

JOINT REPORT ON SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION 2009 - SUMMARY

Social inclusion, pensions, healthcare and long-term care



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JOINT REPORT ON SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION 2009 SUMMARY

Social inclusion, pensions, healthcare and long-term care

European Commission

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
Units E.2 and E.4
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INTRODUCTION

This leaflet presents the main findings of the 2009 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion and reviews the principal trends across the European Union (EU) and at national levels within these areas.

The 2009 Joint Report is based on Member States' National Strategic Reports (NSRs), documents in which they present their strategies on how they intend to promote the EU's common social objectives. Presented to the European Commission in autumn 2008, the NSRs cover the period 2009-11 and focus on three main areas – social inclusion; pensions; and healthcare and long-term care. The aim is for the key messages emerging from the report to drive policy efforts in the areas of social protection and social inclusion over the coming years.

Action at EU level

The EU works to promote social inclusion and social protection through the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process. This sees the EU coordinate and encourage Member States' efforts to combat social exclusion and poverty, and to reform their social protection systems, on the basis of shared experience. Action at EU level is based on agreed common EU-wide objectives which Member States implement by means of national action plans. Meanwhile, EU funding is made available for activities to support these efforts.

The EU's system of common objectives, common indicators, assessment and reporting for social protection and inclusion – the open method of coordination (OMC) – operates in tandem with the EU Strategy for Growth and Jobs. The Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion is a key feature of the OMC (see box).

Open method of coordination

The EU approach to social policy is based on the OMC: a mechanism to coordinate Member States' economic, employment and social policies. The aim is to progress towards common European goals while giving individual countries the choice of defining the policies for how best to achieve them. Under the OMC, the Member States draw up national action plans outlining priorities and planned actions, with the European Commission supporting and monitoring progress.

The economic situation

Presented at the end September 2008, the Member States' NSRs were prepared before the fallout of the financial crisis on the real economy took hold. Although these developments could not be anticipated in the NSRs, Member States and the Commission have agreed that the reports are still relevant, and that the actions envisaged to help achieve the shared social objectives have become all the more urgent. In particular, appropriate social policies should simultaneously support the goals of mitigating adverse social impacts on the most vulnerable and of containing the impact of the crisis on the economy overall.

Social inclusion

Some 16% of the EU population – or 79 million people – are at risk of income poverty, and for children and the elderly, this proportion is even higher. Poverty has multiple roots: poor housing, insufficient skills, a lack of real access to healthcare and other vital services, an inability to access the labour market — all these factors, particularly in combination, can prevent citizens from being able to fully participate in society.

Social inclusion is about making sure that everybody, including vulnerable groups, can play a full part in work and society and that they have an equal opportunity to do so. Promoting social inclusion is also vital to achieving the EU's goals of sustained economic growth, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.

With 2010 being the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, the EU is to reaffirm its commitment to making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by then.

Social protection

Social protection systems are highly developed in the EU. They protect people against the risks of inadequate incomes associated with unemployment, illness and invalidity, parental responsibilities, old age or inadequate income following the loss of a spouse or parent. They also guarantee access to services that are essential for a life in dignity.

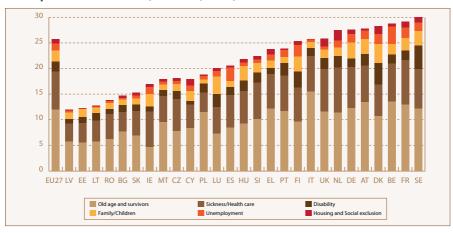
However, inequalities persist and in a fast-changing world, social protection systems are facing new challenges. In particular, the principal threats come from the ageing population, with the proportion of citizens aged 65 and over projected to rise by 77% by 2050. Member States are therefore reforming their pensions, healthcare and long-term care systems in order to ensure universal and sustainable access.

The EU supports the modernisation of social protection systems with a view to ensure social justice for all and promote the active participation of all in society.

Role of social protection expenditure

Social protection serves to cushion poverty, but it also helps insure people against important social risks. A closer look at social protection expenditure shows that old-age pensions and sickness and healthcare benefits represent the bulk of spending in all EU Member States (see figure). This is why when assessing the preventive role of social protection, it is necessary to look in particular at the resilience of pension systems and access of citizens to healthcare.

Social protection benefits (% of GDP, 2006)

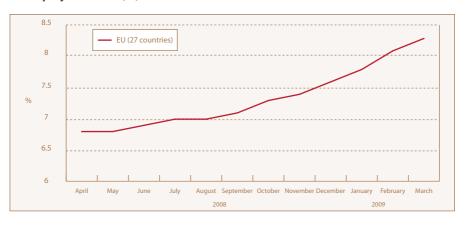


Source: Eurostat.

THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

Recent employment statistics clearly show the impact of the financial downturn on labour markets. The EU unemployment rate reached 8.3% in March 2009, for example, from a low of 6.7% in March 2008. Some countries like Estonia, Spain, Ireland, Lithuania and Latvia have been particularly adversely affected.

Unemployment rate (%)



Note: The chart shows unemployed persons as a percentage of the labour force (total number of people employed and unemployed).

Source: Eurostat.

More citizens claiming benefits

In recent months unemployment has risen considerably in the EU as a whole and in most Member States, especially as regards certain groups such as the young, those on temporary contracts and migrants. Information collected by the Social Protection Committee suggests that most Member States expect social assistance schemes to be put under pressure as some people currently covered by unemployment insurance may lose their entitlements before finding a new job. In addition, the percentage of older workers claiming early retirement or disability has already started to grow in some countries.

In some countries, the number of households defaulting on their mortgage payments or facing repossession is rapidly escalating. Increased rates of over-indebtedness and issues with access to credit for individuals have also been reported. Funded pension schemes face a sharp decline in the value of investments backing pension liabilities.

Contribution of social policy

Social protection systems play the role of 'automatic stabilisers' by helping to cushion the impact of the economic downturn on citizens, in particular the most vulnerable. Given the current outlook, social protection expenditure is projected to grow, although Member States vary in their capacity to meet this increasing demand.

The most badly hit victims of the crisis will likely be vulnerable households at a disadvantage in the labour market and in society. Hence the need for social safety nets which are tight enough to prevent people from falling through and effective enough to launch them back into active social and labour market participation.

Strengthening solidarity

One way to mitigate the effect of the economic crisis and help recovery is to build on the values that underpin the EU's social policies and progress in system reforms. Recent structural reforms in the field of social security have delivered results, bringing more people into employment, better ensuring that work pays and strengthening the resilience of labour markets, prolonging working lives and supporting economic growth. Further reinforcing the positive mutual interaction with action for growth and jobs is vital, notably giving more attention to effective policy integration and mainstreaming of social concerns in other policy areas.

In order to address the negative impact on employment and social cohesion, long-term reforms need to be sustained. These should be balanced with short-term measures aimed at preventing job losses and sustaining household incomes. A strong coordinated EU response is necessary and valuable indications are provided by the European Economic Recovery Plan – the EU's strategy to drive its recovery from the current economic crisis.

Role of the European Social Fund

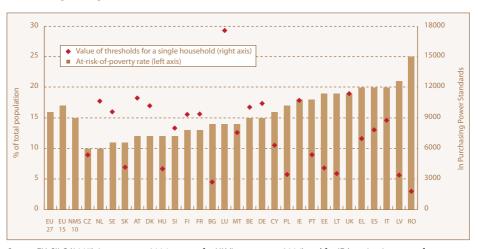
In addition, the European Social Fund should be used to its full potential in a flexible and timely way to alleviate the social impacts of the crisis, by supporting rapid labour market re-entry of the unemployed and focusing on the most vulnerable. Efforts are being made to simplify the implementation of the EU Structural Funds and to enhance coordination with social policies.

FIGHTING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

As shown in the SOCIAL SITUATION IN NUMBERS box, a noticeable proportion of the EU population lives below the poverty threshold¹. This number ranges from 10% in the Czech Republic and the Netherlands to 21% in Latvia. What is more, children and the elderly face an even higher poverty risk, at 19%. Vigilance is needed as new risk groups – e.g. young workers and labour market entrants – as well as new risks, may emerge.

SOCIAL SITUATION IN NUMBERS: 16% of Europeans, or 79 million people, were at risk of poverty in 2007

At-risk-of poverty rate in the EU (%, 2007)



Source: EU-SILC (2007); income year 2006; except for UK (income year 2006) and for IE (moving income reference period 2005-06); RO: National Household Budget Survey 2006. BG data missing.

This defined as 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income, after social transfers.

Helping children out of poverty

The proportion of children at risk of poverty in the EU has not fallen since 2000. Tackling child poverty and breaking the transmission of disadvantage between generations has been a significant concern since the launch of the social inclusion process. The issue has increasingly been singled out as a key priority for Member States.

In 2006, the March European Council asked the EU-27 to take decisive steps to eradicate poverty among children. Many have taken this invitation to heart. Indeed, most countries which made the issue a priority are now planning to reinforce their strategies and follow a more multidimensional and integrated approach.

A boost must be given to Member States' efforts to implement comprehensive strategies against poverty and social exclusion of children, including accessible and affordable quality childcare.

22 countries have set targets relating to child poverty, 16 of them using EU-agreed indicators. A few have also set intermediate targets for their specific challenges (jobless households, families most at risk, intensity of poverty, childcare).

In addition, greater attention is generally given to children and families in the overall design of social inclusion policies, notably in the context of active inclusion policies. Many have 'mainstreamed' child poverty in this way in areas such as minimum income and wages, reconciliation of work and family life and family-friendly services.

Promoting the social inclusion of Roma

Roma throughout Europe tend to face a range of disadvantages, making them extremely vulnerable to social exclusion and poverty. Accordingly, the Member States with a sizable Roma minority have given more coverage to this question and in general there is a better understanding of the challenges involved.

In particular, the issues to be tackled include desegregation, access to employment, addressing educational disadvantage, and improved access to basic services such as housing and healthcare. However, there is a need for a comprehensive policy framework, together with more data and a more extensive and reliable knowledge base.

Active inclusion

Combating social exclusion means promoting the inclusion of vulnerable groups and tackling discrimination in all spheres of life, including on the job market. 'Active inclusion' strategies have an important part to play, to make sure that social policies mobilise people who are capable of working while providing a decent standard of living to those who are and will remain outside the labour market.

Active inclusion, simultaneously promoting inclusive labour markets, ensuring adequate income and access to quality services, is a priority for most Member States. However, the various aspects are dealt with separately in most cases, whereas most disadvantaged people suffer from multiple disadvantages and integrated responses are essential.

Several countries have taken steps to ensure that the purchasing power of minimum income beneficiaries is maintained, But it remains essential, for example, to design better links between out-of-work benefits and in-work support, in order to create the right incentives, while at the same time ensuring adequate income support and prevent inwork poverty, and foster lasting labour market inclusion.

Migrants

Another group that tends to face social disadvantages are immigrants. Indeed, significant gaps persist between this group and the majority population in terms of poverty, income, health, employment, unemployment, education and early school-leaving.

As such, the Member States give priority to improving the inclusion of migrants. Increasingly adopting a holistic approach, they are focusing more on getting both migrants and the host society involved in the process, and several are working to create synergies between inclusion policies and antidiscrimination measures. But still the issue needs to be given increased attention.

Disabled people

With an estimated 50 million European citizens or more having some form of disability², the inclusion of these citizens continues to be addressed. Economic inactivity and insufficient income support are commonly seen as underlying disabled people's poverty, yet quantitative evidence is scarce. Member States are focusing on integrating disabled people into the labour market, and eliminating barriers to education and lifelong learning, for example.

Few, however, are giving priority to eliminating structural obstacles to full participation in society. There is further scope for giving more attention to disabled people in policy design across different areas (disability mainstreaming).

Tackling homelessness

Homelessness is one of the most severe forms of social exclusion and in the current economic climate, access to affordable housing and preventing evictions are all the more crucial in tackling poverty and social exclusion.

Some countries implement comprehensive, multidimensional strategies to address its different manifestations specifically, while others focus on measures integrated in wider policy frameworks, e.g. relating to housing, employment, and health. Supported housing – combining the objective of independent living with personalised social support – is receiving considerable attention.

Several Member States have set targets to reduce homelessness or strengthen support structures. Lack of reliable data, however, continues to impair efforts to define and monitor effective policies. Promoting financial inclusion is crucial to prevent homelessness, particularly in the current circumstances; appropriate support and advice must be ensured to people facing eviction or repossession.

² Labour Force Survey ad hoc module on disability 2002 combined with the Eurostat population estimate for 2008.

Addressing educational disadvantages

The importance of education is recognised by most countries, but only some have integrated the issue into a comprehensive long-term strategy to prevent and tackle social exclusion. Pre-primary education is seen as fundamental, both as a key element in levelling socio-economic disadvantage, and as a means to facilitate work/family life reconciliation. Efforts also focus on ensuring high-quality standards in all schools, combating early school leaving, improving access to education for specific groups and introducing measures to validate prior learning.

Addressing financial exclusion

Addressing financial exclusion is vital in any strategy against poverty, and the crisis brings the issue even more to the fore. On the one hand, people facing poverty and/or exclusion encounter specific difficulties in accessing financial services, with negative consequences for their personal finance or ability to find a job. Denial of access to financial services on the mainstream market may lead people to turn to more costly and risky alternative financial products. On the other hand, for the general population, an improper marketing and unequal access to information of financial services may lead to over-indebtedness.

Some Member States have comprehensive policies, often incorporating debt advice, whereas one is tackling over-indebtedness as a priority. Microcredit – the use of small loans to those in poverty designed to spur entrepreneurship – is provided in some countries to people who cannot access the mainstream credit market.

SOCIAL SITUATION IN NUMBERS: Despite overall progress on the labour markets, 7% of the employed live below the poverty threshold ('in-work poverty')

ADEQUATE AND SUSTAINABLE PENSIONS

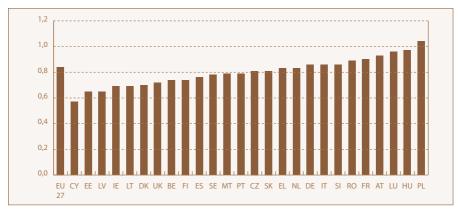
Population ageing can negatively affect pension systems. The dependency ratio (the ratio of population aged 65+ to those aged 15–64) is forecast to more than double from 25% to 53% between 2004 and 2050³. While old age is no longer synonymous with financial hardship, the risk of pensioner poverty remains.

Over the last decade Member States have reformed their pension systems to better provide adequate and sustainable pensions. Progress has been made in providing adequate pensions without jeopardising financial sustainability and work incentives. Yet the new economic outlook will make the necessary fine-balancing even more challenging.

'Adequacy' and 'sustainability' defined

The goal of pension schemes is to ensure a decent living standard for the retired, in order to prevent poverty and social exclusion in old age. Such adequate pensions allow the elderly to share in the economic well-being of their country and to participate in public, social and cultural life. Adequate future pensions, however, require pension systems to be financed sustainably in the face of rapidly ageing societies. Adequacy and sustainability of pensions are thus inextricably linked.

Relative income of the elderly: median income of people aged 65+ as a ratio of income of people aged 0-64, 2007



Source: Eurostat.

³ Eurostat.

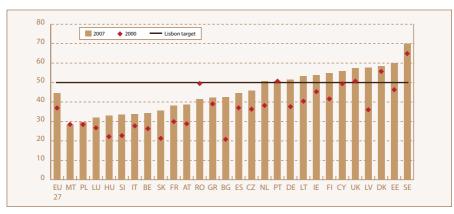
More people in work and for longer

Due to rises in life expectancy, pension system reforms have focused on keeping older people active in the labour market. In fact more older people have jobs, with 11 countries now meeting the Lisbon target of 50% employment for those aged 55–64 years by 2010. Given the increase in life expectancy, even higher employment rates will be necessary in the medium term.

To encourage older citizens to remain in the labour market, the effective retirement age has to rise. According to national reports, Member States are starting to increase the pensionable age in statutory pension schemes, early exit routes are being closed and incentives to early retirement removed. These are important signals for employers and employees to improve their practices of age management and postpone retirement. The current economic downturn will test the durability of these achievements. It will be crucial to prevent a drop in the effective retirement age and a use of early pathways out of the labour market to deal with rising unemployment.

SOCIAL SITUATION IN NUMBERS: The employment rate of older workers (aged 55-64) reached 45% in 2007 as against 37% in 2001.

Employment rate of older workers (55-64)

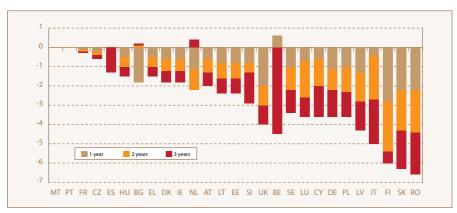


Source: Eurostat.

Ensuring pension adequacy

The present economic outlook highlights the need to ensure that workers who are unemployed for a time are covered by the pension scheme. Indeed, under reformed systems, career breaks can significantly reduce adequacy, as shown by the figure. In particular, it is important to ensure full coverage and to monitor pension adequacy for women and low-wage earners.

SOCIAL SITUATION IN NUMBERS: Current pension systems have generally reduced poverty among the elderly, but single elderly women face a much higher risk than single elderly men (28% compared with 20%).



Impact of a 1-, 2- and 3-year career break for unemployment on future pensioner's income

Source: ISG calculations on theoretical replacement rates carried out in the OECD APEX model or in national models. Note: Measured by difference in net theoretical replacement rates – pensioner's income relative to the last received wage, in percentage points.

Funded pension schemes

Although in most part they are not yet that important for those retiring today, funded schemes in general are becoming more significant every day. This is why the Joint Report 2009 pays close attention to funded pension provision.

In particular, it emphasises the need for funded schemes to include provisions that protect against substantial volatility. One solution consists in lowering the investment risk as people approach retirement age – known as a 'lifecycle approach towards investment'.

With such a strategy, younger members might choose riskier products with a higher chance of earning more over one's life; in contrast, members close to retirement could select products with a more cautious investment strategy before turning pension savings into retirement income.

The report also calls for appropriate solutions for the pay-out phase which is still to be determined in a number of countries with mandatory schemes. Annuities guarantee an income for life regardless of its eventual length and, as such, are the most secure means of providing an income in retirement.

Member States should give careful consideration to the proportion of overall pension income expected to come from defined contribution schemes and whether they would be sufficiently appropriate for all groups in the population. For instance, in voluntary schemes, there is evidence that coverage and contribution levels depend on the socioeconomic status of scheme members.

If private schemes are to be an essential source of retirement income, coverage and contribution levels need to be set accordingly.

In addition, well-functioning supervisory bodies and effective financial regulatory frameworks are essential. With citizens' pensions coming from multiple sources, it is vital that they have access to unbiased information and financial education so that they can make informed decisions.

Impact of the crisis on funded pension income

Long-term oriented strategies and the regulatory framework have limited the impact of the crisis on private pension income for most of those retiring today, but some will face outcomes below their expectations.

Minimum income provisions

Member States are changing their minimum income provisions for older people to increase benefits and ease access. In as much as benefits tend to be price-indexed, relative incomes were likely to have fallen behind in recent years of growth. Yet, the relative erosion is in most part substantially smaller than could be expected. Most countries have uprated minimum pensions and minimum provisions.

UNIVERSALLY ACCESSIBLE HEALTHCARE AND LONG-TERM CARE

Member States are committed to accessible, high-quality and sustainable healthcare and long-term care for citizens. Good health is an important goal, as it contributes to each individual's general well-being. In addition, it enables people to participate in the labour market, as well as in social and political activities, reduces sick leave and absenteeism, increases productivity, and postpones retirement, allowing for longer working lives.

SOCIAL SITUATION IN NUMBERS: Life expectancy is now 82 years for women and 76 years for men. This follows a gain in longevity of 4 years for women and 5 years for men over the last 20 years.

Improving healthcare systems

Member States maintain that essential policies contributing to good health and longer working lives include effective workplace health policies, health promotion, disease prevention, curative care and rehabilitation. There is also a need to build greater coherence between economic, education, employment, environmental and social policy.

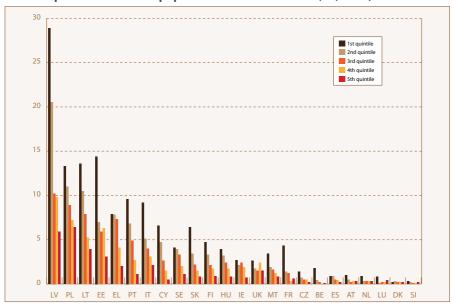
Member States are also continuing in their efforts to improve efficiency and effectiveness, with several exploring the possibilities of privatisation. Whether such reforms promote quality and efficiency depends on the incentives and contracts with insurance funds. At national level, success depends on the institutional capacity to monitor, regulate, ensure risk equalisation and identify what the private and what the public can do better. Private and public provision also needs to be coordinated to create synergies and avoid duplication.

SOCIAL SITUATION IN NUMBERS: Total expenditure on health has increased throughout the EU in the last 20 years. Today it ranges from 10% of GDP or more in some countries to 6% or less in others.

Access to healthcare for all

Despite the good healthcare systems in place in Member States, there continue to be striking inequalities in the health of European citizens from different socio-economic groups and regions. The available data suggest that people in all countries report that at least on one occasion in the previous 12 months they felt they needed medical care (examination or treatment) and did not receive it either because they had to wait, or it was too expensive, or it was too far to obtain (unmet medical care). Those with less education, wealth or a worse job status tend to suffer more from ill health. Such inequalities aggravate social exclusion and economic inequality and represent a loss of human potential.

Self-reported unmet need for medical care (access reasons), (by income quintile from the poorest fifth of the population to the richest fifth, %, 2006)



Source: Eurostat based on EU-SILC 2006 data.

Access reasons: waiting for care, paying for care and distance to care.

Member States are working to improve the situation through a variety of cross-sectoral policies addressing both how to promote better health and prevent disease. In addition, they are looking to involve a wide range of services such as education, housing and employment. In addition, all countries see enhancing primary care as the way forward to improve access, ensure coordination of care and contribute to sustainability.

However, as healthcare treatment – in particular hospital costs – consumes the largest share of expenditure, promotion and prevention receive a relatively small proportion of spending in relation to their goals. In addition, the shortages of general practitioners and nurses in many countries may make these goals more challenging to achieve.

Quality of healthcare

Quality issues are rising up the agenda for Member States, with several undertaking initiatives that aim to provide citizens with good quality and safe preventive care and treatment. For example, quality standards or clinical guidelines have been devised and implemented using evidence-based medicine or health technology assessment.

However, only a few countries have made patient safety – a crucial element of quality – a key priority, and set up appropriate structures and systems. Huge disparities can be seen, with some Member States advanced in the implementation of quality and safety strategies and in providing a patient-centred approach, and with others only at the beginning of the process. These disparities may be due to the limited resources allocated to healthcare and the insufficient awareness about long-term advantages that good quality of care may bring.

Sustainability and coordination

As mentioned above, the issue of staff shortages in healthcare persists and the ageing of the population will likely make them more acute. This raises the question of sustainability of the system. Member States should therefore take measures to recruit, train and retain healthcare professionals at all levels.

In addition, countries have made progress in creating an integrated approach for managing chronic diseases, but there remains much to do to improve coordination between levels of government, types of medical care, health and social care, public and private provision, and the public and third sector. This is all the more so for long-term care.

Long-term care

Higher life expectancy and socio-economic changes are driving demand for long-term care. Thus, Member States are looking to identify a sustainable mix of financing, with the current share of private sources of finance being relatively high. These sources can be private health insurance coverage or private household payments.

Dependent people prefer long-term care in a residential or community setting rather than institutional care, but in many countries the latter still accounts for more than half of public expenditure. Additionally, as in healthcare, there is a need to address the expected workforce shortages in the long-term care sector (formal care) as well as devising ways to support family or informal carers.

CONCLUSIONS

Key messages from Member States' new NSRs outlining strategies to promote the EU's common social objectives:

- The EU can build on the values of solidarity that underpin its social policies and on progress in structural reforms to cushion the impact of the economic crisis and help recovery. Further strengthening the positive mutual interaction with action for growth and jobs is vital, notably by allowing social protection systems to fully play their role as automatic stabilisers. In order to address the negative impact on employment and social cohesion, long-term reforms need to be sustained while balanced with short-term measures aimed at preventing job losses and sustaining household incomes. Recent structural reforms in the field of social security have delivered results, bringing more people into employment, strengthening the incentives to work and the resilience of labour markets, prolonging working lives and enhancing economic growth. A strong coordinated EU response is needed and valuable indications are provided by the European Economic Recovery Plan.
- The European Social Fund should be used to its full potential in a flexible and timely way to alleviate the social impacts of the crisis, by supporting rapid labour market re-entry of the unemployed and focussing on the most vulnerable. Simplified implementation of Structural Funds and improved coordination with social policies will help. The Commission will issue a regular bulletin to monitor social trends. Reports from Member States could facilitate exchange of information and policy experiences in the Social Protection Committee.
- Comprehensive Active Inclusion strategies that combine and balance measures aimed at inclusive labour markets, access to quality services and adequate minimum income, need to be implemented. A boost must be given to Member States' efforts to implement comprehensive strategies against poverty and social exclusion of children, including accessible and affordable quality childcare. Sustained work is required to tackle homelessness as an extremely serious form of exclusion, to address the multiple disadvantages the Roma people are facing and their vulnerability to social exclusion and to promote the social inclusion of migrants. Vigilance is needed as new risk groups, e.g. young workers and labour market entrants, as well as new risks may emerge.
- Long term adequacy and sustainability of pension systems depend on continued efforts to reach the Lisbon target of a 50% employment rate of older work-

ers notwithstanding the downturn. It is important to ensure full coverage and to monitor pension adequacy notably for women and low wage earners. Long-term oriented strategies and the regulatory framework have limited the impact of the crisis on private pension income for most of those retiring today, but some might face outcomes below their expectations. Funded scheme designs will need to be reviewed to boost their ability to cope with risk in the investment and pay-out phases and to improve coverage so they can fully realise their strength in coping with ageing.

- Member States strive to improve the value for money of healthcare and reduce health inequalities by increased attention to primary care, prevention, health promotion, better coordination and rational use of resources. These strategies need to be more vigorously pursued, in particular where healthcare systems are under-resourced. This also implies addressing potential staff shortages in health care by measures to recruit, train, retain and develop health care professionals at all levels.
- Member States are also striving to establish and strengthen systems for quality long-term care, to create a solid financing basis, to improve care coordination and to ensure sufficient human resources as well as support for informal carers.
- The current Social Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Cycle lasts until 2010, the target year for the Lisbon strategy. Strong commitment will be needed to achieve the agreed objectives on social protection and social inclusion and the 2010 European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion will reaffirm it. While the decision on setting national quantified targets and their definition remains a core responsibility of the Member States, the positive role of the Social OMC could be further strengthened by evidence-based national target-setting. Increased attention should be given to the quality and continuity of stakeholder involvement and to the mainstreaming of social considerations inter alia via the evaluation of social impacts as a vital part of integrated impact assessments.

FIND OUT MORE

Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2009				
National strategic reports	http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/ spsi/strategy_reports_en.htm			
Social inclusion in the EU	http://ec.europa.eu/social/main. jsp?catld=437&langld=en			
Social protection in the EU	http://ec.europa.eu/social/main. jsp?catld=443&langld=en			
European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion	http://ec.europa.eu/social/main. jsp?langld=en&catld=637			
European Social Fund	http://ec.europa.eu/social/main. jsp?catld=325&langld=en			
European Economic Recovery Plan	http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/ thematic_articles/article13502_en.htm			

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