

The European Platform against Poverty and the role of faith-based organizations in the fight against poverty

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Europe2020: a renewed political commitment to fight poverty and exclusion

- **Three policy priorities:** smart growth, sustainable growth, inclusive growth
- **Five headline objectives:** Research, Employment Education, Energy, Poverty reduction
- **Seven flagship initiatives** to underpin and support the achievements of the objectives, among which a new European Platform against poverty
- **A social dimension “mainstreamed”** across various priorities.

The European Platform against Poverty

« Mission statement »

- All flagship initiatives are meant to catalyse progress towards the headline targets and should help triggering a wide range of actions at various level (national, EU and, where appropriate, international) to underpin them.
- The overarching objective of the Platform against poverty is *“to ensure 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.”*

Three areas of initiative for the Commission

- 1. Broaden and enhance cooperation among relevant actors with a view to foster commitment and reduce social exclusion...**
- 2. Design and implement programmes to promote social innovation...**
- 3. Undertake an assessment of the adequacy and sustainability of social protection systems...**

1. Broaden and enhance cooperation among relevant actors

- Enhancing cooperation, through peer-reviewing and exchange of good practice
- Fostering commitment by public and private players to reduce social exclusion
- Take concrete action, including through targeted support from the structural funds, notably the ESF

2. Design and implement programmes to promote social innovation

Some key areas where new solutions are needed:

- to provide innovative education, training, and employment opportunities for deprived communities (e.g. Roma)
- to fight discrimination (e.g. disabled)
- to develop a new agenda for migrants' integration

3. Adequacy and sustainability of social protection systems

The agenda for modernisation and reform of EU Social Protection Systems remains a central element in the fight against poverty and exclusion. It concerns the scope and design of:

- Tax-benefits systems**
- Social safety nets**
- Pension systems,**
- Health care systems**

Two areas for action at national level

To promote shared collective and individual responsibility in combating poverty and social exclusion

To define and implement measures addressing the specific circumstances of groups at particular risk (such as one-parent families, elderly women, minorities, Roma, people with a disability and the homeless)

Faith-based organisations: a rich tradition of knowledge and commitment

- **A “constitutional” vocation to help and the most vulnerable**
- **A powerful reality, well-rooted in the community.**
- **A presence not limited to urban areas but also covering remote rural areas, including areas where other NGOs may be unable of operate.**
- **A capacity to draw their voluntary membership in all segments of the local population**
- **A great familiarity with people needs**

A decade of EU social inclusion process: faith-based organisations from observers to actors

- **An increasing interest in participating in the European debate and becoming an active player in the development of EU policies for social inclusion**
- **The broadening and consolidation of EU networks of faith-based organisations (Caritas Europe, Eurodiaconia)**
- **The establishment of partnerships with the European Commission under the PROGRESS programme**

The value added of the partnership: lessons from the last decade

- **A specific attention to new forms of poverty and marginalisation (migrants, extreme poverty, homelessness, etc)**
- **An approach well rooted in the “European social model” that fully recognises the complementarity between non-governmental and governmental action**
- **A potential for social innovation (examples: Work with Roma in Italy, Church action on poverty in the UK and experience of participatory budgeting)**
- **An extraordinary capacity of mobilisation (cfr contribution to the European Year 2010)**

From 2010 to 2020: new horizons for engagement and cooperation

The European Year against poverty and exclusion has been successful in raising awareness and creating political commitment

It has already « delivered »: the social dimension in the Europe the European target for poverty reduction,

The Platform may be the second major delivery of the Year. It will open new ground for action and cooperation.

Thank you for your attention!

Poverty reduction may be an uphill struggle in the present economic conditions

- **Social expenditure (social protection, education and health) represents some 70% of public expenditure in the EU. Social protection benefits - excluding education and health – make up more than 40% of public expenditure.**
- **Efforts to curb public deficits and debt are inevitably affecting social expenditure. Therefore, public policies to address poverty and exclusion are facing unprecedented challenges.**
- **The social situation is likely to further deteriorate and poverty is likely to increase. The slight augmentation observed in poverty rates between 2007 and 2008 - from 16% to 17% - will certainly become more substantial in 2009-10.**

Conclusions

- The presence of a strong social dimension in the EU strategy – including a headline objective for poverty reduction – can help orienting reforms towards higher efficiency and equity.
- EU action to fight old and new forms of poverty and exclusion can build on the important experience developed over the last decade and on the momentum created by the European Year.
- The “Platform against poverty”, that the Commission has proposed as a flagship initiative in the Europe2020 strategy can become a tangible expression of EU solidarity towards the most vulnerable.
- The Platform could be the second, major, “delivery” of the European Year.