



French Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2008

Results of the informal meeting of ministers responsible for combating poverty and social exclusion

Press release

Marseilles, Thursday 16 October 2008

The European ministers responsible for combating poverty and social exclusion met for the first time on 16 October 2008 under the aegis of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union in a meeting chaired by Martin Hirsch, the French High Commissioner for Active Solidarity against Poverty.

At a time when 16% of Europeans live below the poverty threshold and the growing phenomenon of the working poor affects 8% of jobholders within the EU, the ministers reaffirmed their political commitment to this issue. In this context, the ministers debated the place of the fight against poverty on the political agenda of their countries.

Organised in line with the 7th European round table on poverty and social exclusion, the ministers' meeting focused more specifically on the European strategy of active inclusion and on the instruments needed to implement it. The aim of the active inclusion strategy is to create a new framework for coordinated action to combat poverty based on three inseparable and complementary pillars: assistance for a sufficient minimum income, inclusive labour markets, and access to quality services. The ministers' discussions were thus able to build on the key messages developed by the participants in the round table, i.e. people living in poverty, European voluntary networks, social partners, businesses, representatives of local authorities and of the Member States.

Having first recognised that the Member States are primarily responsible for combating poverty and social exclusion, the ministers expressed their conviction that the European Union added value by contributing to the mutual reinforcing of the relevant national strategies. The Member States positioned themselves with a view to work in the context of the 2010 European Year of Combating Poverty, which has just been adopted unanimously.

The ministers expressed their unanimous interest in the **strategic approach of active inclusion**, which envisages an effective insertion of the people furthest from the labour market. They welcomed the recommendation and the communication on the active inclusion strategy presented by the Commission on 3 October 2008. They all expressed their commitment to arriving at **common principles of active inclusion** at the EPSSCO Council on 15 and 16 December 2008, in order to complement and modernise the common foundation of shared values of European solidarity, with respect to the principle of subsidiarity. They encourage the Social Protection Committee to ensure a follow-up of the application of these common principles.

The ministers also insisted on the **need to define the tools best suited for implementing and monitoring the European strategy** for combating poverty which should be the subject of a discussion on the basis of the renewed social agenda. In this regard, the aim is to be as specific and as innovative as possible.

A vast majority of Member States deemed setting quantified aims at national level to be a pertinent approach, worthy of being intensified, notably in the context of the European Year of Combating Poverty in 2010. These aims could be directed at the entire population concerned or at specific sub-sections (e.g. children, the working poor). Interested countries could work together on the adequate indicators for each national situation, with the support of the Social Protection Committee.

The development on a voluntary basis of social experiments in the area of childcare, financial inclusion, access to housing for the homeless and the social integration of ethnic minorities, migrants and the Roma, which could be carried out within Member States in the context of transnational programmes, was also highly commended.

The possible creation of a European network for sharing best practices will be discussed at the first conference on social experiments in Europe, which will take place in Grenoble on 21 and 22 November, with the support of the Commission, by means of the European Social Fund and the Progress programme.

Belgium, which will host the 9th Round Table on Combating Poverty in 2010, the European Year of Combating Poverty, has already expressed its intention to organise a ministerial meeting on this issue.

Finally, in view of the current financial crisis and the uncertainties with regard to economic growth within the European Union, the ministers decided to maintain a link between the 27 to follow the regular developments of poverty and the events that affect the most vulnerable. In addition, on the initiative of the French Presidency and with the full agreement of the European Commission, the Member States who so wish can form a watchdog group to analyse changes to the situation of poverty in real time and, if necessary, call on the European institutions to take a concerted response.

Communication service contact

Patrick Chanson

Cabinet of the French High Commissioner for Active Solidarity against Poverty

0033 1 44 38 14 17

Patrick.chanson@pm.gouv.fr