



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 15 November 2007

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**SOC 454
ECOFIN 455**

NOTE

from : The Working Party on Social Questions
to : Permanent Representatives Committee / Council (EPSCO)

Subject : **Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: "modernising social protection for greater social justice and economic cohesion: taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market."**
- Draft Council Conclusions

Delegations will find in the Annex draft Council Conclusions on which general agreement was reached at the level of the Working Party on Social Questions on 6 November 2007.

DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

PROTECTION AND EMPOWERMENT IN THE FRAMEWORK OF ACTIVE INCLUSION

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

RECALLING

1. that social cohesion is at the centre of the European project, high levels of cohesion being a distinctive mark of European societies; poverty and exclusion are the most radical forms of denial of equal opportunities for all, since they imply the absence of basic conditions of access to opportunities and rights;
2. that the quest for an inclusive society is a central objective of the European Union and its Member States;
3. the Council Recommendation on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems¹;
4. that, since the beginning of the Lisbon Strategy, Member States and the Commission have been invited by the European Council to take steps to make “a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010”;
5. the role of the Open Method of Coordination on social protection and social inclusion and its contribution to fighting poverty and social exclusion;

¹ 92/441/EEC of 24 June 1992, Published in the Official Journal L 245 of 26.8.1992

6. that the March 2007 European Council stressed that the common social objectives of Member States should be better taken into account within the Lisbon Strategy and welcomed progress on active inclusion.

RECOGNISING

1. that social inclusion, which promotes citizenship and opportunities for all, is both a fundamental dimension of the Lisbon Strategy and a building block of the social dimension of the sustainable development strategies for Europe, and has positive impacts on, and contributes to, employment, economic growth and human development;
2. that the complexity of situations of poverty and exclusion calls for integrated strategies, with the double aim of protection and empowerment, and covering different policy fields;
3. that the levels and configuration of poverty and exclusion, as well as historical contexts and policies, can be different when comparing countries and regions and that this implies respect for diversity in strategies and options for fighting these problems;
4. that social inclusion must be politically visible and given the high profile it requires at the European level, in view of its importance to citizens and its strategic relevance for meeting the common objectives of growth, employment and social cohesion, including gender equality;
5. that the success of inclusion policies depends on the involvement and cooperation of relevant actors and stakeholders in the different phases and stages of policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
6. the importance of developing comprehensive national strategies to support families and individuals in playing a socially cohesive role, and to avoid the risk of the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

WELCOMES

1. the European Commission's important initiative in launching, by means of its Communication on "Modernising social protection for greater social justice and economic cohesion: taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market", a second-stage consultation as a follow-up to the first phase consultation launched in February 2006;
2. the intention of the Social Partners to engage in a bilateral dialogue with the aim of better taking into account the situation of those most excluded from the labour market, and awaits with great interest the results of the second phase consultation through which the Social Partners will further develop how social dialogue might complement the role of public authorities in implementing the active inclusion approach.

ACKNOWLEDGES

1. the approach of active inclusion as a holistic and balanced framework for fighting poverty and social exclusion, based on the principles of protection, empowerment and user influence, which puts forward a powerful and integrated agenda for a more inclusive society, with positive effects on the financial, economic and social sustainability of economic and social models;
2. that the social inclusion of the people who are furthest from the labour market is not only a goal in itself, but is also an important condition for fully achieving the Lisbon objectives;
3. that active inclusion policies should be implemented in a co-ordinated way through the active participation of all relevant stakeholders at national, regional and local levels;
4. that active inclusion and flexicurity are complementary and mutually reinforcing approaches;
5. the role of education, preventive labour market policies and individualised or tailored services for those at risk of exclusion from the labour market.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES

1. to cooperate actively in the second-phase consultation launched by the Commission and to adequately involve the social partners and relevant stakeholders at the various levels in the debate.

INVITES THE SOCIAL PROTECTION AND EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEES

1. to study the development of the existing set of indicators in order to ensure the adequate monitoring of the relevant dimensions of active inclusion, in close cooperation with the European Commission, and also to promote benchmarking on the Member States' successful experiences with active inclusion;
2. to work closely with the Commission during all further stages of the process on active inclusion.

INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

1. to cooperate fully with the SPC, which plays a pivotal role in promoting the monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the active inclusion approach, as well as with the EMCO;
2. to identify key policy areas that may prove decisive to the sustainability of inclusion strategies and to achieving the Lisbon objectives;
3. to enhance the existing cooperation with the SPC in the work of improving indicators and information systems in order to upgrade the capacity for producing quality, up-to-date and comparable information on the dimensions of active inclusion;
4. to ensure close cooperation with the EMCO and the SPC in the process of assessing the consistency and coherence of the Lisbon strategy's overall policy framework in relation to the objectives of social cohesion;

5. in the light of the outcome of the consultation process, to develop proposals for a deepening of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in social protection and social inclusion, addressing adequate income support, access to inclusive labour markets and quality social services, in view of the new OMC cycle, including a recommendation on the common principles.

INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE MEMBER STATES

1. to promote the political visibility and high profile of social inclusion at the European level, as an important element of the strategic political instruments for economic and social development and the corresponding objectives, namely in the context of the Lisbon Strategy, the Strategy for Sustainable Development and others, as well as maintaining closer and positive interactive links between them;
2. in close cooperation, and with the support of the relevant Committees, to improve governance mechanisms in the field of inclusion, namely by improving the OMC processes with a view to developing policies which encourage both integration into the labour market and adequate social protection, improving the articulation between the committees and the linking of inclusion policies to agreed political objectives at the European Level;
3. to take due account of the Key Messages of the Round Table Meetings and of the Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty in the development of the OMC process and in relation to the political objectives in the field of social cohesion at the European level, as well as other suitable forums;

4. to promote a further development of the now well-established format of the yearly Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion by holding experimentally a Ministerial Round Table in order to upgrade political participation and to foster communication between the stakeholders and the Member States' authorities, as proposed at the VIth Round Table held in the Azores on 16-17 October 2007; in this context welcomes the intention of the forthcoming French Presidency to hold such an experimental Ministerial Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion in October 2008.
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