socialplatform

Informal EPSCO Council
Athens, Greece, April 29-30, 2014

Economic recovery and social policies: the role of minimum income schemes

Put in place adequate minimum income schemes as the basis for high level social protection across the life span and as economic stabilisers

Remarks by Heather Roy, President of Social Platform, in the Opening Plenary of the Ministerial Meeting on April 30, 2014

"There is a quote attributed to Desmond Tutu that there is only so long we can keep pulling people out of the river before we have to travel upstream and find out what is pushing them in the river in the first place. For people across Europe finding themselves at increasing risk of and experiencing poverty and social exclusion the time to travel upstream to the banks of the river is now.

It is not possible for us all to ignore both the structural causes and effects of an increasingly imbalanced combination of social and economic polices across Europe at all levels. The Europe 2020 targets of reducing poverty, increasing employment and ensuring access to education are not being met in and in the case of the poverty target are unlikely to be reached in any substantial way. That is why the forthcoming lid term review of the Europe 202 strategy is the opportunity to reinforce the commitment of Member States and the European Union to address the causes and effects of poverty and social exclusion.

Such a reinforcement will require a commitment to ambitious policy development and implementation by all parties and must be coupled with the direct involvement of the people of Europe through co-operation and partnership including that with civil society actors and our colleagues in the Social Partners. We have been encouraged by the commitment yesterday by the participations in the trio meeting to such engagement with civil society and hope that this will be improved and realised imminently.

Rebalancing our social and economic policies is not just a question of enabling sustainable growth. It is also concerned with reducing the increasing inequalities in our society but furthermore it is about ensuring that principles of solidarity, fairness and an enabling of rights are at the heart of the European Union. The introduction of the social scoreboard to strengthen the social dimension of the EMU must be evidenced through the forthcoming Country Specific Recommendations and the implementation of the key policy proposals of the Social Investment Package must be used as a guiding framework at national level to ensure that social considerations guide our economic policies.

It is the development and implementation of effective polices that will be key in addressing poverty and social exclusion across Europe.

In our discussions yesterday we considered how the adoption of minimum income schemes can be one such policy. Research available from Social Platform members such as the European Anti-Poverty Network and the work of the European Minimum Income Network in which members of social platform are engaged show the benefit of minimum income schemes in enabling people to live their fundamental rights of dignity and participation and enable people, where possible to re-enter and access employment.

However what we know is that minimum income must be adequate and we are concerned that there is a reluctance to look at the real question of levels of minimum income to ensure adequacy at all stages of the life cycle. This includes ensuring that the relevant

mechanisms are in place to ensure decent standards of support for children, people of older age as well as in certain specificities of life such as disability or indeed ensuring that gender issues in ensuring adequate income are addressed.

That is why yesterday we proposed the development of an EU framework Directive on Adequate Minimum Income schemes to support and guide Member States in the implementation of such schemes.

There is an emerging consensus at European Level for adequate minimum income from all institutions and this needs to be translated into the political will to develop such a framework directive. Such a framework directive would support and contribute to the delivery of the poverty target of Europe 2020 and should be integrated into the Annual Growth Survey and the respondent National Reform Programmes.

Adequate minimum income schemes must also be combined with access to social services and removing barriers to the labour market as outlined in the 2008 Active Inclusion recommendation - this combination, in the framework of social investment, will yield positive results.

Furthermore, the ring-fencing of 20% of the European Social Fund (ESF) for social inclusion and the documentation and sharing of good practices must be met with proper proposals for implementation by Member States through demonstrable approaches to reduce poverty and social inclusion and not only be employment focused.

The forthcoming European elections will be a scorecard of how the people of Europe believe Europe and its member states are responding to their needs. Millions of people have benefitted from the European Social Model and it has not only pulled people out of the river but stopped them falling in in the first place. We believe though that there is more to do and it is committing through policies such as adequate minimum income is what many people in Europe want to hear from you."
