

L'Europa dei diritti e dei doveri nell'ambito dell'opportunità

Poverty, inequalities and social exclusion in Europe



Class: 5A ITI of ISIS D'Aronco

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Introduction:

Although Europe is one of the world's richest regions, a significant part of its population do not have the resources they need for a decent life.

Nowadays there are 19 million poor people and 80 million people who live at risk of poverty in the EU. Living in poverty may result in a variety of problems, from not having enough money to spend on food and clothes to suffering poor housing conditions and even homelessness. Poverty also means having to cope with limited lifestyle choices that may lead to social exclusion.

The 16% of the population, and 19% of the children are currently at risk of poverty, since they live on an income below 60% of the median household income of their own country. 17% of Europeans suffer from material deprivation, which means that their living conditions are severely affected by a lack of resources. Social transfers reduce the risk of poverty by 38% on average in the EU, but this impact varies from less than 10% to nearly 60% across EU.

EU action has helped to create a consensus about the following key challenges:

- to eradicate child poverty by breaking the vicious circle of intergenerational inheritance
- to promote the active inclusion in the society and the labour market of the most vulnerable groups
- to ensure decent housing for everyone
- to overcome discrimination and increase the integration of people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and immigrants and other vulnerable groups
- to tackle financial exclusion and overindebtedness.

Since 2000, the European Union has provided, through the [open method of coordination](#), a framework for national strategy development as well as for policy coordination between EU countries on issues relating to poverty and social exclusion.

This coordinated action at European level is reflected in [national action plans](#). It encourages EU countries to examine their policies critically, and highlights how some perform well in certain areas, spurring on others to perform better. It also creates a better basis for policy making by involving NGOs, social partners, local and regional authorities and those working with people in poverty.

The European Commission provides financial support to relevant activities undertaken by a wide range of stakeholders.

Besides, the global crisis produces a daily increase of these figures. Thus, it is essential that EU's policies correspond to its founding values and represent the real EU. It's very important to replace economic growth priority with a new priority: social sustainable development.

That state of affairs is in marked contrast to the basic values of the European Union – solidarity, justice and social cohesion. Europeans are particularly attached to these three values. A 2007 Euro barometer poll showed that 37% of them rank social equality and solidarity among the three most important values to be maintained and strengthened in society today.

The European Union wants to ensure a decent life for its worst-off citizens and to stop others from sliding into poverty. It sees this as a moral and social but also economic priority. A dynamic economy and a socially just economy are perfectly compatible. After all, economic growth is needed to fund social assistance. Besides, at the same time, providing jobs for those who have so far been excluded, and reintegrating them into society, will help to boost the European Union's economic development.

Social policy is a matter for Member States. They are the ones who decide on the measures to be taken to combat poverty, inequalities and social exclusion.

However, national governments are increasingly aware that it is useful to coordinate their policies at the European level. This is reflected in the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), which makes the fight against social exclusion a specific aim of EU social policy. That fight has been carried into the field of action of the European Community, which "supports and complements the action of the Member States".

Concretely, the European Union intervenes in several ways :

- the Open Method of Coordination (OMC): it guides, encourages and assesses the Member States' national policies;
- mutual learning: it enables local or national administrations and associations to share their experiences and learn from each other;
- financial support: it contributes to the integration of people who are in difficulty and promotes mutual learning initiatives.



2010 – European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion:

In March 2000, European heads of state and government pledged to make “a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty” by 2010.

If the fight against poverty is to reach the decisive stage, everyone at all levels must be involved in and committed to action. That's why the EU has decided to make 2010 the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. Many events will be held across Europe calling for the recognition of everyone's basic right to live in dignity and be able to take an active part in society.

The guiding principle of the 2010 Year is to give voice to the concerns of people who have to live with poverty and social exclusion, and to inspire every European citizen and other stakeholders to engage with these important issues.

This Year also aims to challenge stereotypes and collective perceptions of poverty. By harnessing the EU's principles of solidarity and partnership, 2010 represents a clarion call to tackle the causes of poverty head-on in a bid to ensure everyone can play a full and active role in society.

The objectives of the European Year:

- **Recognition:** recognise the fundamental right of persons experiencing poverty and social exclusion to live in dignity and to take an active part in society
- **Shared responsibility and participation:** promote public support for social inclusion policies, emphasising collective and individual responsibility in combating poverty and social exclusion, and fostering commitment by all public and private actors
- **Cohesion:** promote a more cohesive society, where no one doubts that society as a whole benefits from the eradication of poverty
- **Commitment and practical action:** renew the pledge of the EU and its Member States to combat poverty and social exclusion, and involve all levels of authority in the pursuit of that aim

National and local events will take place in every EU Member State, plus Norway and Iceland. Activities will include awareness raising campaigns, workshops and information seminars in schools. Films, magazines and other information material will be produced to help people understand how poverty and social exclusion affect their communities, and for those directly affected, increase awareness of their rights.

Along with public figures, people who have experienced poverty will act as campaign ambassadors, which will help to raise visibility and credibility for the Year's activities and invite others to get involved.



Two European-level conferences will take place in January and December; an art initiative will build a bridge between people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and the creative world; while special training days will give the media and decision-makers fresh insight into these complex subjects.

The official closing ceremony is taking place on the 17 December in Brussels. The event, which is a high point of 2010, will be filled with political declarations, prizes, key interventions, presentation of national co-funded projects and much more.

The Conference (17 will be an opportunity for Member States to highlight one of the national co-funded projects that took place in the framework of the European Year. At the Project path session: "Sharing, learning, inspiring" participants will be able to learn more about what happened at national level by visiting the country stands. The projects are diverse in terms of their content and size, they go from theatre initiatives to conferences, to working with people experiencing poverty to stakeholders, often combining the two.

Throughout 2010 journalists from all over the participating countries submitted written and audiovisual entries to the European Year Journalist Award. The articles or audiovisual entries cover poverty and social exclusion. The winning national and EU entries can be consulted at the Journalist Award stand at the conference. The winner is Spain and was presented by Lesley-Anne Knight European Ambassador of the European Year.

The Employment Council declaration on the 2010 European Year will be signed by the Ministers present at the conference. It additionally hoped that the declaration will be included in European Council which will be taking place at the same time. This would be a strong signal to the commitment of the European Union leaders to put combating poverty and social exclusion at the top of the political agenda.

Eurochild hands over child poverty petition to european parliament and commission:



Throughout the 2010 European Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion, Eurochild ran its "End Child Poverty" campaign. The petition asks political leaders in Europe to do everything possible to end child poverty now. It was signed by some 14,000 people during the year. A delegation of children handed over the signed petition and their key messages to representatives of the European Parliament and the European Commission.

The children were ambassadors for the campaign in their own countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Portugal, and Wales, UK) during 2010. They represent organisations that work with and for children at risk of poverty and promote children's participation. Many of the children had already worked together in July 2010 when they agreed three key messages to tackle child poverty and met with many EU policy makers.

Meeting with the children, Commission President Barroso congratulated the children's efforts and emphasized his on-going commitment to EU efforts to reduce poverty and social exclusion. He agreed that children themselves have a valuable contribution to make, and their views and opinions should be taken seriously.

Social protection – a key tool to combat poverty:

Europe's social protection systems provide an essential safety net for people who face challenges like unemployment, ill health, poverty or old age.

The delivery of social protection varies across the European Union, but it usually takes the form of welfare benefits to cover things like unemployment, sickness and maternity, invalidity, the demands of old age, and family expenses.

Whatever the benefit, these payments can play a key role in ensuring that people living in poverty get a chance to live a dignified life.

What is more, social protection systems have been deployed to keep people from falling into poverty due to the recent recession, which has left thousands of Europeans without a job or with reduced incomes.

Work and support

The EU is committed to promoting closer cooperation between Member States as they set about modernising their social protection systems to face the challenges of today and tomorrow.

This includes sharpening up the role social protection plays in combating poverty and social exclusion. In 2008, the European Commission asked Member States to harness these systems as a means of developing policies to stimulate "active inclusion".

Active inclusion strategies centre around getting as many people as possible into the labour market while making sure those who are unable to work receive decent social support so they can lead fulfilling lives.

Active inclusion, as promoted by the Commission, is based around three common principles:

- Building inclusive labour markets that are open to everyone who is capable of working;
- Provision of adequate income support, which recognises a person's basic right to levels of social assistance and benefits that allow them to live in dignity and not be excluded; and
- Access to quality services, such as social assistance, employment and training services, housing support and social housing, childcare, long-term care and other health services.

Providing access to quality services plays a vital role in supporting the social and economic inclusion of groups at risk.

For example, good quality childcare and training services can help poorer single parents find a way back to the world of work. Meanwhile, good quality housing and health support can make huge difference to the quality of life of people with disabilities and others who are simply unable to work.

Combating health gaps

Health is a key issue in terms of delivering social protection and access to quality services, especially for people living in poverty. This is partly due to the prevalence of the 'health gap' that exists across society.

The level of health inequalities between different social groups and people living in different parts of Europe remains high. In fact the gap in life expectancy across the EU can reach up to eight years for women and 14 years for men, depending on the social group they belong to.

Health inequalities are the result of a mix of factors such as accessibility to decent healthcare, educational attainment, income levels, living and working conditions, and lifestyle behaviours (such as the choices people make in relation to diet, smoking and drinking).

Put simply, people with a poor education, low occupational status and limited incomes tend to have more health problems and die younger than their better-off contemporaries. All of this means that individuals living at risk of poverty are most likely to find themselves at the bottom of life expectancy league tables.

In October 2009, the Commission announced a series of measures to help Member States and other stakeholders tackle health inequalities.

Europe as a whole must improve its knowledge and understanding of the health gap issue, devise better methods for monitoring and data collection, and carefully assess how EU policies can be aligned to deliver better health outcomes.

Closing the gap will involve focusing more help on the regions and communities that are lagging behind.

To help disadvantaged people catch up, Member States should focus on providing better health services to those who need them the most, design better health promotion and health protection initiatives, and find ways to improve living and working conditions.

The Commission recently published its 'Second Biennial Report on social services of general interest'. The report covers issues such as health and social services from an employment and economic perspective, as well as attempts to improve the quality of social services across Europe.

