robert Urbé and Peter Verhaeghe. I am grateful for this piece of work. It represents the state of reflection within Caritas in Europe at this moment

Brussels, October 2010

Erny Gillen

President of Caritas Europa

# ■ A learning and working Europe

*Ora et Labora* - The Holy Benedict

*Every worker is worth more than gold* - Cardinal Cardijn

*Through work man must earn his daily bread and contribute to the continual advance of science and technology and, above all, to elevating unceasingly the cultural and moral level of the society within which he lives in community with those who belong to the same family.* - John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*

## ■ 1. Introduction

The present paper will develop on the section of the Caritas Europa core poverty paper “Poverty among us” devoted to work as one of the three main pillars of social welfare<sup>1</sup>: however, it was deemed useful to also include education and training as major determinants of decent work.

Indeed, education and training go beyond “knowledge” and beyond “economy”. They are meant to contribute to the “formation of the heart”<sup>2</sup> without which there is no true humanity.

However, within the limited scope of the present paper, we shall concentrate on a few issues only in order to contribute to a better recognition of the central role of work and of training in Europe and in the world.

When addressing these issues, one immediately stumbles over the definition of “work”. In our understanding, “work” cannot be limited to “employment” and “paid work”. It is also about participation, exchange and recognition. It is about self-esteem and meaningfulness.

Among the current mantras of economists we find the narrative on “Active labour market policies” (ALMP). Although some interesting developments have taken place against this background, namely through measures aiming at giving people with difficulties the opportunity to perform useful activities or even to access the labour market, generally speaking it remains true that the idea behind the concept of ALMP appeared as being largely problematic. Very often it has legitimised approaches aiming at “activating” people rather than empowering them, sometimes even suggesting that “any job is better than no job at all”... Very often also, it has contributed to stigmatizing individuals rather than addressing more fundamental and systemic issues linked to the way growth, jobs and the whole economy were considered.

In contrast, many different experiences are and have been made, including in Caritas member organizations that show that in every human being created “to the image” of God, there is an aspiration to participate in the continuous work of creation. But no credible policy towards work can deliver unless this dimension of human beings is duly considered – i.e. unless we “put people first”, building on their “capabilities”<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See the social welfare model presented in « Poverty among us », Part A, Chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> See *Deus Caritas Est*, 31.

<sup>3</sup> Amartya K. Sen (1985). *Commodities and Capabilities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

In other terms, it is also a matter of vision and values, a vision which is described within the caritas family as “a civilization of love”<sup>1</sup> and, in more mundane terms, “social cohesion”.

Among the concrete examples of realizations or programmes where Caritas organizations are or were involved, let us mention:

- o Exchange of experiences of social projects with an employment dimension where people experiencing or having experienced poverty were given the possibility to express their own assessment of the projects;
- o Personal and social development trainings.
- o Involvement in “work integration social enterprises” (“WISE”), which are considering (re)integration in the labour market as one of their main “raison d’être”
- o The provision of support schemes when it is not possible to develop employment measures, in order to cater for individual or family needs.
- o Cooperation and networking with other private and public entities.

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<sup>1</sup> See “To Live Solidarity and Partnership in Europe and in the World”, the Caritas Europa Strategy 2005-2010

## ■ 2. Visions and Values

“Since on the seventh day God was finished with the work he had been doing, he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken.”<sup>1</sup>

In our Christian vision, everything starts with a God who creates heaven and earth, a creation which is also defined as “work”. Therefore, work is given a major status as a divine activity and as the possibility it offers to participate to this divine activity.

On the other hand, we can see, after the original sin, how work becomes associated with suffering (“By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat”)<sup>2</sup> .

However, whatever can be said about work, “the primary basis of the value of work is man himself, who is its subject. This leads immediately to a very important conclusion of ethical nature: however true it may be that man is destined for work and called to it, in the first place “work is for man” and not “man for work”<sup>3</sup>.

The same is applicable to education and training. Training is never an end in itself. It is rather an instrument aiming at fully answering to our vocation to “love the Lord, [y]our God, with all [y]our heart, with all [y]our soul, and with all [y]our mind” and to “love [y]our neighbour like [y]oursel[ves]”<sup>4</sup> . Therefore the insistence of the Catholic Church on the “formation of the heart” already mentioned. In other terms, knowledge and wisdom should not be considered as simple “add-on’s” to Christian identity and to Christian love: they are an integral part of it.

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1 See Gn 2,2

2 See Gn 3, 19

3 See John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, 6.

4 See Mt 22, 37-38

## ■ 3. Learning and working in Europe

### [3.1. What do we mean by “work”?](#)

In the Caritas Europa core poverty paper “Poverty among us”, work is identified as one of the main pillars of welfare, together with “the Welfare State” and “the family”. By doing so, the analytical framework emphasizes the role of “formal” work in the framework of the labour market.

Such an analysis has to be extended and further refined. In particular, it is obvious that care provided within the family, or even outside the family in volunteering activities, deserves the same respect as “paid work” within the context of employment relations, including self-employment. Beyond respect, however, it may also deserve financial or similar consideration, as is already the case in some countries and under specific conditions.

In addition to this, we also need to carefully consider the increasingly complex organisation of our societies and their evolution towards mainly “services-based” economies, with the consequence that the output of one’s work can most often hardly be seen.

This double extension of the definition of “work” makes it clear that what is ultimately at stake in any economic appraisal is not so much the distinction between “work” and “activity”, but rather the entitlements which are within the reach of any person in order to earn the goods and services he or she needs in the broad meaning of the term<sup>1</sup>.

To a large extent, the same goes for training : the distinction between education, formal training and other forms of training is indeed difficult to make, as it also heavily depends on the recognition given to specific training schemes and experiences, hence the present debates on “life-long learning” or on the French “Validation des acquis de l’expérience” (recognition of experience-based competences). This is even more the case in societies where sciences and technologies, together with increasing life expectancies, require more constant upgrading of skills and knowledge than before.

For those reasons, it is essential that different channels and settings are put in place in order to simultaneously achieve the following objectives:

- Provide decent living conditions to those who otherwise would not benefit from them, including through the imposition of an adequate minimum wage level;

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<sup>1</sup> Amartya K. Sen (1985). *Commodities and Capabilities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

- o Contribute to society through work and/or activities which not only provide monetary added value, but also social profit ;
- o Fight undeclared employment, which is a plague for individuals as well as for the whole economy. In all European countries, such channels and settings exist, often supported by European instruments such as the structural Funds. However, they are also very often under pressure from a financial point of view as well as for a more “content-wise” reason: sometimes, they are accused of contributing to the fragmentation of the labour market and/or of distorting competition.

It is essential to recognize that such mechanisms face the particularly difficult task of simultaneously providing high-quality goods and services while, at the same time, providing jobs for people facing specific difficulties. Such a challenge can only be successfully overcome through specific instruments, but also through education and training. This logically leads us to the next issue.

### 3.2. Working and learning in the European Union

A key reference on working and learning in the European Union for the last 10 years has undoubtedly been the so-called “Lisbon strategy” adopted in 2000 which aimed at making Europe “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”<sup>1</sup>.

Recognizing the importance of “knowledge” was an important step, even though, as we have seen, “learning” means more than “knowledge” – and even though “learning” does not primarily have to do with “growth”.... Similarly, the emphasis put on the quality of jobs, in line with the International Labour Organization’s insistence on “decent work”, broadens the scale to the appropriate level.

There was thus huge disappointment among the civil society<sup>2</sup> when the newly elected European Commission decided, in 2005, to “revise” the Lisbon strategy and to focus mainly on “growth and jobs”.

In contrast with this disappointing evolution, the European Union also launched a more promising process under the name “Active inclusion”<sup>3</sup> which aims at considering employment as a means towards social cohesion rather than as an end in itself. In order to do so, this strategy complements access to employment with the following two additional policy priorities:

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1 Presidency conclusions of the 23-24 March 2000 Lisbon European Council, see [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm) .

2 See in particular Social Platform’s press releases : ” “Growth and jobs” is not sufficient to achieve social cohesion” (<http://www.socialplatform.org/News.asp?news=15620>) and its more recent brochure for the post-Lisbon: “From ‘Growth and Jobs’ to ‘Sustainable and Social’”

3 COM (2007) 620 final “Modernising social protection for greater social justice and economic cohesion: taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market” – see <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0620:FIN:EN:PDF>

- o Access to quality social services
- o Adequate income support

The “active inclusion” agenda can be seen as a complement, but sometimes also as an alternative to the already mentioned “active labour market policies” (ALMP). For some, it does not question the relevance of ALMP but rather complements them in order to enlarge their scope to people who are remote from the labour market. For others, it rebalances policy priorities by paying more attention to fundamental rights, including the right to social protection, while also recognising the importance of access to the labour market.

The Lisbon agenda has now been replaced by the so-called Europe 2020 Strategy, which is in clear continuity with its predecessor.

### [3.3. The Europe 2020 Strategy](#)

The Europe 2020 Strategy aims at setting up a strategy for a “Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe”<sup>1</sup>. “Smart” is meant to include knowledge and innovation; “inclusive” is meant to boost employment and reinforce social cohesion.

In this respect, the Europe 2020 Strategy does not differ very much from the previous one, especially if we consider the latter’s 2005 version and its refocus on “growth and jobs”. In both cases, the strategies include targets in terms of employment rate as well as in areas linked to education and research (i.e. “early school leavers” rate). The main difference lies in the increasing pressure put on the Member States to comply with the 5 “headline targets” of the Europe 2020 Strategy, including a new target on poverty reduction.

This target is expressed in absolute amounts (“bringing at least 20 million people out of poverty” from 2010 to 2020), but instead of the original 80 million people estimated “at risk of poverty”, the final political agreement now considers 120 million people including, in addition to the latter, people facing material deprivation and people living in jobless households – which links the poverty agenda with the “growth and jobs” agenda.

The headline targets are to be implemented through 10 guidelines of which the first six ones are “economic” (“Broad Economic Policy Guidelines” – BEPG’s) and the remaining four ones, below, are on employment. The most relevant guideline for poverty is guideline 10 which states, in its present wording<sup>2</sup>, that “Member States’ efforts to reduce poverty should be aimed at promoting full participation in society and

<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission “EUROPE 2020 - A strategy for Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” (COM (2010)2020 - Brussels, 3.3.2010) - <http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Proposal for a Council decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States Part II of the Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines {SEC(2010) 488 final} - <http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/Brochure%20Integrated%20Guidelines.pdf>

economy and extending employment opportunities making full use of the European Social Fund. Efforts should also concentrate on ensuring equal opportunities, including through access to affordable, sustainable and high quality services and public services (including online services, in line with guideline 4) and in particular health care.

Member States should put in place effective anti-discrimination measures. Equally, to fight social exclusion, empower people and promote labour market participation, social protection systems, lifelong learning and active inclusion policies should be enhanced to create opportunities at different stages of people's lives and shield them from the risk of exclusion.

Social security and pension systems must be modernised to ensure that they can be fully deployed to ensure adequate income support and access to healthcare — thus providing social cohesion — whilst at the same time remaining financially sustainable. Benefit systems should focus on ensuring income security during transitions and reducing poverty, in particular among groups most at risk from social exclusion, such as one-parent families, minorities, people with disabilities, children and young people, elderly women and men, legal migrants and the homeless. Member States should also actively promote the social economy and social innovation in support of the most vulnerable."

However, although an agreement has already been reached on the BEPG's, the final agreement on the employment guidelines is only foreseen at a later stage.

Finally, this strategy is meant to be implemented through 7 additional "flagship initiatives" including a "poverty platform" which is still to be defined. This "poverty platform" aims at ensuring "social and territorial cohesion such that the benefits of growth and jobs are widely shared and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are enabled to live in dignity and take an active part in society".

#### ■ 4. From an “activated” to a “knowledge-based” social model

In designing its “2020” strategy, the European Union has made important steps to address some of the weaknesses of the previous strategy. Furthermore, it has rightly kept the focus on skills and innovation, which are undoubtedly important drivers of social and economic progress.

However, the following two main weaknesses are still there:

o The EU 2020 strategy remains inspired by the “trickle down” theories which state that any progress made in the field of growth and competition necessarily end up benefiting the whole society. In contrast, figures show that, in spite of economic growth, poverty has not been reduced and inequalities have grown in most of the EU Member States. It is therefore legitimate to question this “mainstream” model: should we not concentrate on investing in an enabling environment for social and economic progress, instead of on what appear to be symptoms rather than real causes?<sup>1</sup>

o Although skills and innovation are still high on the agenda, they reflect what specialists often describe as the “knowledge-intensive”, rather than the “knowledge-extensive” growth paradigm<sup>2</sup>, i.e. a system focused on research, development and innovation rather than on basic skills and provisions such as literacy and pre-school education programmes. As Nicaise points out, while some of the targets of the Lisbon strategy which are more closely related to productivity have shown rapid progress, such as the number of people graduating in engineering, other not less important achievements in the field of education have been persistently lagging behind (early school leavers, number of people completing secondary education, participation to lifelong learning). Some indicators have even deteriorated since 2000 (“low achievement in reading”).

Even though reference is mainly made in this document to the European Union, the thinking behind has its roots on a much larger scale, not the least in OECD documents such as its 1994 “Jobs study”<sup>3</sup>. In contrast, institutions such as the Council of Europe have developed concepts and tools which foster participation and citizenship in a much more promising way, although their relevance from the point of view of employment is less direct<sup>4</sup>.

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1 In addition, much can also be said on “alternatives to GDP” as a way of measuring social progress. See on this the “Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress” [http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/documents/rapport\\_anglais.pdf](http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/documents/rapport_anglais.pdf)

2 NICAISE, Ides (2010), EU2020 and social inclusion. Re-connecting growth and social inclusion in Europe, unpublished (available at <http://www.acw.be/EU-seminarie/docs/Ides%20Nicaise-Broken%20connections.doc>)

3 <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/42/51/1941679.pdf>

4 See in particular, its initiatives in the field of social cohesion [http://www.coe.int/t/DG3/default\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/DG3/default_en.asp)

## ■ 5. Training, employment and migration

Some general observations also need to be made with respect to migrants, since most studies and analyses only very partially address their specific situation.

Migration is a global issue, There is a fundamental human right to migrate and also a right to stay in a country where one can live, work and have a family. We believe in a global approach to migration issues.

Too often, in our societies, migration policies are designed from the utilitarian point of view in relation to migrants' contribution to fill gaps on the labour market, to the sustainability of our social protection systems and to address demographic challenges, while not or insufficiently taking into account challenges faced by migrants in receiving societies. Migration policies are heavily influenced by security concerns, while the social challenges are addressed only when conflicts emerge.

Regarding the EU employment and migration policies, we perceive little interest by the member states to create and harmonise legal labour channels for migrants, except for the highly qualified ("Blue Card"). On the one hand, the EU considers regular migration as an ideal answer to our current challenges, but on the other hand the policies developed and implemented are not reflecting this idea. Budgets for controlling migration flows are huge compared to those invested in setting up regular channels for legal migration.

One of the main consequences of this situation is the reality of irregular migration of people who arrive in our territory, often after an awful journey. Many migrants and asylum seekers are in a very insecure situation, not only in terms of residence-related rights, but also in terms of employment. In particular, the underground economy makes extensive use of migrants in irregular situations, not the least as domestic workers for wealthy families.

The presence of migrants is very often seen as a problem rather than as an opportunity and as an openness to other cultures and other ways of living. Migrants represent a serious challenge for very stratified – and often rigid - social systems which prioritise "intensive" at the expense of "extensive" knowledge, as seen above. It is particularly unacceptable that the proposed guideline 10 of the EU 2020 strategy only mentions that "legal" migrants are deserving our attention: unacceptable first and foremost because no distinction should be made between "legal" or "illegal" migrants, but between migrants in "regular" or "irregular" situations; secondly, because such a discrimination is contrary to the high profile EU claims in this respect.

To address such challenges, more is needed than policies focusing on growth and jobs. Migration is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. It can only be properly looked at from a global point of view together with geopolitics, climate change and energy policy, agriculture, trade and international financial and monetary governance systems as well as (civil) wars, natural and man made disasters. At the same time, the challenge of integration of migrants in our societies should be mainstreamed in all relevant policy areas. Migrants in our societies are not one single, homogeneous group, but belong to several minority groups in our societies, of which many are disadvantaged or socially excluded on basis of ethnic origin, nationality, level of qualifications, religion, etc. Disadvantaged migrants' groups deserve particular attention in the strategies promoting social inclusion, developed in relevant policy areas such as education, youth and culture, employment and social affairs etc.

## ■ 6. Decent work, corporate social responsibility, socially responsible public procurement

Before concluding, it is useful to cross the European Union's boundaries and examine some issues of a more global nature. Decent work is definitely one of those. It is described by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as follows<sup>1</sup>:

"Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men."

In a similar vein, the concepts of "corporate social responsibility" and "socially responsible public procurement" have developed, inside<sup>2</sup> as well as outside<sup>3</sup> the European Union.

Those concepts may in no way be limited to issues of employment conditions, but are helpful to develop frameworks and behaviours that better take into account specific requirements linked to the quality of work.

One of the most conflicting issues around those concepts is whether they may be limited to a mere voluntary approach. Without entering this complex debate, it is important to note that there are different possible "degrees" of enforcing a rule, as well as different levels. Undersigning a voluntary code of conduct with little incentive for complying is less demanding than softening the European rules on Public Procurement to allow for some flexibility with regard to working conditions.

Similarly, one might also mention here the sensitive (European) debate on the working time directive, where, to date, legal initiatives have not succeeded in breaking through the apparently irreconcilable positions.

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1 <http://www.ilo.org/global/Themes/Decentwork/lang--en/index.htm>

2 [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sustainable-business/corporate-social-responsibility/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sustainable-business/corporate-social-responsibility/index_en.htm)

3 <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Embeddingen.pdf>

## ■ 7. Conclusions

From a general point of view, one can only take stock of the narrow scope of the European narrative on work and training, partly due to the fact that the Member States only agreed to entrust the European Union with limited powers in this respect.

However, the success of the Erasmus programme for the exchange of students across Europe shows that the European Union is able to build a coherent and forward-looking framework in areas where there is a political will to do so, even in areas where it has limited and fragmented competences<sup>1</sup>.

Numerous other “success stories” can be found among the many programmes supported by the Structural funds, in particular the European Social Fund and its various programmes such as Equal and Horizon.

Too often, political priorities in Europe are dominated by short-term and economic objectives, instead of by more ambitious programmes aiming at empowering people by facilitating access to training and life-long learning for all.

There is therefore an urgent need for a new political impetus aiming at removing barriers and rigidities also in the field of education and training, where national traditions very often prevent from tapping more fully into the rich potential of the European diversity.

Similarly, employment policies are too often dominated by narrow considerations, giving room to an excessive use of conditionality and relying too much on the necessary flexibility of workers rather than addressing the rigidities stemming from the lack of European integration.

The EU concept of “flexicurity” is illustrative in this respect. Although it may be interpreted as a situation where the right balance is struck between flexibility and security, in practical terms, its sponsors did not succeed in building confidence and in creating the conditions for a renewed commitment towards a truly inclusive and integrated labour market in Europe. As recent decisions by the European Court of Justice have shown<sup>2</sup>, it is far from obvious that social rights have precedence on internal market rules.

Moreover, it is also clear that on many of those issues, social dialogue has to be complemented by a more extensive use of civil dialogue. When issuing its communication on “active inclusion”, the European Commission had to fight hard to open its consultation to civil society, rather than limiting it only to social partners.

Finally, one should also be aware of the importance of those issues at the global level. When advocating for a “European social model”, characterized by a respect of the rule of law, the promotion of fundamental rights, the existence of strong social protection systems based on solidarity, and the support of social economy initiatives, one should keep in mind that it only makes sense if this model remains a reference inside as well as

<sup>1</sup> The same goes for other schemes like “Comenius” for pupils, “Leonardo” for youngsters in vocational training and “Grundtvig” for adults

<sup>2</sup> See a.o. the “Viking” and “Laval” cases: CJCE, 11/12/2007, aff. C-438/05, The International Transport Workers’ Federation & The Finnish Seamen’s Union / Viking Line ABP & OÜ Viking Line Eesti and CJCE, 18/12/2007, aff. C-341/05, Laval un Partneri Ltd / Svenska Byggnadsarbetareförbundet e.a.

outside the European Union. In this respect, the Lisbon Treaty, by granting legal personality to the European Union, will make it possible for it to adhere to the Council of Europe's Convention on Human Rights, which opens new perspectives in this respect.

On the other hand, its new "horizontal social clause"<sup>1</sup> also constitutes a new tool for advancing social considerations in all its policy fields. The future of our "working and learning" Europe will also depend on the use we make of them.

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<sup>1</sup> See art. 9 of the Lisbon treaty

## ■ 8. Recommendations

1. As this document is being completed, there are still alarming signs that the open method of coordination in the field of social protection and social inclusion (OMC spsi) might not take place any further. This would be a very disappointing signal during the European year against poverty and social inclusion, as well as a sign of inconsistency with the poverty target of the EU2020 programme. Finally, it should be highlighted that without such a driving force, the EU2020 strategy misses the opportunity of building on the involvement of millions of citizens and civil society organisations that are ready to contribute to the European project and provide useful information to the European decision-makers. Therefore our first recommendation is to make the OMC spsi a reality while improving it by reinforcing its overall governance, including its interlink with the Europe 2020 Strategy.

2. Throughout all its programmes, the European Union calls for improving skills. However, recent figures seem to acknowledge that basic skills, such as literacy, are worsening rather than improving. Even though reducing early drop-out rates has been chosen as one of the headline targets of the EU2020 programme, more remains to be done in this respect. Therefore our second recommendation is: make extensive knowledge a key objective of social inclusion as well as education programmes.

3. Finally, there is a tendency to re-direct structural funds towards business-supporting programmes and technological innovation at the expense of sustainable development, including social cohesion and environment-friendly policies. Therefore our third objective reads: ensure that all regulations on structural funds are carefully screened along the lines of the social impact assessment rules and principles.

4. Member states are increasingly using the wording of European policies like “active labour market policies”, “active inclusion” or “flexicurity” while limiting themselves to “activating measures” and “flexibilisation of labour law”. Therefore they are urged to implement these concepts fully according to their wider definition given in the respective European documents.

5. In the knowledge economy (and also in relation to the smart growth requested by the Europe 2020 strategy) more and more emphasis has to be put on education. Sound formal and informal education is also a good means to avoid unemployment whereas early school dropout often leads to weak chances on the labour market. Therefore member states should invest more in people, especially in their education albeit primary, secondary and tertiary, but also in early childhood education as well as in life long learning, and develop comprehensive programmes (including adequate budgetary means) in order to achieve the education goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

6. As for recommendations regarding migration issues please refer to the respective related Caritas Europa paper of the same series of poverty papers called “Invisible borders – a barrier to inclusion

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For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=327&langId=en>



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