

Briefing Paper #10

10 priorities for 2009-2014

Deliverables for the new European Parliament
and new European Commission



solidar

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SOLIDAR is a European network of 53 NGOs working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide.

SOLIDAR lobbies the EU and international institutions in three primary areas: social affairs, international cooperation and education.

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Photo from Soweto

Photo of Social worker with lady

FOREWORD

A new European Parliament has been elected and a new European Commission is in the process of formation. These important institutional changes take place in the middle of the worst global financial and economic crisis since to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Statistical data shows that the consequences of the current crisis will be terrible: Euro area unemployment rose up to 9.2% (April 2009), one third of the EU population could not afford an unexpected expenditure (May 2009) and 50 million people are expected to lose their jobs with another 200 million joining the 1.3 billion living in extreme poverty in the world (ILO).

With this document SOLIDAR defines **10 priorities for the next 5 years** and calls upon the new European Parliament and new European Commission to decide upon a new direction for Europe, in both its internal and external policy initiatives. This new direction is needed in order to change the often devastating social realities in Europe and the rest of the world, which are likely to gain in importance as a consequence of the current crisis.

SOLIDAR proposes to work together for new Social Europe, Decent Work for all and to ensure that everyone can enjoy a life in dignity. In order to achieve that we have to start with setting up a social impact assessment of all our internal and external policies, with concrete benchmarks that ensure – amongst others – social progress, sustainable economic growth, more and better jobs, social welfare, gender equality and anti-discrimination.

The European Union has to 'put people first': single income parents that are unable to buy school books for their children, workers in precarious situations with diminished rights or job security, migrants who are discriminated against, elderly people who have insufficient pensions to afford primary necessities and internally displaced people who fled their community because of devastating natural or man-made disasters.

Putting people first is an opportunity for Europe to place more emphasis on the basic values of the Union – respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights – and ensure that nobody is left behind.

Together we can be a force for change!

Conny Reuter

Secretary General SOLIDAR

10 PRIORITIES FOR 2009 – 2014

1. Social Europe should be at the heart of the European integration process. Europe
 - has to set regulations, requirements and standards to prevent European citizens, in particular the most vulnerable, from losing out.
2. Decent Work has to become the main pillar of the European Union's external and internal policies to ensure sustainable economic growth and development. Strengthen and broaden social protection coverage by ensuring access to social security, pensions, unemployment benefits, maternity protection and quality health care to all.
3. Legal and policy frameworks need to be developed at European level and within Member States to guarantee accessible, affordable and quality social, health and education services. Competition in social markets needs to be based on quality.
4. European governments need to increase the delivery of genuine aid resources to meet their own 2010 and 2015 targets. Resist the temptation of further inflating figures in the coming years by counting other non-aid items, such as migration or security related expenditures.
5. Real political commitment is required to effectively reduce poverty and social exclusion. The internal and external dimensions of the fight against poverty and social exclusion cannot be uncoupled.
6. The EU's so-called Global Europe strategy has to be revised so that it prioritises decent work, human rights and food security. It is time for the EU to abandon its trade distorting subsidies.
7. Integration is a "two-way process" which includes the active involvement of migrant associations and civil society organisations. Europe has to refuse that migration and integration policies are build on utilitarian considerations.
8. Member States need to reduce institutional barriers that can have a negative impact on access or educational attainment of migrant children. Recognise and promote the crucial role played by civil society organisations in providing services for vulnerable persons and groups.
9. Develop a European strategy for smart green growth and jobs which will create 10 million new jobs by 2020. Find additional funding for climate change adaptation and promote this in the run up to the Copenhagen conference.
10. Reinforce or build up trust in the EU by setting priorities and implementing policies promoting solidarity, equality, non-discrimination, diversity, mutual respect, pluralism and justice. A reinforced, more effective and visible OMC in the fields of social protection and social inclusion, migration and integration is needed.

WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR THE NEXT MANDATE?

1. FOR A SOCIAL EUROPE

Today 78 million people are living in or are at risk of poverty in the EU27, this means 1 out of 7 European citizens, amongst whom 1 out of 5 children.

Europe is often understood to be all about markets and less about social policies. Yet the Treaty establishing the European Community (TEC) sets down as a core priority certain fundamental social objectives: promoting employment, improving living and working conditions, comprehensive social protection, dialogue between management and labour, and combating poverty and other forms of social exclusion.

In recent years though, the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital within EU Member States has always held preference over social and sustainability goals.

Depending on the policy field and topic, Europe has had to set up certain regulations, requirements and standards, like the recognition of professional qualifications and conditions for people to access public services. These regulations could make European citizens - in particular the more vulnerable, disadvantaged and less mobile - lose out as a result of increased openness of the EU's internal market and exposure to influences from trade and financial market policies.

The European Union could even play a proactive role in ensuring that the fundamental social rights in the Charter of Fundamental Rights are put into practice. In fields such as (gender) equality, non-discrimination, workers' protection, social services and the integration of migrants, the potential of these Treaty rules should be made use of, especially in these times of financial and economic crisis.

Deliverables:

- **Social Europe should be at the heart of the European integration process**, and civil society organisations and citizens strongly involved in the construction of Europe.
- **Europe has to set regulations, requirements and standards to prevent**

European citizens, in particular the most vulnerable, to lose out, also as a result of increased competition and the dynamics of the internal market integration.

2. DECENT WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR ALL

9.2% of working population or 14.6 million people in Europe were unemployed in April 2009. These are the highest levels since 1999.

Since 2005, decent work has been recognised as a key pre-condition for the eradication of poverty, and its achievement now features under the Millennium Development Goal number one. Apart from creating good jobs, the decent work agenda has a special focus on social protection: according to the International Labour Organization (ILO) less than 2% of GDP is necessary to provide a basic set of social security benefits to all of the world's poor. The question then is not can we afford to do it, but rather can we afford not to.

The EU has committed itself to promoting decent work for all through all its internal and external policies. But to this day, its trade policies destroy jobs, its migration policies perpetuate exploitation, its debt policies promote the free market over redistribution of wealth.

Deliverables:

- **Decent Work has to become the main pillar of the European Union's external and internal policies to ensure sustainable economic growth and development.** All people have the right to work, to good working conditions and to sufficient income for their basic economic, social and family needs, a right that should be enforced by providing adequate living wages, fundamental freedoms and rights at work.
- **Strengthen and broaden social protection coverage by ensuring access to social security, pensions, unemployment benefits, maternity protection and quality health care to all.**

These benefits should be available to everyone, including workers in the informal economy in Europe and the rest of the world.

3. PRESERVING AND PROMOTING SOCIAL SERVICES

7% of population lived in a household that had been unable to pay as scheduled utility bills for their main dwelling in the last 12 months and 3% in a household that had been unable to pay either rent or mortgage payment.

Social services are essential to help the people most in need, to provide people with a safety net and new future opportunities. The challenge we are facing today is how to reconcile the need to rebuild prosperous and competitive societies whilst ensuring that the people in Europe have adequate social protection and fundamental rights.

Social services are a core element of all European social protection systems. They contribute to social inclusion and social cohesion, and to the implementation of the fundamental rights of individuals. The special nature of social services is that they bring about the realisation of social rights of individuals and groups and social policy objectives of society as a whole. The special nature of the users of social services is that they are often people who are dependent, need support and guidance, are ill, or are living in poverty. The special nature of both the services and the users therefore need to be recognised. Social, health, employment and education services contribute to social policy objectives, form core elements of social protection schemes and are in the general interest of societies.

Deliverables:

- **Legal and policy frameworks need to be developed at European level and within Member States to guarantee accessible, affordable and quality social, health and education services** which meet people's expectations and needs.
- **Competition in social markets needs to be based on quality**, for example services adapted to needs, integrated

service delivery, provided by qualified staff on a continuous basis, embedded in local service infrastructure and communities allowing for NGO providers to offer services on their own initiative, responding to new needs.

4. MORE AND BETTER AID

As a consequence of the financial crisis some 53 million people could be driven into poverty in developing countries, on top of the 135-150 million driven into poverty by the rise in food and fuel prices over the 2007-2008 period.

In 2002, governments agreed to increase their aid by 2015 as well as stop inflating their figures by including debt relief. In the current context of the economic crisis, where this aid is needed more than ever, governments and the European Commission are insisting that funds for issues such as climate change adaptation and relief from the food crisis, as well as so-called aid-for-trade financing should come out of the same pool of funds. This means less money spent on health and education, social protection and social infrastructure at a time when it is need most.

Whilst claiming that money is not there for additional efforts on climate change and food, our governments are not doing enough to fight tax evasion and avoidance by multinational companies, which through the existence of tax havens and transfer pricing robs developing countries of some \$600 million per year that they could be putting towards their own development.

Deliverables:

- **European governments need to Increase the delivery of genuine aid resources to meet their own 2010 and 2015 targets.** Step up efforts to deliver more effective aid and set additional targets that go beyond the minimum international standards.
- Stop counting refugee costs, student costs and debt relief as official development assistance. **Resist the temptation of further inflating figures in the coming years by counting other non-aid items, such as migration or security related expenditures.**

5. ERADICATE POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

8% of Europeans are so called working poor: individuals and families who maintain regular employment but remain in relative poverty due to low levels of pay and dependent expenses.

The poverty figures will only increase as a consequence of the financial and economic crises unless adequate policy frameworks which support protecting public wealth and robust social infrastructures are put in place at both European and national level. While the rich in our societies are getting richer and the wealth is concentrated in fewer hands, frameworks are required to set up mechanisms for redistributing income and wealth and more effectively fighting poverty and social exclusion. With 8% of Europeans being working poor - that is to say workers whose wages are below the poverty line - equal pay for equal work and decent working conditions have to be fought for, especially because of the increase in the amount of temporary agency/interim workers and posted workers (workers who work in another EU State for a limited period).

Labour law should be about efficiently protecting individual and collective rights and promoting fundamental values. Active labour market policies are needed to combat social exclusion and not create further segregated labour markets. A set of measures that actively address inequalities in the labour market, eliminating discrimination in recruitment procedures, ensuring access to promotion and training are needed. In coordination with social protection systems, labour law should support active policies bringing people in precarious situations and far from the labour market back into employment.

Deliverables:

- **Real political commitment is required to effectively reduce poverty and social exclusion.** EU policies including the Lisbon Strategy need to be reoriented and aimed at achieving socially inclusive and cohesive societies. This commitment should be underlined by setting policy targets for poverty reduction for 2015 and 2020 at all political levels, in particular eradicate extreme forms of poverty and break the cycle of intergenerational transmission.

- **The internal and external dimensions of the fight against poverty and social exclusion cannot be uncoupled.** The European dimension of the fight against poverty and social exclusion cannot be dissociated from global challenges linked to migration, climate change, decent work and implementation of International Labour Organisation (ILO) core labour standards, etc.

6. MAKING TRADE WORK FOR DEVELOPMENT

An estimated 487 million workers (16.4% of the global workforce) still do not earn enough to lift themselves above the \$1US per day whilst 1.3 billion workers (43.5%) live below the \$US2 per day. 80% of the global population has no access to social protection.

There is abundant evidence showing that trade liberalisation has led to many people losing their jobs both within and outside of the European Union. Whilst global output grew by 4.2% between 1997 and 2007, world employment only increased by 1.6% yearly. Add to this the fact that unjust export subsidies on agriculture are aggravating the food crisis by pricing small farmers from developing countries out of the market, it is astonishing that the mantra that free trade is good for everyone persists.

In particular, the EU has been negotiating free trade deals with some of the world's poorest countries, the so-called Economic Partnership Agreements with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. In these negotiations the EU has been demanding that they open their markets to EU companies in all areas including agriculture, services and industrial goods, with very little regard for how this will affect their infant industries and chances of ensuring that they do not remain forever commodity-export dependent economies.

But trade can be made to work for the poor if it is undertaken in a context of strong domestic regulation and if developing countries are given the space to develop.

Deliverables:

- **The EU's so-called Global Europe strategy has to be revised so that it prioritises decent work, human rights**

and food security above profits for European companies.

- **It is time for the EU to abandon its trade distorting subsidies** under the Common Agriculture Policy and ensure that both European and developing countries can enjoy access to healthy, nutritious and environmentally sustainable food. Current trade preferences which violate human and labour rights should be suspended.

7. MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

There is a serious lack of social cohesion in European countries which is exploited by racists, right wing extremists and those seeking to promote division.

Although a feature of human history for centuries, in recent years migration has become a political 'hot potato' in Europe. In the context of the economic and climate crisis, an increasing number of people are likely to attempt to flee poverty and environmental degradation. The EU's current policies on migration are partially contradictory and hypocritical. On the one hand, Europe encourages a brain drain by accepting highly skilled migrants, robbing poor countries (some of which are in the EU itself) of their health workers, teachers and engineers. On the other, it is increasingly shutting its doors to the poor and unskilled, those most desperately in need. And for those who are lucky enough to make it to Europe, they are often subjected to systems of double standards which deny them access to welfare and employment rights. Yet entire industries, from agriculture through to services rely on migrant labour.

These migration policies have created a serious lack of social cohesion in European countries, which can be easily exploited by racists and those seeking to promote division. With the current uncertain economic times, Europe needs to prevent this and should not fall into economic nationalism and turn their back to one of the most vulnerable groups. Social cohesion and the integration of migrants present one of the key challenges to European communities.

Deliverables:

- **Integration is a "two-way process" which includes the active involvement of migrant associations and civil**

society organisations, and also requires Member States to provide documented and undocumented migrants with opportunities to fully participate in society and access to essential services.

- **Europe cannot build migration and integration policies on predominantly utilitarian considerations** and focus the benefits for the host society only, largely disregarding the interest of the immigrants themselves.

8. EDUCATION FOR ALL

50% of immigrant youth drop out of high school, in Belgium, before getting a diploma. The causes are low social-economic disadvantages, the other language and the late enrolment.

In order to provide vulnerable groups with new future opportunities, education is of vital importance. There is a strong relation between poverty, social exclusion and low levels of education. All levels of education, training and lifelong learning are important tools in the fight against poverty and discrimination, and to build democracy and social cohesion. Education is a fundamental human right which has the potential to empower people to exercise their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Increased migration from third countries and intra-EU mobility flows present challenges for both migrants and their school-aged children as well as for education policies and systems. Children from a migrant background are less likely to attend pre-school education schemes or institutions in the social welfare sector of a similar nature, like a kindergarten. This is often due to insufficient information or cultural and linguistic problems of understanding between immigrant parents and pre-school staff, which constitute a real challenge as these children lack equal early start opportunities. Debates and policies on education and training should prioritise the promotion of social inclusion and social cohesion, and in this context, pay special attention to migrant children. Every child in the European Union, including undocumented children have the right to go to school.

Deliverables:

- **Member States need to reduce institutional barriers that can have a**

negative impact on access or educational attainment of migrant children in order to ensure equity in education. Explicit recognition of the fundamental right of access to education on the basis of equal rights and equal opportunities is needed.

- SOLIDAR underlines the need to better link debates and policies on education and training to the promotion of social inclusion and social cohesion and strongly calls for a recognition and promotion of **the crucial role played by civil society organisations in providing services for vulnerable persons and groups, also supporting a smooth functioning of education systems in view of attaining general interest objectives.**

9. CLIMATE JUSTICE

250 million people are affected by disasters every year. According to the UN, the number of extreme weather events such as storms and heat waves will continue to rise as a result of climate change.

Whilst there is very little doubt of the effects of climate change already, unless there is an ambitious deal in Copenhagen at the end of 2009, the world will really be in danger. There are two important ways in which the EU must show leadership: first of all it must adopt an ambitious target to lower its greenhouse emissions (mitigation) and secondly it must find the money to support developing countries affected by climate change to cope (adaptation).

In policy terms this means upping its target of 20% emissions cuts to 40% and finding additional money, beyond the 0.7% already committed to Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), to put on the negotiating table as an incentive for developing countries to commit to their own ambitious targets. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that developing countries will need an additional \$86 billion to cope with climate change – a lot of money at first glance, but nothing in comparison to the 1 trillion G20 leaders committed to dealing with the global economic crisis. And once again, the EU's other policies (for example its insistence on facilitating access for European companies to natural resources in poor countries despite the well-documented impact on the environment) are incoherent with sustainable development.

Deliverables:

- In climate change debates more emphasis has to be put on the necessity for the EU to **find additional funding for climate change adaptation above and beyond current aid commitments** and promote this in the run up to the Copenhagen conference.
- **European strategy for smart green growth and jobs which will create 10 million new jobs by 2020** – with two million in the renewable energies sector alone – needs to be developed. Europe has to become a world leader in innovation, new green technologies and products.

10. CIVIL SOCIETY AND CITIZENS ENGAGEMENT

The turn-out in the last European Elections was just 43.2%. Over 162 million people in the European Union did not go and vote.

Citizens of Europe need to be engaged in decision making processes at European, national and local level that have impact on their living and working conditions. Civil society organisations can empower vulnerable groups and socially and economically disadvantaged people to formulate, together with decision makers, new and comprehensive policies, monitor and evaluate existing ones and propose changes to existing legislation.

Democracy also depends on the contribution of the millions of citizens who, through their time and effort, add to the public good. The volunteer who supports a single parent, someone working in a youth club, the activist who campaigns for the cancellation of third world debt, everybody is an intrinsic part of our society and a vital factor in creating a sense of social inclusion and belonging. The engagement of individuals for the public good is encouraged, organised and supported by organisations and associations set up by citizens to make our world a better place. Engaging with NGO service providers that bring together these individuals provides a direct link to the everyday reality of citizens within Europe and empowers the millions of volunteers in Europe to contribute to fighting poverty and social exclusion.

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC - a voluntary method which relies on 'soft law'

mechanisms) can be a useful tool to develop together a new social Europe in an economically difficult period. The OMC provides an adequate framework to exchange experiences and good practices and can particularly promote the involvement of all stakeholders in the process of implementing action plans to fight against poverty and social exclusion.

Deliverables:

- Reinforce or build up trust in the EU by setting priorities and implementing policies **promoting solidarity, equality, non-discrimination, diversity, mutual respect, pluralism and justice**. There is a need to promote the engagement of citizens and strengthen civil dialogue to bridge the gap between Europe and its people by establishing legal and policy frameworks that promote and recognise the involvement of volunteers.
- For a **Europe that builds on fundamental rights, justice, equality, non-discrimination, on fair chances in life and decent working conditions for all**, on the full societal inclusion and participation of all citizens and people living in Europe, and on sustainable development.
- The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) has brought about concrete and positive effects, particularly by putting the issues of poverty and social exclusion on the agenda. SOLIDAR supports **a reinforced, more effective and visible OMC in the fields of social protection and social inclusion, migration and integration** as well as education and training.

11. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AT HEART OF ENLARGEMENT

17% of inhabitants are at risk of poverty in Croatia, moving up to 20% at or near the poverty line in Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina, 25% in Albania, 30% in FYR Macedonia, 34% in Montenegro and 36% in Kosovo.

The development of EU-compatible policies is fast becoming a necessary part of the preparations for the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU. The EU's enlargement process has to result in increasing the economic competitiveness and at the same

time effectively tackling social problems and strengthening the capacity of public administration in candidate countries. It is imperative to improve the effectiveness of current expenditure, improve the quality of healthcare, education and social protection and the accessibility of these services.

The volume of undeclared work in Croatia is 27%, Serbia 40% and Kosovo 80%, whilst the EU-average is estimated 9%. The Purchasing Power Parity in Western Balkans is 3 times less than in the 12 New Member States and 6 times less than the Old Member States.

There is a lack of access to healthcare and pension benefits. Corruption is rampant and the capacity of the state limited. The number of hospital beds is considerably lower than in the EU, with less than half the number of beds available in Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The average social security benefits per month for eligible recipients in 2004 was just €53 in Croatia, €27 in Albania, €17,50 in Serbia, €19 in Montenegro and just €15 in Bosnia & Herzegovina.

Deliverables:

- **Citizens in the Western Balkans are in general and Civil Society Organisations in particular in need of awareness raising on the different aspects of European Enlargement**, the European Commission should invest more in building Partnerships between civil society in Old Member States, New Member States and (potential) Candidate Member States.
- **Western Balkans Social Observatories should be set by CSOs and Trade Unions and supported by the European Union** that fulfil a "watchdog" role for decent work, social inclusion, social cohesion, social services, social protection and poverty eradication.

FOR FURTHER READING

1. [Together for Social Europe Declaration](#)
2. [Briefing Paper on the financial crisis](#)
3. [Call to Action for Decent Work, Decent Life](#)
4. [Decent Work Briefings on Decent Work, Trade, Social Protection and Financing for development](#)
5. [CSO recommendations for the Western Balkans](#)
6. [SOLIDAR response to the European Commission Green Paper on Mobility and Migration](#)