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PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Renewed social agenda:  
Opportunities, access and solidarity in 21st century Europe**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Technological advances, globalisation and an ageing population are changing European societies. In recent years the pace of change has accelerated. Europeans are living longer, healthier lives in new family configurations and working patterns. Values and relationships between generations are changing. Europeans face unprecedented opportunities, more choice and improved living conditions. The European Union, notably through the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs, greater market integration and macroeconomic stability, has been instrumental in creating those opportunities, by stimulating employment and mobility.

At the same time stark realities remain: too many people are inactive or unemployed and too many young people leave school early, and as a result, there are still too many people living in poverty (especially children and older people) and in social isolation. And, new issues have emerged – an ageing and better off population brings with it increased old age dependency and diseases of affluence (obesity, stress). On top of this far reaching set of societal changes, 2008 is witnessing a global economic slowdown, with increased competition for scarce resources, including food and energy and continuing turbulence in the financial markets. Whilst the EU economy should hold up well in the face of these external shocks, due to sound fundamentals, such recent developments including dramatic increases in food and oil prices generate concern. The poor are disproportionately affected by these developments. In addition, while opinion polls show that Europeans are generally satisfied with their quality of life, they are worried about the future and fear that their children will be less well off in years to come.

Social policies need to **keep pace** with these changing realities - they need to be flexible and responsive to change. All levels of governance need to rise to this challenge.

Actions in the social field are primarily the responsibility of the Member States and have to be taken closest to the citizen at national and sub-national level. The EU's powers and responsibilities in the social field are limited. However, the EU, with its blend of shared values, common rules and solidarity mechanisms, is uniquely placed to work in partnership with the Member States and stakeholders and foster cooperation to manage socio-economic change, particularly the change driven by globalisation and technology. It has successfully responded to emerging social challenges over the past fifty years by stimulating growth and jobs in a sound macroeconomic policy framework, promoting gender equality, fighting discrimination, fostering social partnership, improving working conditions, and ensuring social cohesion by tackling regional inequalities and assisting adjustment to economic change.

The challenge now is to build on that strong base by pursuing a **renewed social agenda**. The fundamental goals are set in the Treaty. The means to achieve them need to be renewed. The focus needs to be on **empowering and enabling** individuals to realise their potential while at the same time helping those who are unable to do so.

This agenda cannot be confined to traditional social domains; it must be **cross cutting** and multidimensional, covering a wide range of areas from labour market policies to education, health, immigration and intercultural dialogue. The reality is that economic and social actions at EU and national level are mutually reinforcing and complementary. That is why this renewed social agenda is fully coherent with and reinforces the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs.

The renewed social agenda set out in this Communication is built around **opportunities, access and solidarity**. Generating opportunities requires a continued effort to creating more and better jobs and increasing welfare. It means dismantling barriers, facilitating mobility, fighting discrimination, fostering gender equality, supporting families and tackling new forms of social exclusion. To exploit opportunities, individuals need access – to education, health care, social services of general interest. They should be able to actively participate and integrate in the societies in which they live. Those individuals and regions that cannot cope and are left behind by the rapid pace of change need support. Therefore, the renewed social agenda is also one of solidarity – stepping up efforts to fight poverty and social exclusion and explore new ways to help individuals adjust to globalisation and technological change. To do so, the EU has to innovate in the way it sets policy frameworks, in its legislation, in bringing people together in the exchange of best practice and in catalysing new approaches.

This renewed social agenda takes into account the results of the broad public consultation<sup>1</sup> that was launched by the Commission in 2007 to take stock of Europe's changing "social reality". It sets out a series of concrete measures in the priority areas identified in the European Commission's recent Communication *Opportunities, access and solidarity: towards a new social vision for 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe*<sup>2</sup>.

## **2. EUROPE'S SOCIAL DIMENSION – TIME TO RENEW AND REINVIGORATE**

Shared social values are intrinsic to feelings of European identity, having underpinned the foundations of the European project from the beginning. EU policies have a strong social dimension and positive social impact: the Lisbon strategy has contributed to the creation of more and better jobs. EMU and the euro have ensured price stability, facilitating job creation and stable growth. Cohesion policies have helped less developed EU regions and disadvantaged groups. The Single Market has created opportunities, taking account of and responding to the social impact of market opening. EU employment and social policies have improved employment conditions, including health and safety at work, promoted equal opportunities and social inclusion and fought discrimination, racism and xenophobia.

Successive waves of enlargement to embrace new Member States have been hugely successful in consolidating democracy and fundamental rights and in boosting the prosperity of the whole EU. The European story has been a successful process of "social convergence" as the economies of acceding Member States have strengthened, even if this process is still underway. In this process, European norms and EU rules and guidelines have played a part. This record of convergence is a testament to the strength of Europe's shared social values and the EU's ability to support their development. In short, enlargement has been successful in spreading equal opportunities across the continent.

The fundamental social objectives of Europe have not changed: a strong commitment to harmonious, cohesive and inclusive societies respecting fundamental rights in healthy social market economies. This is clearly spelt out in the objectives of the Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

But new developments call for an urgent review of means, not ends. **Globalisation** is the principal shaping force of our times.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/citizens\\_agenda/social\\_reality\\_stocktaking/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/citizens_agenda/social_reality_stocktaking/index_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> COM(2007) 726, 20.11.2007.

It makes for a crucial difference to both the rationale and the focus of Europe's social agenda. In the last generation, the social dimension made a huge stride forward as Europe's Single Market widened and deepened. In the 1980s the Social Agenda was conceived as a means of securing assent to the industrial restructuring that the "1992" agenda involved. The focus was on employment protection and the need to secure consensus between the social partners in order to facilitate industrial change. Today a much wider social agenda is needed that allows Europe to take full advantage of the opportunities brought about by globalisation, to help citizens adapt to changing realities and to show solidarity with those who are affected negatively.

Combined with globalisation, rapid **technological change** has wide ranging impacts on society and profound implications for social policies<sup>3</sup>. It increases the demand for skills, widening the gap between the skilled and unskilled. The average unemployment rate for low-skilled workers is around 10%, compared to 7% for those with upper secondary education and 4% for those with tertiary education. The overriding social issue for the longer term is to how best to equip individuals with the right skills to give them a better chance in the modern economy as workers, entrepreneurs and consumers. This is more than an issue of industrial training in the conventional sense. It is about what types of skills and competences are needed for a new type of economy and how citizens can be equipped to succeed. That is why the EU is investing heavily in skills development, supporting the development of more efficient and sustainable labour markets and social systems, combining flexibility and security, and promoting mobility in education and continuous training and in knowledge and innovation.

**Demographic change** is driving societal change and needs innovative policy responses. Increased life expectancy is one of Europe's greatest achievements. But, combined with declining fertility, the ageing of Europe's population requires major changes to the way we live, work and prepare for retirement. The population in the age group 15-64 is projected to contract by 48 million by 2050, and the dependency ratio will double over the same period<sup>4</sup>. Public social expenditure has to adapt flexibly to take account of Europe's ageing population, changing work patterns. Enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of welfare systems, notably via improved incentives, better administration and evaluation, and the prioritisation of spending programmes has become crucial to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of European social models. The EU is working in partnership with Member States to address common challenges, supporting their efforts to ensure equity and financial sustainability, while carrying through necessary health and pension system reform. The Council has recently invited the Commission and the EU's Economic Policy Committee to refine the analysis of social expenditure and the reforms necessary to ensure equity, efficiency and effectiveness<sup>5</sup> (see accompanying document).

**Immigration** is making a significant contribution to employment, growth and prosperity in the European Union. Demand for migrants, particularly those with specific skills, is likely to increase over the coming years due to demographic change and labour market shortages in certain sectors and regions. Member States have also recognised the importance of joint action at the EU level to address challenges linked to immigration and **integration**.

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<sup>3</sup> See also accompanying Commission staff working document "A renewed social agenda for Europe: Citizens Wellbeing in the Information Society"

<sup>4</sup> The ratio of those over 65 to the working population (15-64) will increase from 1 to 4 currently to 1 to 2 in 2050.

<sup>5</sup> ECFIN Council Conclusions of 14 May 2008, available at:  
[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ecofin/100325.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ecofin/100325.pdf)

The Commission has recently proposed a comprehensive Common Immigration Policy for Europe<sup>6</sup> for coordinated action and with a view to promoting prosperity, solidarity and security. To realise its potential, immigration has to be accompanied from the start by efforts to facilitate successful integration, including by host country language learning. This poses also a mix of other complex challenges and requires efforts in different sectors such as health, housing and education.

**Climate change** and new energy use patterns will create new opportunities as well as social impacts. The EU, at the forefront of international efforts to tackle climate change, is also analysing its social-economic consequences and developing policies to support adaptation. The transition to a sustainable low-carbon economy is of vital importance for the well-being of future generations. The EU can help harness new opportunities for economic development and the creation of "green jobs", while acting in solidarity with vulnerable groups and in consultation with social partners. In this context, attention will need to be paid to the risk of "energy poverty".

### **3. THE RENEWED SOCIAL AGENDA FOR OPPORTUNITIES, ACCESS AND SOLIDARITY: THE GOALS**

The Renewed Social Agenda is based on three interrelated goals of equal importance:

- Creating Opportunities: Creating opportunities means generating more and better jobs and facilitating mobility. In societies where each individual is regarded as being of equal worth, no barriers of any kind should hold people back. This means ensuring the chances for all to develop their own potentials while respecting Europe's diversity and tackling both overt and indirect discrimination and fighting racism and xenophobia.
- Providing Access: Given the very different starting points in life, opportunity cannot be ensured without improving access for the most disadvantaged. All citizens must have access to good quality education, social protection, health care and services that can help to overcome inequalities in starting points and to enable all to enjoy longer, healthier lives. Europe's youth must be equipped to take advantage of opportunities. All Europeans should have access to education and skills development throughout life (for example, second chance schools or life-long learning) so as to be able to adjust to change and start afresh at different points in their life.
- Demonstrating Solidarity: Europeans share a commitment to social solidarity: between generations, regions, the better off and the less well off and wealthier and less wealthy Member States. Solidarity is part of how European society works and how Europe engages with the rest of the world. Real equality of opportunity depends on both access and solidarity. Solidarity means action to help those who are disadvantaged – who cannot reap the benefits of an open, rapidly changing society. It means fostering social inclusion and integration, participation and dialogue and combating poverty. It means giving support to those who are exposed to temporary, transitional problems of globalisation and technological change.

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<sup>6</sup> COM(2008) 359, 17.6.2008.

Actions to move towards these goals are primarily the responsibility of the Member States at national, regional and local levels. The scope for action is wide and calls for priority setting. Hence, the agenda that follows focuses on key areas – youth, human capital, longer healthier lives, mobility, social inclusion, anti-discrimination and equal opportunities as well as participation and civic dialogue - where EU action demonstrates clear added value and full respect for the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Actions in each of these areas contribute to the three goals of opportunities, access and solidarity. They reflect the need for the EU to innovate and evolve - in the way it sets policy frameworks, in its legislation, in bringing people together in the exchange of best practice and in catalysing new approaches.

#### **4. THE RENEWED SOCIAL AGENDA FOR OPPORTUNITIES, ACCESS AND SOLIDARITY: THE PRIORITIES**

##### **4.1. Children and Youth – tomorrow's Europe**

Europe's future depends on its youth. Yet, life chances of many young people are blighted - they lack the opportunities and the access to education and training to realise their full potential. 19 million children and young people are at risk of poverty and six million drop out of secondary education each year. Action is required to break the vicious cycle of childhood deprivation, unhealthy lifestyles, academic under-achievement and social exclusion of children. The problems of high youth unemployment, too many early school-leavers, and the relative job insecurity and wage inequality faced by younger people have to be tackled. So too do the concerns of youth that despite working longer, they may be worse off in old age than previous generations. All children need to receive an education that equips and gives them a fair chance in today's world. They need to be encouraged to reach different and higher levels of qualification and skills than their parents achieved.

The EU can help to develop new forms of intergenerational solidarity and to address the specific problems facing young people today, including access to education and training, the labour market, housing and finance. The European Youth Pact agreed by the European Council in March 2005 provides a common framework for action by the EU and Member States. The Commission will continue a range of activities focused on children and youth: mainstreaming children's rights in EU actions, stepping up efforts to promote and protect the rights of the child<sup>7</sup>, actions on youth and health and promoting the safer use of the Internet<sup>8</sup> and enhanced action on road safety.

#### **Further action:**

The renewed social agenda includes:

- a Communication on School Education in support of efforts by Member States to improve the quality of their education systems and achieve targets regarding early school leavers, literacy, participation in secondary education and preparing young people for lifelong learning. This follows a public consultation on "Schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". Maximising the efficiency and equity of primary education and training is an essential part of ensuring opportunities for young people.

<sup>7</sup>

See [http://ec.europa.eu/justice\\_home/fsj/children/fsj\\_children\\_intro\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/fsj/children/fsj_children_intro_en.htm)

<sup>8</sup>

COM(2008) 106, 27.2.2008.



- a Green Paper on "Migration and Mobility: challenges for the EU's educational systems".

Later in 2008/2009 the Commission will:

- issue a Communication on developing the Open Method of Coordination on youth, with a particular focus on young people with fewer opportunities.

– develop a more comprehensive approach to child poverty, based on quantitative targets (see section 5.2), inspired by the European strategy on inclusion and social protection.

#### **4.2. Investing in People, More and Better Jobs, New Skills**

The new social agenda is an integral part of the Lisbon Strategy and the EU Sustainable Development Strategy. One of the biggest contributions the EU can make to well being is to foster growth and jobs since a healthy economy is the foundation for prosperity and the best escape route from poverty is a job. The Lisbon Strategy and EMU are contributing to create more jobs, through price stability, decreased unemployment and improved productivity. The 2008 Spring Economic Forecast anticipates the creation of 3 million new jobs in 2008 and 2009 on top of the 7½ million already created in 2006 and 2007. Small and medium-sized enterprises have a key role in generating new and better jobs, as clearly recognised in the recently adopted "Small Business Act" for Europe<sup>9</sup>.

A key role for the EU in the face of globalisation and rapid technological change is to help Member States to modernise labour markets and to anticipate change and restructuring. It agreed on common flexicurity principles and pathways based on flexible and secure contractual arrangements, life-long learning, active labour market policies and modern social security systems to ease labour market transitions and make work pay. The Commission is working with the Member States and social partners to implement flexicurity at national level within their Lisbon reform programmes. On the legislative side, it is important that the European Parliament and the Council come to a rapid and positive conclusion on the proposals for directives on working time and on temporary agency work.

Social dialogue at European level is essential to facilitating change. The Directive on the European Work's Councils provides a platform for dialogue between employers and workers and could be further improved. Partnerships between social partners and public authorities in anticipating and managing change are being developed.

The Structural Funds offer financial support to Member States, regions, municipalities, businesses and citizens in anticipating and adapting to changing circumstances. The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF), set up in 2007, provides support for the rapid re-integration into the labour market of workers who are made redundant as a consequence of changes in trade patterns created by globalisation. The EGF has had a positive impact in a number of Member States but there is room to further exploit its potential.

Immigration is already playing an important role in filling labour market gaps and skills shortages. Demand for migrants, particularly those with specific skills, is likely to increase with demographic change. The Commission's recent Communication on a Common Immigration Policy for Europe<sup>10</sup> sets out a number of initiatives designed to ensure that

<sup>9</sup> COM(2008) 394, 25.6.2008.

<sup>10</sup> COM(2008) 359, 17.6.2008.

economic migration is well managed in partnership with the Member States on the basis of commonly agreed principles. Integration is one of those key principles.

Education and investing in human capital formation in general is critical to ensure labour participation and social inclusion and to enhance the competitiveness of the EU. In this rapidly changing world, people need access to opportunities at different points in their lives. This means a commitment to lifelong learning and ongoing renewal of skills attuned to present and future labour market needs. The Commission will bring forward initiatives on skills and on supporting the Member States in modernising their education systems within the limits of the Treaty. New skills - entrepreneurial, for the low-carbon economy, information and communication technologies - as well as those fostering digital, media and financial literacy are all part of a modern skills set.

Necessary reforms will be carried forward in the framework of the Lisbon strategy, which includes the European Employment Strategy, and the Open Method of Coordination in education and training. Actions will also be taken to promote entrepreneurship education, ICT "e-skills"<sup>11</sup> and financial education in the EU.

#### **Further action:**

As part of this package, the Commission is coming forward with:

- a Directive to improve the functioning of European Works Councils to ensure effective social dialogue on restructuring operations. The renewed social agenda is also accompanied by staff working documents, one encouraging and supporting Social Partners to step up their efforts to anticipate and manage structural change and another highlighting the importance of company-based trans-national agreements;
- a Report on the European Globalisation Fund that reviews its first year of operation, indicates how procedures can be simplified and streamlined and suggests a number of ideas as to how the EGF could be improved.

Later in 2008/2009, the Commission will propose:

- a "New skills for new jobs initiative", providing a first assessment of labour market and skills needs up to 2020 and a mapping of existing anticipation instruments at national and European level, and proposing a more effective approach to ensure anticipation and matching between labour demand and supply through synergies between employment, training and education policies;
- an updated strategic framework to apply the open method of coordination for European co-operation in education and training;
- a Communication on multilingualism in the EU.

### **4.3. Mobility**

The free movement of people is a rich source of opportunities for citizens, helping to boost economic growth and competitiveness. Europeans are increasingly mobile. The EU has a

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<sup>11</sup> COM(2007) 496, 7.9.2007.

robust legal framework in place providing for the free movement of workers. Moreover, it provides practical support to facilitate mobility and to remove potential obstacles, including support for the free movement of workers through the EU's Job Mobility Action Plan.

The EU also supports student and youth mobility through a variety of transnational European programmes, such as the Erasmus programme. This enhances their language and intercultural skills, their employability and makes them more open to future job and geographical mobility.

The directive on posting of workers has been instrumental in promoting free movement of services and at the same time protecting workers and working conditions. However, the posting of workers from one Member State to another also raises a number of questions about the application of existing European and national legislation and practices on posted workers. The Commission recently adopted a recommendation<sup>12</sup> on enhancing administrative cooperation in order to combat undeclared work and ensure an appropriate level of confidence between Member States.

Some questions have also been widely discussed recently in the wake of rulings by the European Court of Justice (in the Laval, Viking and Rüffert cases). The Commission will support the Member States in making effective use of the opportunities offered by the existing directive on the posting of workers. At the same time, on the basis of a thorough analysis of the rulings and other precedents, it will discuss all these questions with the social partners and the Member States and address issues of concern, including in a specially convened Forum in the autumn of 2008. The Commission is committed to ensuring that there is no contradiction between the fundamental freedoms of the Treaty and the protection of fundamental rights and will thoroughly assess, discuss and respond to issues of concern, including through providing interpretative guidelines if needed.

In this context the Commission strongly welcomes the common position agreed by the Council of ministers on 9 June 2008 that, as concerns temporary agency workers, establishes the principle of equal treatment as of day one, unless social partners decide otherwise.

#### **Further action:**

As part of this package, the Commission

- invites social partners and Member States to discuss the issues raised by the recent Court rulings and organise a Forum to promote debate and exchange of good practice among stakeholders on how to respect social rights against the background of increasing labour mobility. The Commission will support Member States and discuss with them and the social partners how to address issues of concern;

- continues to develop a “fifth freedom” by removing barriers to the free movement of knowledge, promoting the mobility of specific groups like researchers<sup>13</sup>, young entrepreneurs<sup>14</sup>, young people<sup>15</sup> and volunteers<sup>16</sup>. It will also seek to ensure a complete and

<sup>12</sup> Commission Recommendation of 3 April 2008 on enhanced administrative cooperation in the context of the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services.

<sup>13</sup> COM(2008)317, 23.5.2008 Better careers and more mobility: a European partnership for researchers

<sup>14</sup> Pilot Project 2008-2010.

<sup>15</sup> Green Paper planned for June 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Proposal for a Council Recommendation in accompanying document.

rigorous implementation of the EC Directive on mutual recognition of professional qualifications<sup>17</sup>.

#### 4.4. Longer and healthier lives

Europe's ageing society demands a variety of policy responses - from supporting research into how information technology can improve the health and wellbeing lives of older people, to assessing what health care and pension reforms are needed to meet the needs of an ageing population while ensuring the sustainability of public financing.

The EU should facilitate access for all to quality health care. Enhancing patients' rights to cross-border health care are an important aspect of this. There is a need for clarity on patients' rights and for a framework to ensure that Member States retain the capacity to decide on their national health systems, mindful of the need for sustainable funding. There is also a need to foster patients' and professionals' mobility by facilitating the cross-border interoperability of electronic health records while protecting privacy.

The EU is supporting efforts by Member States to ensure the financial sustainability of social protection systems including health, to ensure adequate pensions in the future, and preserve the quality and accessibility of services. Under the Open Method of Coordination in these areas financial sustainability and social adequacy have been common joint objectives since 2006. The Commission and the Member States are also analysing the economic and budgetary impacts of ageing and of pension and healthcare reforms.

Poverty, unemployment, low levels of education, genetic risks and disability are all associated with poorer health. The European health strategy<sup>18</sup> adopted in October 2007 highlights shared values of universality, access to good quality health care, equity and solidarity. It foresees action to address the challenges linked to Europe's ageing population and growing inequalities in health. The European Health Portal provides citizens and stakeholders with access to information on key health issues.

The strategy for health and safety at work adopted by the Commission in 2007<sup>19</sup> helps people remain in the labour market longer by improving protection against risks in the workplace. The strategy aims to achieve a 25% reduction in workplace accidents by 2012.

#### **Further action:**

The Commission will:

- propose a Directive on the application of patients' rights in cross-border health care. This will establish a Community framework for cross-border healthcare on the basis of the case-law of the European Court of Justice. It will help to: provide legal clarity regarding patients' rights; ensure high-quality, safe and efficient cross-border care; and provide a framework for European cooperation in full respect of the principles of the national systems and ensuring their sustainability;

<sup>17</sup> Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the recognition of professional qualifications.

<sup>18</sup> COM(2007) 630, 23.10.2007.

<sup>19</sup> COM(2007) 62, 21.2.2007.

- come forward with a Recommendation on the cross-border interoperability of electronic health records, which will facilitate patients' and professionals' mobility;
- present a Communication focused on actions to meet the needs of an ageing population in autumn 2008. Within the framework of the "European Action Plan for Ageing well in the information society" a new EU-funded programme on assisted living will raise over €600 million for research into the use of Information and Communication Technologies to improve the lives of older people at home, in the workplace and society more generally;
- publish an updated report on the impact of ageing on public expenditure in the spring of 2009, followed by a Communication on the long-term sustainability of public finances in the autumn 2009;
- issue a Communication on health inequalities during 2009, building on work under the Social Inclusion and Social Protection OMC;
- propose a Communication and draft Council Recommendation on patient safety and the quality of health services, including the prevention and control of healthcare-associated infections and a Communication on Telemedicine and Innovative Information and Communication Technology Tools for Chronic Disease Management.
- issue a Green Paper on the EU health workforce, a vital part of delivering high quality health services, which will consider the challenges posed by ageing, mobility and technological change and how they can be addressed.

#### **4.5. Combating poverty and social exclusion**

Some 78 million Europeans, or 16% of EU population, are at risk of poverty. Poverty strikes in particular the unemployed, the disabled and the elderly; women are disproportionately at risk. Even employment is not a guarantee against poverty: in-work poverty is on the increase with some 8% of employed people at risk of poverty. There are barriers and financial disincentives preventing or discouraging certain groups from gaining full access to employment, training, education, housing and health-care. The EU is helping coordinate efforts to promote active inclusion, including labour market integration, making work pay and life-long learning, particularly for those who are furthest from the labour market, as part of the fight against poverty. The Commission is also working to ensure that single market and competition rules facilitate the development of good quality, accessible and sustainable social services, including those supplied by social economy enterprises (e.g. cooperatives, mutual undertakings).

#### **Further action:**

The Commission is presenting the first biennial report on Social Services of General Interest as part of the package and will in 2008/2009:

- propose a Recommendation on active inclusion covering questions of income support, links with the labour market and better access to quality services. The planned 2010 Year of inclusion and the fight against poverty will provide the opportunity for a renewed political commitment on the part of the EU and its Member States to those fundamental goals of the EC Treaty;

- reshape and significantly extend the food aid programme for Europe's most deprived people. The programme has provided food to over 13 million people in 2006 and has become even more important in a context of rising food prices;

- undertake initiatives to improve digital literacy, enhance broadband deployment in underserved areas<sup>20</sup> and to give better access and accessibility of persons with disabilities to the information society<sup>21</sup> with a view to tackling the digital divide. Action is also planned to promote financial inclusion – so that no one in the EU is denied access to a basic bank account.

#### **4.6. Fighting discrimination**

Pursuing opportunity means systematically attacking discrimination and fighting racism and xenophobia. In addition to the long standing legislative protection on the basis of gender, the EU has legislation banning discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation in employment and discrimination on grounds of racial or ethnic origin in employment, education, social protection and access to goods and services. To complete this legal framework, a key element of this renewed social agenda is a proposed directive to combat discrimination based on religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation and to put into effect the principle of equal treatment, outside the field of employment.

The EU is actively engaged in fighting racism and xenophobia and encourages the Council to formally adopt the Framework Decision on Racism and Xenophobia on which political agreement was reached in April 2007.

Over the last half century, the EU has promoted gender equality (one of its core values) by developing a comprehensive legislative framework. It has invested in increasing women's participation in the labour market through the European Social Fund. The employment rate of women rose from 54.3% to 57.2% between 2001 and 2006, and the objective of 60% by 2010 is within reach. But inequalities persist, as reflected in gender pay differentials. Women also remain underrepresented in economic and political decision making processes<sup>22</sup>.

#### **Further action:**

As part of this package, the Commission is:

- proposing a Directive to combat discrimination based on religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation and to put into effect the principle of equal treatment, outside the field of employment. It will also continue non legislative action to promote equality in close cooperation with Member States, civil society and social partners<sup>23</sup>;
- reporting on the EU instruments and policies in favour of Europe's Roma community (see accompanying Report).

It will:

<sup>20</sup> COM(2006) 129, 20.3.2006.

<sup>21</sup> COM(2007) 694, 8.11.2007.

<sup>22</sup> Women and men in decision-making 2007, European Commission 2008.

<sup>23</sup> See accompanying communication on ""Non-discrimination and equal opportunities: A renewed commitment".

- strengthen the integration of a gender perspective ('mainstreaming') in its policies and activities, including those covered by this Renewed Social Agenda, inline with the commitments in the EU Roadmap on Equality between Women and Men (2006-2010) and in the European Pact for Gender Equality;
- report in 2008 on the implementation of the Roadmap and, in 2010, present an evaluation and follow-up strategy;
- consider presenting legislative proposals in September 2008 with a view to improving the reconciliation of private and professional life by improving parental leave arrangements, introducing new forms of leave (paternity, adoption and filial leave), and strengthening protection for pregnant women.
- continue to tackle the gender pay gap, in line with its Communication adopted in July 2007<sup>24</sup>, in particular by exploring ways of improving the legislative framework and the way it is being implemented, making full use of the European strategy for growth and jobs, encouraging employers to commit themselves to equal pay and supporting the exchange of good practice at Community level;
- issue a report on the “Barcelona” targets concerning the availability of child-care facilities in September 2008;
- focus the Open Method of Coordination on reducing the at-risk-of-poverty rate for women, particularly older women;
- take action on the gender gap in entrepreneurship (currently only 31% of entrepreneurs in Europe are women).

#### **4.7. Opportunities, Access and Solidarity on the Global Scene**

The EU cooperates with national and international partners to promote high social standards protecting workers, consumers and the environment. Coordinated EU action helps shape the international agenda and harness the positive benefits of globalisation and managing change. The Commission will pay increasing attention to the projection of its social policies externally and the social impacts of its internal policies globally.

The Commission will continue its cooperation with the candidate and potential candidate countries in the social and related fields<sup>25</sup>. It will contribute to the international efforts aimed at promoting the social dimension of globalisation. It will also continue pursuing policy dialogue on employment and social affairs in bilateral and regional fora, including with partner countries of the European Neighbourhood Policy and with emerging economies. The Commission will ensure that its external relations, trade and development policies in the broadest sense help promote opportunities, access and solidarity beyond EU borders.

It will incorporate decent work and social concerns in agreements between the EU and third countries, and strengthen the social dimension of trade and trade-related policies (including through the Generalised System of Preferences and Free Trade Agreement negotiations).

<sup>24</sup> COM(2007) 424, 18.7.2007.

<sup>25</sup> See eg. Commission Communication "Western Balkans: Enhancing the European perspective", COM(2008) 127, 5.3.2008.

Development and external policies and assistance will also be used to support the development of social protection systems, the modernisation of labour markets and contribute to international efforts addressing the social dimension of globalisation and of climate change.

**Further action:**

The Commission reaffirms its commitment to promote the internationally-agreed agenda for decent work, including through the cooperation with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and other partners, and the mobilisation of all relevant EU policies (see accompanying report highlighting the progress made since 2006). The Commission also calls upon all Member States to set an example by ratifying and implementing the ILO Conventions classified by ILO as up to date.

The Commission will continue to promote Corporate Social Responsibility in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders.

**5. THE RENEWED SOCIAL AGENDA FOR OPPORTUNITIES, ACCESS AND SOLIDARITY: THE INSTRUMENTS**

The Social Reality Stocktaking has confirmed that citizens and stakeholders expect the EU to bring added value to social development, while remaining mindful of subsidiarity, proportionality and diversity. It will continue to do so through the instruments in the EC Treaty (legislation, social dialogue, the Open Method of Coordination, EU funding, involvement of Civil Society) and by exploiting the scope for synergies between them in a comprehensive approach and a "smarter mix" of policy tools. The coordination and surveillance of economic and budgetary policies also play an important role in this respect.

**5.1. EU legislation**

The EU has put in place a robust legislative framework for the well-being of Europeans by establishing and strengthening their rights as citizens, consumers and workers in many areas, including mobility, health and safety, social security, working conditions, information and consultation, gender equality, and non-discrimination.

In some cases, new EU legislation can offer solutions if there is broad agreement on its relevance and convincing evidence about its added value. Existing legislation will need to be updated and streamlined in the light of emerging issues (e.g. in the field of discrimination, health and safety), new forms of work organisation (e.g. European Works Councils, reconciliation of work and family life) and jurisprudence from the European Court of Justice (e.g. working time, social security, cross border health care).

Existing legislation must be effectively applied and enforced. Problems of improper implementation are often due to a lack of knowledge or insufficient coordination and cooperation between national authorities. The Commission will work with Member States, the social partners and other players to remedy these problems in line with its Communication on "A Europe of results – Applying Community Law"<sup>26</sup>, and its support for citizens and businesses in the context of the Single Market Review.

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<sup>26</sup> COM(2007) 502, 5.9.2007.



## 5.2. Social Dialogue

The European Social Dialogue, one of the cornerstones of the European social model, has an essential role in EU policy making. The right of Social Partners, enshrined in the EC Treaty, to be consulted prior to any employment or social affairs initiative from the Commission, to negotiate themselves on issues submitted by the Commission or to conclude autonomous agreements on their own initiative, has had many positive results, e.g. their agreements on parental leave, on violence and stress at work, on telework and on the ILO Convention on seafarers. A staff working document on telework and a proposal on the Social Partners' agreement on the ILO Maritime Convention are part of this package.

The Commission calls upon the Social Partners to make full use of the possibilities offered by the European Social Dialogue. With their knowledge and experience they are best placed to identify changing social realities and have a specific role to play helping to provide responses. The EU will continue to facilitate the Social Dialogue, including at sector/industry level, and the implementation of European framework agreements by the national social partners.

## 5.3. Open Method of Coordination

Open methods of coordination (OMCs) are key to the EU Social Agenda, having helped Member States to develop a shared vision of social challenges, fostered a willingness to cooperate and learn from each other's practices, created a new dynamism in furthering and implementing reforms, and promoted more knowledge-based policy making, geared towards openness, transparency and participation.

The first European Employment Strategy, launched in 1997, has contributed to the creation of more and better jobs and hence well-being in very concrete terms. The OMC in Education and Training, launched in 2002, has provided valuable support to Member States in developing their policies and lifelong learning strategies. The results of the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (henceforth the "Social OMC") in areas beyond direct Community competence (e.g. pensions, family and disability benefits, health care and long-term care) show that this process is an essential complement to EU legislation. It illustrates how voluntary cooperation among Member States supported by the EU can give practical effect to the principle of subsidiarity in their joint efforts to combat poverty and exclusion, and to secure modern, sustainable and equitable welfare systems.

Quantified targets and indicators have proved indispensable in boosting and monitoring progress at EU and national level. The preparation of a post-2010 Lisbon Strategy will provide the opportunity to review progress towards objectives and examine if even more ambitious targets should be set (such as higher employment rates for young people, older workers and women). Consideration should also be given to introducing or updating targets in other OMC areas (e.g. percentage of GDP in human capital investment; reducing poverty, in particular child poverty; improving educational attainment, setting targets for reform of pensions, health and long term care systems) so as to reflect a renewed commitment to delivering results under the Renewed Social Agenda. Statistical data will be needed in this context and will be developed in cooperation with Eurostat and the European Statistical System.

### Further Action:

The Commission:

- proposes to strengthen and utilise the full potential of the Social OMC by applying some of the procedures and working methods used under the Lisbon strategy, with a view to improving the political commitment and visibility (i.a. by setting quantitative targets), strengthening the links with other policies, enhancing analytical tools and evidence base, and stimulating monitoring, mutual learning and peer review by Member States. (See accompanying document);
- will consider proposing a Recommendation on active inclusion (see 4.5).

The Social Reality Stocktaking pointed to a growing consensus that GDP as a measure of economic performance is not sufficient to guide policy responses to complex contemporary challenges. The Commission will support the development of well being objectives "beyond GDP".

#### **5.4. EU funding**

Cohesion Policy and the Structural Funds make a vital contribution to the promotion of opportunities, access and solidarity by strengthening both competitiveness and social cohesion. Under the current programming period 2007-13, Cohesion policy and the European Social Fund in particular will spend some EUR 14 billion to strengthen the ability of companies and workers to anticipate and manage change; some EUR 26 billion to increase the quality of education and training; some 30 billion to increase employment including efforts to combat discrimination, EUR 5 billion for investment in health and EUR 1.2 billion to increase migrant's participation in employment and their social inclusion. Furthermore, the European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals (2007-2013) supports the integration of new migrants in Member States. The Commission is working with the Member States to ensure the most effective use of these investments, to support in particular policy priorities under the Lisbon Strategy. As explained above (see 4.2) the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF), supports workers who are made redundant by globalisation.

The European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) also contribute to the EU's social agenda by ensuring an affordable supply of good quality food, improving the competitiveness of the agricultural, forestry and food-processing sectors and the quality of employment within them, enhancing the quality of life in rural areas and improving employment opportunities in rural areas as a whole.

The 2007-2013 Programme on employment and social solidarity (PROGRESS)<sup>27</sup> helps to apply EU law, creating a shared understanding of the EU objectives and priorities, and strengthening partnerships with key EU and national stakeholders. The Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action Programmes support the development of quality education and training and the social integration of young people respectively, in line with the political objectives of the open methods of coordination. Greater involvement of the scientific community and stronger links with other ongoing research activities supported by the Research Framework Programme 2007-2013 will also contribute to developing knowledge – and evidence-based policies.

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<sup>27</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/progress/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/progress/index_en.html)

## **5.5. Partnership, Dialogue and Communication**

Opportunities, access and solidarity for all can only be achieved in partnership between the European Institutions, Member States, Regional and Local Authorities, Social Partners, Civil Society and other stakeholders, including external partners as relevant.

Civil Society organisations act as a vital bridge between the European Union, Member States and citizens. The Commission will continue to support NGOs' capacity to act at the EU level and take an active part in developing and implementing EU policies.

Enterprises, in close cooperation with other stakeholders, can also actively contribute to the goals of the renewed social agenda, for example in areas such as social inclusion and skills development.

Citizens, businesses and other stakeholders should be better informed about the opportunities offered by the European Union, building on existing services like the EURES jobs portal, SOLVIT, the Internal Market Information System, the Enterprise Europe Network, Europe Direct, Your Europe etc. A Single Market Assistance Service is under preparation which will enhance the information offer and its accessibility<sup>28</sup>.

The Commission will continue to promote civic participation, not least in the context of the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. The results of the Year must have a sustainable impact and be taken up in all relevant EU policies and programmes.

The Commission will continue to seek the views of citizens and stakeholders as it puts the Renewed Social Agenda into effect.

## **5.6. Ensuring that all EU policies promote opportunities, access and solidarity**

The development of evidence-based monitoring tools will become an important means of ensuring that all EU policies reflect objectives linked to the promotion of opportunities, access and solidarity. The current Treaty requires all of the European Community's activities to "aim to eliminate inequalities and to promote equality between men and women"<sup>29</sup>. It is generally recognised that the EU should take account of social policy goals and the need to combat all discriminations in the definition and implementation of all other policies. The Commission will continue to submit all major new initiatives to rigorous analysis of social impacts as part of its impact assessment work. The Impact Assessment Board will continue to make sure that the potential social and employment impacts are fully taken into account before proposals are made. In the evaluation of existing policies the Commission will strengthen the attention paid to social impacts.

The EU already nurtures a strong social reflex when developing internal market legislation and measures. For instance EU rules on public procurement leave ample opportunities for authorities to take into account social considerations when selecting the best offer<sup>30</sup>. New initiatives such as monitoring of the retail distribution market, including the price and quality of basic goods could generate positive implications in the social field.

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<sup>28</sup> SEC(2005) 985, 20.7.2005.

<sup>29</sup> Article 3, EC Treaty.

<sup>30</sup> The Handbook on socially responsible public procurement, which the Commission will issue in 2009 will provide detailed guidance and practical illustrations in this context.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

New social realities require new responses. Change is rapid – and policies need to keep pace, responding innovatively and flexibly to the challenges of globalisation, technological advances and demographic developments.

This renewed social agenda is such a response – it shows how the goals of opportunities, access and solidarity will be translated into concrete actions. It is an integrated policy response, complementing the Lisbon Strategy and demonstrating a commitment to delivering results for citizens. It shows that European values remain at the core of EU policies and are an integral part of the EU response to globalisation. It reflects this Commission's strong commitment to the social dimension, already set out in its strategic objectives in 2005, and is an essential contribution to wider efforts to make the Union economically strong, socially responsible and secure. This agenda, including its actions and instruments will be reviewed together with the Lisbon strategy for the post 2010 period.

The Commission calls upon the Council and the European Parliament to renew their commitment to the social dimension of the European Union, by endorsing this renewed social agenda and to agree on the legislative proposals that are accompanying it.