



**Response of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC of CEC) and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) to the Consultation of the European Commission on "Modernising social protection for greater social justice and economic cohesion: taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market (COM (2007) 620)".**

Brussels, 27 February 2008

We thank the European Commission for inviting all relevant actors to make suggestions to promote active inclusion in European societies. From the very beginning, the Christian churches have witnessed to a "privileged option for the poor" in the dedicated action of congregations, diaconal ministries, and a great many individuals. Churches and their related organisations are institutions based at grassroots level, closest to the people, and very often places of support for those who are falling through the safety nets of the social protection systems. They are actively involved in combating poverty and social exclusion by providing social services, education and vocational training, and offering support for people in need. The practice of solidarity is an essential element of Christian faith. In so doing, churches are bridge-builders for a socially cohesive society for all.

**1. Participation and Justice: A holistic active inclusion strategy from a Christian perspective**

The Churches in Europe support the European Commission's intention to come to a holistic active inclusion strategy - linking income support, active employment policies, education and access to quality services.

A just society must enable as many people as possible to recognise their individual talents, to develop them, and to use them productively for themselves and for others. A just society thus invests as much as possible in extending people's ability to organise their own lives and to enhance its dimensions of social concern and economic activity for all. Such a society is able to support its people in using their individual talents and abilities, to be as self-sufficient as possible in earning their own living, while being supportive of others. In today's economic system, this means that as many as possible should have gainful employment, to the extent that they seek such employment. At the same time, the important, multifaceted work in the family, for the needy and in society at large, should be appropriately recognised and integrated. "Participation and justice" means just this: the comprehensive involvement of everyone in education and training, economic activity, social security, and other expressions of solidarity. This does not limit active inclusion to only a few aspects of society, let alone to just one, e.g. receiving a just income or an income subsidy.

*More information:*

*Just Participation. Empowerment for Personal Responsibility. A Memorandum of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany on Poverty in Germany.*

<http://www.ekd.de/english/51808.html>

## **2. Active inclusion: More than financial transfers**

The fact that nearly 96% of total expenditure on social protection in the European Union's 27 member states are invested in social benefits<sup>1</sup> shows the unique importance of financial transfers to combat poverty and social exclusion. We would like to point out the many different factors, which may contribute to income situations of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. A holistic approach in active inclusion policies should take these aspects into account.

### **Making work pay: "Living wages"**

Low pay remains a very real problem for millions of workers across Europe. The existence of so many low paid jobs traps individuals and families in poverty, denying the opportunities and choices that should be available for everyone in a continent as wealthy as Europe. Churches and their related organisations are concerned about the growing number of people working without a sufficient income to live normal, participative lives. It is in the competence of the Member States to improve this situation by defining minimum wages and active labour market policies. We are concerned that the very diverse level of wages within EU Member States has the potential to endanger social peace in European societies and is a threat to the sustainable performance of the European economy. It is in the competence of the EU to promote social coherence in its Member States but also address this issues in its neighbourhood policies.

In response to the problem of low pay, a number of "living wage" campaigns have developed by the churches across Europe. One of the main aspects of a 'living wage' is that it is intended to provide an adequate level of pay that allows workers to provide for themselves and their families.

*More information:*

*Church Action on Poverty: Living wages.*

<http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/campaigns/livingwage>

*Contribution of the CEC Church and Society Commission in cooperation with the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and the European Contact Group (ECG) to the Green Paper on 'Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century'. - February 2007*

<http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/002507answertogreenpaperlabourlaw.pdf>

### **Non-financial assets**

For many poor people in Europe non-financial assets are often the strongest and most important assets they have, with dependence on families and social networks (among them parishes) standing out as crucial in combating the isolation they experience. These assets are

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<sup>1</sup> Eurostat: Total expenditure on social benefits - (% of total expenditure on social protection) 2005.  
<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=0&language=en&pcode=dae12048>.

really positive features in their lives, and an important element in their coping strategies with poverty and social exclusion.

*More information:*

*Sheena Orr, Greg Brown, Sue Smith, Catherine May, Mark Waters: When ends don't meet. Assets, vulnerability and livelihoods. An analysis of households on Thornaby-on-Tees. Church Action on Poverty and Oxfam. Great Britain 2006.*

[http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/resources/policyreports/WhenEndsdon\\_tmeet.pdf](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/resources/policyreports/WhenEndsdon_tmeet.pdf)

### **Inherited poverty**

Poverty is still inherited; and nothing influences the future of children so much as their level of social deprivation. Family policy, social policy and education policy in Europe should ensure that the social and/or ethnic origin of a child does not determine its future. We encourage EU Member States to fight child poverty by raising political awareness and by increasing the income of low income families, with measures providing a better dependability of employment and direct social transfers, the reduction of expenditure (for example through providing free child care), educational support and practical help for the well-being of children (such as support for local family networks and child protection services). Particular attention needs to be paid to supporting families with children, particularly single-parent families, as well as children with a migrant or ethnic minority background, in order to tackle the higher incidents of poverty found there.

*More information:*

*Response of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CSC of CEC), the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and of Eurodiaconia to the Consultation Paper from the Bureau of European Policy Advisers on "Europe's Social Reality" and the Communication "Towards a new social vision".*

<http://www.cec-kek.org>

### **Unmanaged debts**

For many people few financial assets are combined with high levels of unmanageable and unmanaged debt. The combination of high interest rates, inability to move beyond survival mode, lack of any assets, and mental health problems brought on by debt, affects women disproportionately. Churches and their related organisations offer professional debt counselling. These services are designed to help people escape from the trap of debt and equipping families with the skills and confidence to build a sound financial future. These initiatives require however a framework which allows for personal insolvency procedures. An evaluation of such procedures throughout the EU would be important to identify possible improvements.

*More information:*

*Infodienst Schuldnerberatung.*

<http://www.infodienst-schuldnerberatung.de>

### **Preserve mental health**

A high proportion of people with very low income, especially women, experience mental health problems, particularly depression. This has a big impact on their ability to earn and therefore to improve their financial security. Mental health problems as a result of social factors need to be addressed; this can be achieved through better social and welfare

arrangements, work-life balance, the improvement in working conditions, and the fight against substance abuse. We see preventative campaigns and actions in health as key in improving physical and mental well-being, and the low percentage of health expenditure on preventive measures should be addressed.

*More information:*

*Mental Health from the perspective of European Churches and Diaconal Organisations. Contribution of European Churches and Diaconal Organisations to the Green Paper "Improving the mental health of the population: Towards a strategy on mental health for the European Union." - May 2006*

<http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/GreenPaperMentalHealth.pdf>

### **Poverty of Women**

We miss in the Commission's proposal any reflection on the gender aspects of poverty. The factors that make women poorer than men are complex. Because of their caring responsibilities, many women living on their own cannot undertake paid work to improve their financial position, and do not move beyond 'survival' mode. Gender stereotyping plays a role in restricting the choices of occupation made by women and men, and many women end up in low paid employment based on stereotypical female roles. This affects women's chances of asset growth, particularly if they are living on their own or if their status is dependent on the husband (e.g. in the case of many migrant women).. Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights explains, "equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay." Statistics show that employment, work and pay are still not distributed equally in all European countries. We encourage EU Member States to take care to implement fundamental rights on equality between men and women.

*More information:*

*Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women: Challenge of Social Justice. Looking for Equal Opportunities for women in an Enlarged Europe.*

[http://www.efecw.net/Projects/Rep\\_Challenge\\_of\\_Social\\_Justice.htm](http://www.efecw.net/Projects/Rep_Challenge_of_Social_Justice.htm)

### **Active inclusion of rich people**

While social inclusion policies normally focus only on poor people, we would like to point out that active inclusion policies should include both the poor and the rich members in European societies. Over the last years European societies have faced a growing gap between rich and poor. Churches in Europe are concerned about tendencies among prosperous members to do their best to exclude themselves from solidarity in European societies. As Christian churches, we do believe in the responsibility of affluence, in solidarity between the strong and the weak and in the inclusion of all in the sharing of burdens in a society. The European Union's Member States should challenge the trend which sees the groups carrying the financial responsibility for the common life of societies becoming smaller and smaller. They should take measures to avoid more and more pressure being put on a "middle class", while very high earners continue to find ways to avoid their necessary contribution to an inclusive society.

*More information:*

*Response of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches and of Eurodiaconia to the Questionnaire on the Commission's proposal to designate 2010 as the European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion*

[http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CSCCombatPoverty\\_SocialExclusion.pdf](http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CSCCombatPoverty_SocialExclusion.pdf)

*Churches Together in Britain and Ireland: Prosperity with a Purpose – Christians and the Ethics of Affluence.*

[www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=openworld.content&cmid=1819](http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=openworld.content&cmid=1819)

*Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria (ÖRKÖ): Social Mission Statement.*

<http://www.sozialwort.at/>

### **3. Education and Training: Empowerment for Personal Responsibility**

#### **Selective education structures**

Equipping people with skills and personal competence is the most effective way of encouraging them to become more active. While this goal must be pursued in all areas of society, it is in large part the responsibility of the educational system. The prime purpose of these skills will be to develop self-reliance and a spirit of solidarity. Herein lies the key to the effective reduction of poverty – and precisely in this area Europe requires a great deal of change and effort. In some European countries the school systems exhibit considerable selective structures that lead to pecuniary, cultural, and social divisions. This results in a situation in which children's performance at school tends to depend too much on their social background – and often without reflection also on their ethnic background - and not adequately to reflect their personal talents. A new culture of appreciation and participation must overcome the current trends of exclusion and disregard for others in education. At the same time, there will always be people who do not succeed in the formal education system. They most require focused, long-term support from a well-regulated welfare state.

Early intervention policies should be developed if necessary and access to education from a young age can help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty, thereby increasing life opportunities in general, as well as social mobility. As statistics show that the children and young people of migrants have more difficulties completing schools and training, a special focus ought to be given to preventing discrimination and exclusion from higher training and schooling. To ensure a high quality of education in the European Union, learning systems must be accessible and affordable for all members of a society, whatever the background of a person and irrespective of the contractual form of employment.

As education is so important to the success of persons in society, more financial resources ought to be made available to education, teacher training and for supporting successful models. Particularly the issue of language competence ought to be addressed in a more appreciative manor of acknowledging language competence of migrants. The model of European Schools, currently accessible to fairly wealthy persons only, could be explored as a model for particularly disadvantaged persons.

#### **Inter-cultural learning**

European churches support the EU's commitment to "lifelong learning" and for a "knowledge-based society", as the provision of training and re-training throughout the life of a person is essential to enable them to adapt and take up the new opportunities that the fast-changing labour market offers. Lifelong learning, however, should not be reduced to acquiring jobs-based skills, but also those that empower and facilitate engagement in society. Life-long learning does not only mean capacity-building for the labour market and adaptation to technical progress, but also requires the instilling of values, the acquisition of social competences and the development of a responsible personality.

Education, formal as well as informal, should be an instrument for promoting intercultural dialogue. Having knowledge both about one's own as well as about others' religious and cultural identity contributes significantly to a cohesive society. Education needs to encourage a sense of reflective self-identity and respect for the other. Religious education contributes to such an education for young people.

In the field of education, further training modules in the area of formal and informal education, which foster respect for cultural and ethnic diversity, integration and active inclusion of minorities in European societies, should be developed, promoted and tested.

*More information:*

*Church and Society Commission of CEC/Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe: Intercultural dialogue*

<http://www.cec-kek.org/content/intercultural.shtml>

*Comenius-Institut: Europäisierung und Citizenship als Horizonte evangelischer Bildungsverantwortung.*

<http://ci-muenster.de/themen/europa6.php>

#### **4. Active labour market policies**

##### **Coherence of social protection, demographic and employment policies**

In Christian understanding, work is not just a productive factor but a central element of human dignity and of participation in society. Thus it must always be organised and carried out with full respect toward human dignity and must serve the common good. A high level of employment and social security are key elements of the European Social model. Far reaching changes of labour law, as they are considered in the European Union's "flexicurity" concept, will have relevant impacts on social security, the situation of families, demography and mobility in European societies. We therefore ask the European Commission to take into account the intersection of active labour market policies with these sectors in order to come to more coherent European social and economic policies.

##### **Flexicurity in the labour market and family life**

In their contribution to EU's Green Paper on demographic changes, European churches and diaconal organisations discussed this question with special reference to the compatibility of work and family life: "Politics and society should support a more intelligent and flexible apportionment between work and family and social life, giving the parents, especially the women, a better choice to shape their lives. An integration of individual measures with a lateral policy could significantly improve living conditions for young families, such as individual working time options, reduced and increased working hours, care leaves, sabbaticals, educational leave, long term labour time accounts. EU Member States should provide a legal framework to more flexible working conditions for women and men, which enables them to make choices which will provide the best care for their children and optimal conditions for the family life as a whole. An increasing number of children are growing up in single parent households. To enable these parents to earn their living and income for their families, extensive child caring facilities or alternatively benefits for taking care of their own children must be provided. EU Member States should therefore provide a legitimate claim for childcare coverage from an early age onwards, in order to ensure a high standard of caring facilities for children."

*More information:*

*Strengthen a mutual sense of responsibility in European societies. Contribution of European churches, diaconal, migrant and youth organisations to the EU Green Paper on demographic changes.*

[www.cec-kek.org/pdf/DemographyGreenPaper.pdf](http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/DemographyGreenPaper.pdf)

### **Transition between jobs**

The transition between jobs includes in many European societies a high risk of losing employment or security. We support the creation of innovative arrangements providing for transitions between jobs without a break in employment, e.g. the “working foundations” (Arbeitsstiftungen) in the Austrian system, as this provides an effective system for transitions. Independent studies show that although such a system is expensive in the short term, it is financially beneficial in the longer term because unemployed workers tend to get better jobs and remain unemployed for a shorter time.

Churches in Europe are especially concerned about the impact of transition processes in European economies on the marginalised in the labour market, such as less skilled people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and people with a migration background, who would need additional help to enter into the job market and transition between jobs. Despite the emphasis on a knowledge based society, continuous attention is also required to ensure job opportunities and decent pay for people with fewer skills. In addition to further and higher education, vocational training should also be a focus, enabling people with different skills to enter into the labour market. For migrants and refugees the recognition of their qualifications is often an issue which also requires more adequate solutions.

*More information:*

*Contribution of the CEC Church and Society Commission in cooperation with the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and the European Contact Group (ECG) to the Green Paper on 'Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century'. - February 2007.*

<http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/002507answertogreenpaperlabourlaw.pdf>

*Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland: Common Responsibility fundraising campaign 2008: Employment opportunities for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities.*  
<http://www.yhteisvastuu.fi>

## **5. Migration**

Many migrants actually respond to labour market needs and work in precarious and/or irregular situations. In the absence of an EU immigration policy, many have little choice. Under-employment and exploitation are features of some segments of the labour markets, and the regulation of these need to be looked at carefully. Social partners and immigration authorities have a joint responsibility to find solutions which take into account labour market needs, fundamental rights of migrants, and fair competition rules among low-skilled jobs. Initiatives for seasonal and temporary permits for migrants can be important to address this situation, if they are introduced with a clear focus on social cohesion.

The churches in Europe are particularly concerned about the need to properly address basic rights for migrants. The legal status of migrants is still the subject of hugely diverse national legislation. This leads to enormous problems, among which trafficking and new forms of slavery are only the most dramatic. We therefore reiterate the call that EU Member States

should agree on a coherent and transparent migration policy, which recognises the rights of migrants. One of the most important tools of such a policy would be the ratification of the 1990 UN Convention of the Rights of All Migrants and their families by EU Member States and the EU, once the EU has gained legal personality through ratification of the Lisbon Treaty.

*More information:*

*Towards a Balanced Approach in EU Migration and Asylum Policy. 12 Recommendations. Ensure Policy Coherence for Migrants' Rights.*

[www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/12%20Recommendations%20EN%20final%200707.pdf](http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/12%20Recommendations%20EN%20final%200707.pdf)

*Churches encourage European Institutions to put human rights at the heart of anti-trafficking policies.*

[www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/CCMEPR\\_CoE\\_Convention\\_entry\\_into\\_force.pdf](http://www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/CCMEPR_CoE_Convention_entry_into_force.pdf)

## **6. Quality services**

### **Provision of Social and Health Services**

Christian churches have a centuries long and wide experience in providing social services. They started developing and providing social services according to the needs of society long before the welfare state assumed its responsibility. Today, churches in Europe and their related organisations provide social services in all European countries. They offer vocational training and education, especially for people furthest from the labour market. They engage professionals and volunteers in the broad field of social services and active inclusion measures. The way in which they provide such services today depends upon the prevailing legal framework within each Member State.

The legal environment at both EU and national level should enable providers to provide quality integrated services that meet differing and changing needs, ensuring sustainability of the services and the maintenance of the general interest in procuring and providing services. This includes ensuring equal access to quality services for all. At the EU level, the special characteristics of social services should be recognized and policies that affect or regulate their functioning should be carefully assessed and action taken if necessary, particularly in the problematic area of tendering in public procurement. When formulating and implementing policy and legislation, the valuable experience and expertise of users and providers should be taken into account at all levels.

Health and social services are not provided within a 'normal' supplier/consumer relationship and statistics show that often those with the least financial means have the most needs. Therefore, it is essential to ensure social and health services are provided on the basis of solidarity, as market mechanisms do not guarantee access to services for all and the most vulnerable categories of users would risk losing out most in such a system. To facilitate a solidarity-based system a sense of solidarity should be fostered among the public, through civil education and interaction, particularly between generations.

### **New forms of services**

New needs for social services are identified by the churches and church-related organisations and new forms of co-operation are constantly being developed with national and municipal authorities and other organisations, which at a later stage might lead to new forms of services being integrated into a state system of social care. Hence the churches and their related organisations, through their social activities, also provide essential contributions in the adjustment of the social systems in Europe to people's needs.



## **Voluntary activities**

Voluntary activities make an important contribution to personal development, particularly of young people, they foster social inclusion and cohesion, and they increase interaction between generations. The skills and experience obtained through volunteering can enable the volunteer to take up further opportunities. Churches and their related organisations provide a wide variety of opportunities for voluntary activities all over Europe - as matter of fact also with regard to solidarity beyond Europe - in the development sector and encourage the EU institutions to cooperate closely with churches and other not-for-profit providers of voluntary services in civil society. Access to social networks and the support provided by churches, community groups and family are also important for social relationships and inclusion.

## **Advocacy**

It is also part of the churches' engagement to join with and advocate on behalf of those who are not able to express their interests adequately, and to provide a forum for active participation and empowerment of people in society. The social advocacy of churches and church-related organisations is spread over a wide range of areas including services for children and youth, support for families, assistance to the elderly and to people with disabilities, assistance for migrants, assistance for people who are unemployed and in social distress, and for people in the poor countries of the world.

## **Spiritual needs**

Social services often address not only physical and mental needs but also the spiritual dimension of care for each human being because such a spiritual dimension of life is of importance to the majority of people. A number of research studies have shown that participation in religious practices and communities is a relevant factor in the promotion of health and its impact should not be left un-assessed at EU level.<sup>2</sup>

*More information:*

*CEC Church and Society Commission - COMECE - Caritas Europe - Eurodiaconia: Joint Response to the Social Services of General Interest Questionnaire - January 2007*

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<sup>2</sup> Mental Health from the perspective of European Churches and Diaconal Organisations. <http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/GreenPaperMentalHealth.pdf>.

***The Church and Society Commission (CSC)** is one of the commissions of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). The CSC links CEC's some 125 member churches from all over Europe and its associated organisations with the European Union's institutions, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, NATO and the UN (on European matters). Its task is to help the churches study church and society questions from a theological social-ethical perspective, especially those with a European dimension, and to represent common positions of the member churches in their relations with political institutions working in Europe.*

[www.cec-kek.org](http://www.cec-kek.org)

***The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)** is the ecumenical agency on migration and integration, asylum and refugees, and against racism and discrimination in Europe. Members are Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant Churches and Councils of Churches as well as church-related agencies in presently 16 European countries. CCME cooperates with the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches.*

[www.cec-kek.org/English/ccmenews.htm](http://www.cec-kek.org/English/ccmenews.htm)