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Ireland's contribution to the EU's role in tackling poverty

Marking 50 years of Ireland's membership of the EU

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This publication by EAPN Ireland coincides with its conference 'Ireland's contribution to the EU's role in tackling poverty' which was held to mark 50 years of Ireland's membership of the EU.

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The aim is to reflect on EU developments in the fight against poverty and social exclusion over the past 50 years since Ireland joined in 1973. In particular to understand what Ireland's contribution has been, and how Ireland has benefitted over that time in order to draw lessons for the future.

The publication contains a number of articles including: **'50 years of the fight against poverty and social exclusion and for a more Social Europe'** by Hugh Frazer, Adjunct Professor in the Department of Applied Social Studies in Maynooth University. This article providing a great overview and reflections of developments over the past 50 years, ending by outlining some challenges and priorities for the future.

'From Poverty to Social Inclusion: The EU and Ireland' by the late Seamus O'Conneide, who was Professor of Applied Social Studies in Maynooth University. This article was originally published in 2010 as part of a 20th anniversary publication by EAPN Ireland. The article focuses primarily on how the evolution in the "rediscovery of poverty" internationally impacted on thinking in Ireland in the 1970s and how this thinking was used to influence EU developments on poverty during the early years of Ireland's membership and how the EU approach evolved in subsequent decades.

The publication also contains an updated **EAPN Ireland Briefing on the Development of a Social Europe**, the **EAPN Ireland Position Paper on the Future of Europe**, agreed by its members in 2022, and a useful table presenting the **Key moments in EU Social Policy** beginning from the Treaty of Rome in 1957 to date.

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01

50 years of the fight against poverty and social exclusion and for a more Social Europe

Hugh Frazer

Introduction

Europe was conceived as an economic solution to a political problem. The essential idea was that by bringing countries (especially France and Germany) together in a strong mutually beneficial economic union the risk of war between countries would be ended and peace would be ensured.

Thus, it is not surprising that the social dimension of the European Union (EU) has always tended to be subservient to economic and related employment dimensions and the road to a more Social Europe has been a long and rocky one. However, despite this there has been a long tradition of the EU becoming involved to some degree in initiatives to combat poverty and social exclusion and social issues and policies have gradually, if spasmodically, become more central in EU policy making. Essentially there have been four, sometimes overlapping, phases of EU involvement in combating poverty: the era of pilot poverty programmes (1974-1994); the Lisbon Strategy and

the Social Open Method of Coordination (2000-2010); Europe 2020 and the Social Investment Package (2010-2016); and the European Pillar of Social Rights and efforts to build social inclusion more closely into EU policies and processes (2017-present).

In this paper I will briefly outline the evolution of EU policies on poverty and social exclusion, give a particular focus to the issue of child poverty and will draw some conclusions about what has been positive, what negative and what still needs to happen to mainstream efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion in EU and national policy making.

Phase 1: EU Poverty Programme 1974–1994

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In 1974, at the instigation of the Irish government, the EU launched the First EU Poverty Programme which ran to 1979 and involved some 70 small local projects in the nine member states. One of the outcomes of this first programme was the decision some years later by the Irish Government to establish the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) as a State Agency, though it took until 1986 for the necessary legislation to be passed. The first EU programme was followed by the Second European Poverty programme (1985 to 1989). This consisted of local self-help projects dealing with target groups regarded as vulnerable, such as the young unemployed, single parents and older people, as well as projects having a wider community development remit. The emphasis in the first two EU programmes was on innovative projects trying out new ways of tackling poverty and emphasising local involvement and participation. The third European poverty programme, Poverty III (1989-1994), broadened the focus from poverty to poverty and social exclusion and put the emphasis on the development of area-based partnerships involving state agencies at the regional and local levels coming together with the social partners and local community and voluntary organisations to take co-ordinated and effective action to combat social exclusion².

The EU poverty programmes were relatively small-scale pilot projects with no strong legal basis which tested out new ways of tackling poverty and encouraged exchange of learning and good practice between policy makers and activists across the EU. While putting poverty and social exclusion somewhat on the EU agenda they were relatively peripheral activities on the EU itinerary and a proposal from the European Commission for a fourth such pilot programme was blocked by some Member States. However, the learning from the programmes was not forgotten and was important in raising political awareness of poverty and social exclusion. This contributed to the political decision in 2000 to begin to move issues of poverty and social exclusion more into the mainstream of EU policy making following the adoption of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 and the establishment of the Social Open Method of Coordination (OMC). In the two plus decades since then we have seen a slow but uneven process of gradually increasing the political focus at EU level on combating poverty and social exclusion and building a more Social Europe.

Phase 2: Lisbon Strategy & Social OMC 2000–2010³

2

A major step forward in creating a legal basis for EU action on poverty and social exclusion came with the Amsterdam Treaty which came into force in May 1999. This provided the basis for the European Commission to coordinate work by Governments on a range of areas including employment and social inclusion. It introduced a process known as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). This is a 'soft law' approach which allows EU Member States voluntary and agreed cooperation based on shared

concerns while responsibility for developing and implementing policies remains with Member States. The OMC approach is coordinated by the European Commission and was first used for the European Employment Strategy which began in 1998. In March 2000 the European Council adopted the Lisbon Strategy. This gave equal priority to employment, economic and social goals of the EU (environment was added in 2001). It led to the establishment of three social OMC processes – OMC on poverty and social

2. For more detail on the EU Poverty Programmes and the EU's and Ireland's early focus on poverty issues see *From Poverty to Social Inclusion: The EU and Ireland* by Séamus Ó Cinnéide which was published by EAPN in 2010.

3. This section draws heavily on *A social inclusion roadmap for Europe 2020* by Frazer et al (2010).

exclusion (adopted in 2000), pensions (launched in 2001) and health care and long-term care (2004). There were also information exchanges in the field of making work pay. The three social "processes" were subsequently streamlined into one integrated Social OMC built around 12 commonly agreed EU objectives (three for each main strand as well as three "overarching" objectives which addressed horizontal issues that cut across them. The Social OMC was built into the mainstream EU processes as it was coordinated by the Social Protection Committee (SPC) made up of officials from mainly Employment and Social Affairs Ministries in each Member State as well as representatives of the European Commission. The SPC reports to the EU Employment, Social Policy and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO) Council of Ministers. In this paper I focus on the social inclusion strand.

The Social Inclusion Process consisted of five main elements: a set of common EU objectives on poverty and social exclusion; two- to three-yearly National Action Plans on Inclusion (NAPs/ inclusion) in which Member States translated the common objectives into national policies⁴; an agreed set of common indicators to enhance the analysis of poverty and social exclusion and to measure progress⁵; a process of regularly monitoring and reporting on progress leading to regular reports, the Joint Reports on Poverty and Social Exclusion⁶; and a Community Action Programme supporting mutual learning and dialogue between Member States.

As the social inclusion process developed seven particular themes stood out: increasing labour market participation, modernising social protection systems so that they are sustainable, ensure adequate incomes and provide incentives to take up work; improving access to quality essential services; tackling educational disadvantage; eliminating child poverty and social exclusion; ensuring decent accommodation and tackling homelessness; and overcoming discrimination and increasing the

integration of people with disabilities as well as immigrants and ethnic minorities, especially then Roma. From around 2006 work increasingly focussed on these themes. The first three came together under the umbrella of Active Inclusion with the Commission Recommendation in 2008⁷ and in 2007 there was thematic year devoted to child poverty and in 2009 another devoted to homelessness and social exclusion.

A key element of the social inclusion process was the emphasis on promoting better governance on poverty and social exclusion. Eight themes stood out that remain highly relevant today. These include: the importance of developing comprehensive, multidimensional and strategic responses based on rigorous diagnosis and with clearly defined and quantified objectives; the need to mainstream social inclusion objectives into national policy making including budgetary processes; the importance of coordinating different departments and policy areas so that they are mutually reinforcing the need to ensure effective links between national and sub-national levels of government; the importance of delivering policies on the ground in a coordinated manner involving all relevant stakeholders; the importance of mobilising and involving all actors – government agencies, social partners, NGOs, the research community – in the design and implementation of policies and programmes; the necessity to involve people experiencing poverty in the process; and the importance of effective monitoring and reporting on the progress of strategies and the impact of policies.

While the Social OMC only made quite limited progress towards achieving the overall objective set in Lisbon of making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010 it did make a useful contribution to efforts to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Its strengths included: putting and keeping poverty on the EU agenda; highlighting the need to ensure that economic, employment and

4. The development of National Action Plans on Inclusion was significantly influenced by the experience of Ireland which had launched its National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS), *Sharing in Progress*, in April 1997.

5. Responsibility for the development of indicators rested with the SPC and especially its Indicators sub-Group. For more information on EU social indicators and their use in the policy process see for instance see Atkinson et al (2002) and Marlier et al (2007).

6. The secondment of this author, who was then Director of the Combat Poverty Agency, to the European Commission in 2001 as a national expert to assist in the implementation and monitoring of the EU's social inclusion process ensured a strong input of Irish experience into the development of the EU social inclusion process.

7. See European Commission (2008).

social policies are mutually reinforcing; building a shared understanding across the EU of key elements necessary to tackle poverty and social exclusion and increased exchange and learning about effective actions; significantly improving the data and indicators available and developing a stronger analytical framework; strengthening governance and strategies in several Member States; ensuring that the need for a response to the social impact of the financial and economic crisis was articulated in EU debates; mobilising a wide range of actors and supporting and fostering EU wide networks of people involved in the struggle against poverty and social exclusion and giving a voice to those experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Also, the work of the Social OMC led to 2010 being designated the European Year on Poverty, which was very important in putting the issue of poverty and social exclusion more strongly and visibly on the EU agenda and building it into the next overall EU strategy, Europe 2020. However, the limited impact of the Social OMC can be attributed to its being a relatively “soft” form of coordination with no sanctions for Member States who failed to make progress and no basis for recommendations to Member States on what they needed to do to strengthen their efforts. It remained a low political priority compared to the economic and employment strands of the Lisbon strategy and had limited impact on considering how economic and employment policies could contribute to achieving social objectives and

how social policies could contribute to economic and employment goals. It was also supported by quite limited resources.⁸ As the European Commission's own assessment of the OMC as a method of “soft coordination” concluded “most Member States have used OMCs as a reporting device rather than one of policy development”.⁹

Towards the end of the Social OMC EU action on poverty and social exclusion was potentially significantly reinforced because of the increased status given to social issues in the EU Lisbon Treaty, which came into force on 1 December 2009. In particular Article 9 of the treaty, which is known as the horizontal social clause, states that “In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health”. This created a stronger basis for requiring the EU (both the Commission and Member States) to mainstream the EU's social objectives into policy making and, for this to be effective, to systematically carry out social impact assessments. The challenge thus for the coming period for EU coordination in the social field was how the positives of the Social OMC could be built on and its weaknesses could be addressed building on the new legal basis provided by the Lisbon Treaty.

Phase 3: Europe 2020, The Enhanced Role of The Social Protection Committee and the Social Investment Package 2010–2016

3

Europe 2020

In March 2010, on the proposal of the European Commission, the European Council agreed a new EU strategy for jobs and growth, Europe 2020, to succeed the Lisbon Strategy¹⁰. Europe 2020 was built around three priorities: smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth. Under

inclusive growth it stressed that the priority was “empowering people through high levels of employment, investing in skills, fighting poverty and modernising labour markets, training and social protection systems so as to help people anticipate and manage change, and build a cohesive society”. The social inclusion dimension

8. In this period the amount of Structural Funds allocated to support social inclusion measures was quite limited. As Brian Harvey (2008) pointed out: “Overall, EAPN was disappointed that the 2007-2013 programming period was not made a more effective instrument to combat poverty and social exclusion. The Commission's own estimates were that only 12.4% of the European Social Fund was allocated to social inclusion measures.” Harvey

9. See European Commission (2010a)

10. See European Commission 2010

was further reinforced by including social inclusion among the five EU headline targets to be translated into national targets and which constituted shared objectives guiding the action of Member States and the Union. The social inclusion target was “to promote social inclusion, in particular through the reduction of poverty, by aiming to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion”. Thus, the Europe 2020 Strategy, at least on paper, appeared to build on the potential of the Lisbon Treaty and create new opportunities to further strengthen the EU social agenda in general and the fight against poverty and social exclusion in particular. The expectation was created that, at last, tackling poverty and social exclusion and building a more inclusive Europe would be at the centre of EU policy making. It would have equal status with economic and environmental objectives and that economic, employment, social and environmental policies would be developed in ways which would be mutually reinforcing.¹¹

The initial optimism was rapidly dispelled in the first three years of the implementation of Europe 2020. In the height of the economic and financial crisis between 2010 and 2013 poverty and social exclusion levels rose across the EU. Austerity policies dominated the political agenda and hit the poorest and most vulnerable worst. The reality was, as we well known in Ireland, that ideologically driven harsh austerity programmes in many countries led to a decline in demand, an increase in unemployment and a deteriorating social situation. Given the severity of the crisis one would have imagined that every effort would have been made to put the struggle against poverty and social exclusion at the heart of the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy through the European Semester process¹² and for there to have been much closer and more reinforcing integration between economic, environmental, employment and social policies. However, this was not the case. Assessments by the EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion of the implementation of the

Europe 2020 Strategy concluded that in 2011 the social dimension of the strategy was relegated to a minor role as the Commission and Member States put the focus on measures to address the economic and financial crisis and to balance budgets. Relatively little improvement occurred in 2012 or 2013 in spite of the Commission, the EPSCO Council and the European Council encouraging countries to make “tackling unemployment and the social consequences of the crisis” one of five priorities in preparing their National Reform Programmes (NRPs). As regards Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs), in 2011 social inclusion issues featured very little and although there were somewhat more CSRs with a social inclusion dimension in 2012 and a further increase in 2013, they still fell well short of what was needed given the seriousness of the crisis.¹³ Many stakeholders involved in the European struggle against poverty and social exclusion also highlighted the very limited focus on social inclusion in the European Semester. For instance, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) expressed “deep concern about the shocking lack of progress on the poverty target; the minimal visibility of the Europe 2020 strategy in the NRPs/CSRs and generally in the European Semester, and the unacceptable democratic and participative deficit”¹⁴. Thus, as Bart Vanhercke, director of the European Social Observatory, has concluded, “initial experiences under the European Semester, which effectively started in 2011 (in the midst of the global financial crisis), seemed to confirm critics’ worst fears that the new integrated EU policy coordination framework would result in the subordination of social cohesion objectives to fiscal consolidation, budgetary austerity and welfare retrenchment imposed by economic policy players”.¹⁵

Revival of the Social Protection Committee and the Social OMC

The initial failure to integrate the social dimension into the European Semester and the implementation of Europe 2020 and the growing awareness of the lack of progress towards the

11. For more detail on the structure and the social inclusion potential of Europe 2020 see Frazer (2013) Frazer et al (2013) Marlier et al (2013)

12. The European Semester started each year when the European Council identified the main economic and social challenges and gave strategic advice on policies based on a Commission report, the Annual Growth Survey. Member States were then required to review and set out their plans each year to achieve the Europe 2020 Strategy's five EU targets in “National Reform Programmes” (NRPs) These were then assessed and led to Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) to Member States urging them to strengthen efforts where their plans to achieve the 5 targets were deemed inadequate.

13. See Frazer and Marlier (2012 and 2013)

14. See EAPN (2013) and see also Eurochild (2013) and Social Platform (2013)

15. See Vanhercke et al (2020)

poverty target resulted in significant efforts, led by the Social Protection Committee and discreetly supported by the DG Employment, to revitalise the Social OMC. The social affairs ministers of the Member States approved the revitalisation of the Social OMC and its integration into the European Semester process. The Social Protection Committee was brought back into the governance mainstream of the European Semester in 2013 and became involved in the review of both the National Reform Programmes and the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) which were key elements in the implementation of Europe 2020. This gradually led to a closer monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the social objectives of Europe 2020 and gradually to an increase in the number of CSRs made to Member States on poverty and social exclusion related policies. An important development in the monitoring of progress on social objectives was the development of the Social Protection Performance Monitor (SPPM) which was, developed by the SPC building on the work of its expert Indicators Subgroup. This included visual representations of Member States' comparative performance against a portfolio of overarching and context indicators, along with detailed country profiles summarizing key challenges and good outcomes. It also proved very useful in highlighting social trends to watch, where indicators in a significant number of countries were seen to be moving in the wrong direction relative to the Europe 2020 targets and guidelines¹⁶.

Social Investment Package

Another important development was the launch of the Social Investment Package (i.e. the European Commission Communication on Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion and the accompanying Recommendation on investing in children and the various staff working papers) by the European Commission launch in February 2013.¹⁷ As the European Social Policy Network¹⁸ has documented the SIP set out a strong case for the contribution that well-designed social policies can make to

economic growth as well as to protecting people from poverty and acting as economic stabilisers. It stressed that welfare systems fulfil three functions: social investment, social protection and stabilisation of the economy. Indeed, the social investment approach strongly relies on the assumption that social and economic policies are mutually reinforcing and that the former, when framed in a social investment perspective, does represent a "precondition" for future economic and employment growth. Social investment involves strengthening people's current and future capacities. In other words, as well as having immediate effects, social policies also have lasting impacts by offering economic and social returns over time, notably in terms of employment prospects or labour incomes. In particular, social investment helps to "prepare" people to confront life's risks, rather than simply "repairing" the consequences. Social investment, as outlined in the SIP, is thus the set of policy measures and instruments that consist of investments in human capital and enhancement of people's capacity to participate in social and economic life and in the labour market.

The SIP highlighted preventative social policy measures that can stop disadvantage from compounding, such as policies to facilitate early childhood development. The policy areas considered under social investment included inter alia early childhood education and care (ECEC), active labour market policies (in particular, training and job-search assistance), education, retraining and lifelong education, healthcare, social services, housing support, rehabilitation and healthcare and long-term care services. The SIP also stressed that a key element in a social investment approach is to address disadvantage and key social challenges in a more integrated way through a combination of policies so that they are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

The SIP thus was intended to provide a basis for putting social issues at the heart of the Europe 2020 Strategy: it aimed to provide guidance to help reach the Europe 2020 targets

16. For more detail on the revitalisation of the Social OMC and the key role played by the SPC in monitoring the social dimension of Europe 2020 see Vanhercke's chapter "From the Lisbon strategy to the European Pillar of Social Rights: the many lives of the Social Open Method of Coordination" in Vanhercke et al (2020).

17. See European Commission (2013 and 2013a)

18. See Bouget et al (2015)

by establishing a link between social policies, the reforms as recommended in the European semester to reach the Europe 2020 targets and the relevant EU funds. However, the actual impact of the SIP proved disappointing. An assessment by the European Social Policy Network for the European Commission in 2015 concluded that “due to its novelty and slow dissemination and diffusion, the development of a social investment approach in this period has been very limited in their countries” and that a key factor in several countries that “has limited and in some cases actually lead to a decline in the development of a social investment approach has been the impact of the economic crisis and a policy environment dominated by fiscal consolidation policies whose primary aim is to reduce public budget deficits.”

Launched at the same time as and as an integral part of the SIP, the Commission Recommendation on Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage¹⁹, which was subsequently endorsed by the EU Council of Ministers, built on all the learning of the

previous decade on combating child poverty and social exclusion. It set out a very strong common European Framework for tackling child poverty and social exclusion and promoting child well-being. It aimed to help Member States “strengthen synergies across relevant policy areas” as well as “review their policies and learn from each other’s experiences in improving policy efficiency and effectiveness through innovative approaches, whilst taking into account the different situations and needs at local, regional and national level”. It also encouraged the use of financial instruments, especially the Structural Funds, to promote social inclusion and combat poverty. In particular, it set out guidelines for Member States to “organise and implement policies to address child poverty and social exclusion, promoting children’s well-being, through multi-dimensional strategies”. In doing so it stressed the importance of a strategic preventative approach with a strong emphasis on children’s rights and early intervention and it set out a three-pillar approach calling on Member States to:



The implementation of Investing in Children was uneven and there were undoubtedly positive developments that resulted. However, overall, the implementation in the immediate years after its adoption was disappointing. Indeed, the European Social Policy Network in an assessment for the European Commission concluded that “it is clear that very limited progress has been made in most areas in too many of the countries with high or very high levels of child poverty or social exclusion and indeed some of these have

actually weakened their approach in several areas”. Happily, Ireland was not listed as one of these countries. It is striking that the slow implementation and the persistence of high levels of child poverty and social exclusion became the main reason for the European Parliament to call for the adoption of a European Child Guarantee as a means of reinforcing the implementation of Investing in Children (see Phase 4 below).²⁰

20. For more on this see the Commission's assessment in European Commission (2017a) and ESPN's assessment in Frazer et al (2017) Coordination” in Vanhercke et al (2020).

Phase 4: The European Pillar of Social Rights and The European Child Guarantee 2017–present

4

The fourth phase, which began under the Juncker Presidency of the European Commission and has continued under the Von der Leyen Presidency, has focussed on efforts to further strengthen the social dimension of EU policy making, including on poverty and social exclusion, in the European Semester as a means to build a more Social Europe. This phase really began with the official proclamation by the European Parliament, the EU leaders and the Commission of the European Pillar of Social Rights in November 2017.

This was a key initiative promoted by President Juncker to give much greater prominence to social challenges in EU policy making and to build a fairer and more Social Europe.

Before going into more detail about the Pillar it is interesting to note some of the reasons why there has been and continues to be a somewhat greater effort to focus on building a more social Europe and tackling key issues like poverty and social exclusion. Eight reasons stand out:

1. The rise of populist movements and anti-EU sentiments in many Member States, where many people felt that they were losing out and had not benefited from EU membership, led to serious political concerns about the long-term survival of the European Union;

2. Brexit, which highlighted the growing alienation from the EU, particularly in more disadvantaged economic regions of the UK, underlined the need to ensure that more people felt that being part of the EU contributes to an improved quality of life;

3. There was growing evidence that Europe 2020 was not achieving its social objectives and there was a failure to achieve the poverty target;

4. While the Social Investment Package and Investing in Children had made some impact this was quite limited and had very limited implementation on the ground in many Member States;²¹

5. The impact of the Covid pandemic highlighted the extent to which those already experiencing poverty and social exclusion were most vulnerable and worst affected by the crisis;²²

6. The impact of the war in Ukraine, the rise in refugees and the cost-of-living crisis have all increased the risks of poverty for those in vulnerable situations and increased the need for strong policies to integrate and include those affected;

7. there was a growing body of international research highlighting the economic costs of poverty and social exclusion and the risks this poses to social cohesion if not addressed;²³

8. It was increasingly being realised that in addressing the climate and sustainability crisis it is essential to ensure that there is a just transition so that poorer groups are not further disadvantaged and inequality is not further deepened. Thus, there is a need to accompany the green agenda with a stronger social agenda so that both are mutually reinforcing.²⁴

21. See for instance Frazer and Marlier (2017)

22. See for instance EU Alliance for Investing in Children (2020), Frazer (2020) and OECD (2020)

23. See De Schutter et al (forthcoming) for a succinct summary of some of this evidence.

24. For more on the complex interconnections between climate change and poverty see for instance Bharadwaj (2016) and De Schutter et al (forthcoming)

The European Pillar of Social Rights

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)²⁵ sets out 20 key principles to underpin a more Social Europe. From a poverty and social exclusion perspective it is significant that in the preamble it stresses that “The Union shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, promote social justice and protection, equality between men and women, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child.” There are three chapters covering equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion. 20 key principles are set out in these three chapters. Most of them have relevance to some aspect of combating poverty and social exclusion. Of particular note are those relating to: gender equality and equal opportunities; personalised, continuous and consistent support to the unemployed; adequate minimum wages and the prevention of in-work poverty; affordable early childhood education and protection of children from poverty; adequate social protection, adequate unemployment benefits and adequate minimum income; adequate pensions; affordable good quality health care; inclusion of people with disabilities; affordable long-term care services; housing and assistance for the homeless; and access to essential services.

The initial impact of the adoption of the Pillar of Social Rights was its integration into the European Semester cycle as means of achieving a greater monitoring of social and employment challenges in CSRs. A new Social Scoreboard was introduced which monitored Member States' performance in relation to key principles of the Pillar of Social Rights via 12 headline indicators. All this led to a further increase in “social” CSRs, including on poverty related issues, during the 2018 and 2019 cycles of the Semester.

European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan

The implementation of the EPSR only really began fully with the launch of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan in 2021²⁶. This sets out concrete initiatives to turn the European Pillar of Social Rights into reality. It proposes

three headline targets for the EU by 2030 one of which is a reduction of at least 15 million in the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion.²⁷ To put this in context it is interesting to note that Eurostat figures show that in 2021, over one in five people in the EU was at risk of poverty or social exclusion (21.7% of the population or 95.4 million people). Child poverty stood at 24.4%. These EU targets were then translated into national targets which were presented by EU employment and social affairs ministers on 16 June 2022.²⁸ Many of the actions set out to achieve the EPSR's 20 principles are highly relevant to the struggle against poverty for instance Council Recommendation on minimum income²⁹, a Council Recommendation on a Child Guarantee, a Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation and a Council Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems. The Action Plan stresses that EU Funds will be used specifically to assist its implementation and this links closely to an increased use of EU funds to tackle poverty and social exclusion. For instance, the ESF+ finances the implementation of the principles of the European Pillar for Social Rights through actions in the area of employment, education & skills, and social inclusion. Also, it is stressed that implementation of the plan will be monitored as part of the European Semester process.

It of course remains to be seen to what extent the implementation of the Action Plan, particularly the aspects most closely related to poverty and social exclusion, lives up to the aspirations and whether the implementation gaps of the past can be avoided. On an optimistic note, there appears to be a higher level of political commitment than was evident during the period from around 2005 to 2016 to building a more Social Europe and this can only be positive from a social inclusion perspective.

European Child Guarantee

One especially encouraging development is in relation to child poverty and social exclusion. The Council Recommendation on a European

25. See European Commission (2017)

26. See European Commission (2021)

27. The other two targets are that at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment by 2030 and at least 60% of all adults should be participating in training every year by 2030.

28. Ireland set a poverty reduction target of 90,000 persons.

29. See Council of the EU (2023)

Child Guarantee (ECG)³⁰, which was adopted in 2021 as part of implementing the EPSR Action Plan, is a very important and ambitious high level political commitment which is grounded in a children's rights approach and combines a strategic approach with the identification of very specific policy actions. The idea for a ECG originated in the European Parliament in 2015 which adopted a resolution demanding such a guarantee. The Parliament was (and indeed continues to be) very concerned at the weak implementation of the 2013 Commission Recommendation on Investing in Children and the persistent high levels of poverty and social exclusion across the EU. The Parliament's resolution led to the Commission commissioning extensive feasibility studies between 2017 and 2021³¹. These involved widespread consultations involving many actors, including children experiencing poverty and social exclusion, extensive research and analysis and much debate and discussion. They built a very strong case for a ECG. The idea of a ECG was also strongly supported by Ursula von der Leyen in 2019 when she was seeking the Parliament's support for her to become President of the European Commission and her commitment that of her fellow Commissioners was crucial in persuading the Council to adopt the ECG. The ECG sets out to prevent and combat child poverty and social exclusion, break the intergenerational cycles of poverty and build back better after Covid by guaranteeing for children in need "effective and free access to early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day & healthcare and effective access to healthy nutrition & adequate housing". It puts a focus on: homeless children or children experiencing severe housing deprivation; children with a disability; children with a migrant background; children with a minority racial or ethnic background (particularly Roma); children being in alternative (especially institutional) care; children in precarious family situations. Member States are required to appoint national CG coordinators, develop CG National Action Plans (2022-2030), involve a wide range of stakeholders, including children in need, and

to report regularly on their implementation. EU funds are expected to support the implementation of National Action Plans and in countries like Ireland with high levels of child poverty and social exclusion at least 5% of ESF+ must be used to support this. Also, Member States are encouraged to build integrated and enabling policy frameworks to ensure that the implementation of the ECG is underpinned by appropriate institutional arrangements.³² As has been well documented by organisations like Eurochild³³, the EU Alliance for Investing in Children and Save the Children³⁴ the initial implementation of the ECG has been slow to gain momentum in many countries. Political priority and leadership are often not sufficiently evident and the Covid & Ukraine refugee crises may have diverted/delayed attention of governments. Public awareness of the CG remains low. There is a tendency of many of the Child Guarantee Action Plans initially to focus more on reporting on existing rather than developing new policies so they should be seen as work in progress rather than the finished article. In many cases the use of EU Funds needs to be developed further and effective reporting and accountability mechanisms still to be developed. These are all criticisms that are relevant in Ireland. However, in Ireland officials in the Department of Children and organisations like the Children's Rights Alliance, Social Justice Ireland and the Prevention and Early Intervention Network are all pressing for more ambition. Also, the announcement by the Taoiseach on 17th December 2022 that combating child poverty would now be one of the government's key priorities and the establishment of a unit in the Department of the Taoiseach to coordinate efforts across Departments to combat child poverty is a potential game changer. At European level officials in the European Commission, many of the networks active on children's issues, UNICEF³⁵ and the European Parliament are all working hard to strengthen the implementation process of the ECG. Thus, there is a real opportunity that it will become a significant advance in the long struggle against child poverty and social exclusion and the intergenerational perpetuation of poverty across the EU.

30. See Council of the EU (2021)

31. See Frazer et al (2020) and Guio et al (2021) and various recent UNICEF studies for the European Commission which are available on the European Commission website at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en>

32. For details of what should be included in integrated and enabling policy frameworks see Establishing a European Child Guarantee <https://rb.gy/z3sq0>

33. Eurochild has been producing overviews of Member States' CG Action Plans which can be found on the Eurochild website at [/www.eurochild.org/](http://www.eurochild.org/)

34. See Save the Children (2023)

Some Reflections on 50 Years of EU Involvement

Positive lessons and conclusion

Reflecting on the EU's involvement in efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion over 50 years, several positive conclusions can be drawn, many of which will hopefully be built on into the future. For me fifteen things stand out. EU involvement has:

-
- 01 helped to put and keep the issue of poverty and social exclusion on the agenda at both EU and national levels and has gradually moved promoting greater social inclusion from the periphery more towards the centre of EU and national policy making;

 - 02 contributed to building a greater awareness of the need to build a more Social Europe;

 - 03 contributed to broadening the understanding of poverty to encompass social exclusion;

 - 04 contributed to significant improvements in data, indicators and analysis on poverty and social exclusion both at EU and national levels and this has allowed helpful comparisons to be made between the performance of Member States and to highlight areas where countries are lagging behind;

 - 05 increased reporting and monitoring of Member States' performance which has been important in increasing their accountability and putting more pressure on them to strengthen their efforts;

 - 06 fostered agreement and understanding across the EU on key concepts that need to inform efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion such as the need for: multidimensional approaches; coordinated and integrated strategies; mainstreaming of social inclusion objectives across all policy areas; the importance of fostering rights-based policies; the importance of countering discrimination and racism;

 - 07 increased awareness of the interdependence of social, economic, employment and environmental agendas and of the need for social, economic, employment and environmental policies to be mutually reinforcing;

 - 08 helped to highlight the costs of poverty & how this undermines social cohesion and the achievement of economic, employment, & environmental goals;

 - 09 mobilised a wider range of actors such as government agencies, regional/local government, NGOs, researchers, the European Parliament in the struggle against poverty and social exclusion;

 - 10 highlighted the importance of giving a voice and listening to those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, experts by experience, in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies;

 - 11 supported and promoted networking and solidarity across the EU of those who are involved in combating poverty and social exclusion;

-
- 12 increased awareness that poverty and social exclusion are a denial of fundamental rights and contrary to EU's core values of human dignity, human rights and equality;
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- 13 Increased the focus on key issues such as: adequate minimum income; the need for an active inclusion approach (labor market activation + adequate minimum income + access to services) to tackling unemployment; child poverty and the Intergenerational Perpetuation of Poverty;
-
- 14 homelessness and housing exclusion; the need to prioritise those in the most vulnerable situations such as ethnic minorities (esp. Roma/Travellers), people from a migrant background, people with a disability, the long-term unemployed and lone parents;
-
- 15 raised awareness of other key cross-cutting issues that interact with efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion such as gender mainstreaming, urban-rural differences and the link between social inclusion and non-discrimination/equality agendas;
-

Negative lessons and conclusions

However, while there are many positive lessons to remember when reflecting on the past and trying to build for the future there are also several serious failures and weaknesses that stand out and need to be addressed if the EU is to make a greater contribution in the future. Six stand out:

There has been a recurrent gap between the aspirations, rhetoric and social inclusion objectives set out at EU level and actual implementation at both national and EU levels;

There has been a failure to meet targets and unacceptably high levels of poverty and social exclusion have persisted;

There has been a lack of political urgency too much of the time and the dominance of neo-liberal economic orthodoxy has undervalued the development of essential social policies;

Policies and programmes in the area of poverty and social exclusion have remained an area of "soft law" and have thus lacked enforceability;

There has been limited mainstreaming of social policy goals in EU and national economic and employment policies;

Weaknesses have persisted in how EU Structural Funds are used to support efforts to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

Ireland's role

Reflecting specifically on lessons in relation to Ireland's involvement in EU poverty and social exclusion initiatives it is useful to note areas where Ireland has made a particularly strong contribution to the development of EU policies and programmes. Six stand out and most of these relate to the earlier phases outlined in this paper.

1. Ireland played a key role in the establishment of the EU poverty programmes and was a very active supporter of their implementation.

2. Ireland's pioneering establishment of national action plans on poverty and social inclusion significantly informed and influenced the development of National Action Plans under the Social OMC.

3. The work of the Combat Poverty Agency and the Economic and Social Research Institute in the 1990s on child poverty greatly informed and influenced the early stages of putting this issue at the heart of the Social OMC and the Lisbon Strategy.

4. Ireland was one of the countries that led the way on improving data and analysis on poverty and social exclusion and this contributed to the improvements developed by the Social Protection Committee's Indicators Subgroup and Eurostat.

5. Ireland was a very active participant from an early stage in fostering the exchange of learning and good practice and encouraging support for networks. Indeed, Ireland's pioneering support for national networks concerned with poverty issues such as EAPN, INOU, and the Community Worker's Cooperative encouraged the Commission to develop a funding programme for European networks, many of which have featured strong Irish involvement.³⁶

6. Ireland was one of the countries that early on emphasised the participation of people experiencing poverty.

Reversing the lens and addressing the question as to what impact EU initiatives to combat poverty and social exclusion have had on the development of Irish policies four things stand out.

First, the EU reinforced the value of developing national strategies, developing more co-ordinated and integrated approaches to poverty and social exclusion and setting targets.

Secondly, EU work on poverty and social exclusion helped to highlight that, while by EU standards Ireland has a relatively strong social protection system, it has lagged behind (and still does) the best performing countries in ensuring that those experiencing poverty and social exclusion have access to good quality essential services in areas such as health, early childhood education and care and social and public housing. This has increased the pressure

to do better and also provided guidance on how to do so.

Thirdly, comparisons with other countries as part of the EU process served to highlight that Ireland was doing particularly badly in addressing poverty and social exclusion amongst lone parent families and jobless households and highlighted the need to strengthen policies in these areas, particularly the development of an active inclusion approach to unemployment and the provision of affordable and accessible early childhood education and care.

Fourthly, learning from other countries has reinforced the need for Ireland to develop more coordinated and integrated delivery of services at local level so that the needs of people in vulnerable situations can be supported in a holistic way tailored to their needs.

36. In this regard the late Fintan Farrell's involvement in the development of networking at European level, especially EAPN, and his insistence that the voices of people experiencing poverty should be heard and his advocacy on their behalf was critical in advancing the struggle against poverty and social exclusion at EU level.

Some Challenges and Priorities for The Future

If the EU's contribution to tackling poverty and social exclusion is to be enhanced in the future several things will be important. In the immediate future, for me, six things stand out:

there must be really effective implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, especially those areas that most relate to tackling poverty and social exclusion;

the 2030 poverty target must be achieved and ideally exceeded;

the implementation of the European Child Guarantee must be actively pursued and closely monitored and reported on;

social inclusion objectives must be fully mainstreamed in the European Semester and mainstreamed across economic, employment and environmental policies;

efforts to foster the inclusion of migrants and asylum seekers and ethnic minorities, especially the Roma and Travellers, must be increased;

the use of EU funds to support efforts to tackle poverty and social exclusion must be increased and become more strategic.

Looking to the medium and longer term there are four key challenges to be addressed which will be key to increasing the EU's impact

First, there is a need to move EU social policy from "soft" to "hard" law so that it becomes enforceable.

Secondly, there must be much closer links developed between the EU's social inclusion and environmental agendas as they are interdependent and making progress on one is vital to making progress on the other.

Thirdly, as artificial intelligence becomes increasingly significant in the future development of the economy and society it will be vital that the EU controls and regulates its development so that it contributes to achieving greater social inclusion and cohesion and does not lead to greater inequality, poverty and social exclusion.

Finally, given that the very reason for the existence of the EU is to maintain and promote peace, it will be important to ensure that the strong connection that exists between policies combatting poverty and social exclusion and the promotion and maintenance of peace is recognised at the heart of EU policy making. Again, Irish experience can be key in providing leadership in this regard.

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02

From Poverty to Social Inclusion: The EU and Ireland

Séamus Ó Cinnéide

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The designation of the year 2010 as “The European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion” is the latest development in over a thirty-five year of commitment by the European Union to addressing poverty in Europe.

This aspect of the EU¹ is significant in a long history of how relatively prosperous countries acknowledged the poverty and social exclusion that exists in the midst of prosperity. This recognition of the existence of poverty in the midst of plenty, the so-called “re-discovery of poverty”, has been a recurring phenomenon for over a century. The developments in the European Union in this regard, perhaps more than developments in any other policy field, have been significantly influenced by Ireland, and they have in turn influenced policy in Ireland. This article will attempt to give an overview of this history.

Poverty and social reform

The history of the welfare state is the story of the introduction of new social policies, or the codification or expansion of existing policies and programmes, and these developments were usually responses to public and political shock at calamitous social reverses, or to shameful revelations about continuing misery in the midst of prosperity.

In the United Kingdom the New Poor Law of 1834, and the factories legislation in succeeding decades, were a response to the upheavals and urban squalor that followed the industrial revolution. The next wave of wide-ranging change, when Ireland was still part of the United Kingdom, saw the Liberal Party reforms of the first two decades of the twentieth century, in particular the introduction of Old Age Pensions, children's legislation and public health measures. These followed the first “discovery of poverty”, in particular urban poverty, in Britain in the late nineteenth century, by Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree in their extensive

1. What is now called “the European Union” has had different titles at earlier stages of its development, but for simplicity “EU” is the term used here throughout.

social surveys, and later in the Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration after the Boer War. (Fraser, 1973; Vincent, 1991)

On the other side of the Atlantic, in the United States, the moment of truth was the Great Depression of the 1920s, which elicited the wide-ranging measures of Roosevelt's New Deal, including the introduction of Social Security.

Back in the United Kingdom the years of the Second World War were years of national unity and mobilisation which resulted in revelations and reflections on social conditions and social issues. This culminated in the Beveridge Report of 1943 and the radicalisation of the Labour Party. Following the election of the post-war Labour government it soon embarked on an extensive programme of social legislation. It set up the National Health Service, introduced National Assistance and engaged in extensive programmes of educational reform and public housing.

However, despite the high hopes of the 1940s, poverty, and Beveridge's other miserable and formidable "giants", remained unvanquished in Britain, as Brian Abel-Smith and Peter Townsend famously discovered in the early sixties. Their book *The Poor and the Poorest* (1965) shocked readers with its estimation that despite the welfare state one in seven in the population were poor. This was the original "rediscovery of poverty" in the UK. Something along the same lines had already happened in the United States. Michael Harrington's book *The Other America* estimated that a quarter of the population were living in poverty, and John F. Kennedy made poverty part of his presidential election campaign. These exposures on the two sides of the Atlantic led to new research-inspired practical initiatives to deal with poverty at its roots, in so called "Community Development Projects" in Britain and in President Johnson's "War on Poverty" in the United States.

The "rediscovery of poverty" that had happened in the United States and in Britain in the 1960s did not happen in Ireland until the 1970s. It was a delayed reaction to the Irish social revolution of the

1960s, the decade of accelerated modernisation and increasing prosperity, when the country's accession to "the Common Market" was being pursued.

The rediscovery of poverty in Ireland

In the 1960s Ireland was transformed in terms of demography, the economy and culture. Existing systems of dealing with social needs and social problems were exposed as being out of date and out of line with what people expected. One of the major developments was the beginning of universal second-level education. Other areas of social policy were scrutinised and found wanting; "the care of the aged", primary health care and what was called "the status of women", with new policies being proposed in these areas. Still there was no mention of poverty as a policy concern.

However, the new-found prosperity certainly exposed social inequalities: it was clear that "the rising tide" had not "lifted all boats". In 1971 the number of unemployed, nearly 70,000, was the highest in two decades: by then emigration had become an option less often chosen. From America there were echoes of new struggles for freedom: "we shall overcome". Closer to home the Troubles had started in Northern Ireland, associated partly with issues of discrimination and marginalisation.

Against this background the subject of poverty came on the public agenda. In 1971 the Council for Social Welfare, newly established by the Catholic bishops of Ireland, organised a conference on poverty in Kilkenny, a conference that attracted 170 participants. The present writer read a paper on "The Extent of Poverty in Ireland", based on desk research, which arrived at the estimate that 24% of the population was poor (Ó Cinnéide, 1972). This estimate became widely accepted, and the fact that the discussion of poverty was now underpinned by an accepted estimate of its extent led to a widespread commitment "to do something".

In January 1973 Ireland joined the European Economic Community, or the Common Market, as it was commonly called then, or the European Union as it is now called. Later that year a general election was due. The joint manifesto of Fine Gael and the Labour party, the two main opposition parties going into the general election, the Fourteen Point Plan, included the following commitment on poverty:

The elimination of poverty and the ending of social injustice will be a major priority in the next government's programme. It is conservatively estimated that under Fianna Fáil a quarter of our people live in poverty. The social policy of the new government will bring immediate assistance to those in need and lay the foundations of long-term policy that will root out the causes of low incomes, bad housing and poor educational facilities.
(The Labour Party, 1973)

Fine Gael and Labour won the election and formed the new government: they were now able to act on their commitment in relation to poverty.

The Coalition Government moved quickly. In May 1974 it established the National Committee on Pilot Schemes to Combat Poverty, charged with recommending schemes to deal with poverty. Within a few months the Committee, 26 strong, had transformed itself, with Government approval, from an advisory body to an executive body, ready to run anti-poverty projects throughout the country.

The EU Poverty Programmes

The "rediscovery of poverty" in Ireland paralleled developments in Europe. The economic downturn and the "crisis of the welfare state" in the 1970s had made it inevitable that the EU would have to acknowledge the issue of poverty, and do something about it. In late 1972, at the Paris Summit, the Heads of Government of the member states had ordered the preparation of a Social Action Programme, and poverty came onto the European agenda. One of the stated objectives of the Social Action Programme drafted in 1973 was "to assist the Member States in their efforts to ensure that the chronically poor are aided and equipped

to increase their share in the economic and social well-being of the Community." (EEC, 1973)

The Irish poverty agenda connected with the European agenda in the Social Action Programme when the Irish Government persuaded the European Commission to launch the First European Poverty Programme in July 1975. There was nothing in the Treaty of Rome about poverty, and the European leaders had to rely on Article 235 which provided that "[i]f action by the Community should prove necessary to attain ... one of the objectives of the Community and this Treaty has not provided the necessary powers, the Council shall, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, take the appropriate measures." It undoubtedly helped the Irish cause that the responsible member of the European Commission, the Commissioner for Social Affairs, was the newly appointed Irish commissioner, Dr Patrick Hillery. The Irish initiative on poverty may be one of the few examples of European policy being influenced by Irish preoccupations, and must have been due to the goodwill towards the new member states associated with the first expansion of the Common Market in 1973. This influence has had a lasting impact because, as we shall see, the first European Poverty Programme was succeeded by further European initiatives on poverty and social exclusion up to the present.

The first EU Poverty Programme, which lasted from 1974 to 1980, consisted in all of about 70 small local projects in the nine member states. Ireland was exceptional in having a national committee and a larger number of projects with a wider distribution. In the other countries there was no national co-ordinating body and the projects were mainly based on the work of existing religious and charitable organisations. The mobilisation of poor people themselves, and the employment of local organisers, facilitators or community workers, was previously relatively unknown in Ireland. Exceptionally the Irish National Committee on Pilot Schemes to Combat Poverty, which in time came to be referred to simply as "Combat Poverty", operated twenty four local projects throughout the

country, of which thirteen were run on a community development or community action basis and the others were concerned with more specific actions or activities dealing with particular groups. Not the least of the achievements of Combat Poverty was the promotion of a radical model of community work and a concern for social justice. Combat Poverty, in this its first manifestation, lasted until 1980 when it was wound up. By that time the European Poverty Programme had finished and, under a different government, more conservative counsels prevailed in Ireland.

In 1985 Jacques Delors became President of the European Commission. He was to have the longest term of any holder of that office, from 1985 to 1995. He was from a Catholic socialist background and inspired and supported many social policy initiatives within the EU. The first of these was the Second European Poverty programme, which ran from 1985 to 1989. It had more focussed objectives than the first programme, both at the European level and at the project level. It consisted of local self-help projects dealing with particular target groups regarded as vulnerable, such as the young unemployed, single parents and older people, as well as projects having a wider community development remit. The emphasis was on innovation and improvement in the services for those with whom the projects were working, decentralising the provision of services and improving co-ordination, making services more accessible, and reducing stigmatisation by the promotion of user participation in the services. Again, these were "pilot projects", with an emphasis on self-evaluation and learning from the results with a view to applying them more widely if appropriate.

In Ireland there were nine projects. While there were considerable achievements at the local level, and in terms of developing community work generally, participants and evaluators began to understand better the limitations of local projects as a means of combating poverty, a lesson that had already been learned long before in the United States and in Britain.

If the learning and application of lessons from the second European poverty programme was limited there were to be other related and more substantial developments. The anti-poverty work started in Ireland in the 1970s got a fresh impetus in 1986. That was the year when the Commission on Social Welfare reported, presenting a detailed analysis of the social welfare system and setting new targets for social welfare increases. It was the year when the (Economic and Social Research Institute) ESRI began the first ever extensive survey on poverty in Ireland. It was also the year that the Combat Poverty Agency came into existence on a statutory basis to spearhead research and promotional work on poverty in Ireland.

Overall the First and Second European Poverty programmes pioneered new ways of defining and dealing with poverty, but also showed the limitations of widely distributed and separate local projects. While they had some success in diagnosing poverty-related problems, overall they lacked coherence and the resources to reverse trends that resulted in poverty. It was concluded that any successful anti-poverty action required an integrated strategy at central or local government level, involving all social partners.

In 1989 the results of the first major research on the extent of poverty in Ireland, undertaken by researchers at ESRI, was published (Callan, Nolan et al. 1989). The authors explained the problems inherent in defining poverty and the choices that had to be made in calculating how many people are poor. Their chosen unit of measurement was a "household", consisting of one or more adults, with or without children. They defined a number of "poverty lines" and calculated, on the basis of an extensive survey, how many households had incomes below those lines. For example, taking a "poverty line" defined as 50% of the mean income of all households, and counting the income needs of a second adult in a household as 70% of the first, and the income needs of a "child" as 50% of the first adult, the survey showed that 19% of households, 23% of persons, were below that line. These were the figures most commonly cited: other assumptions about the poverty line and

about the equivalence weightings of a second adult (and subsequent adults) in a household and of a child, gave different estimates.

This research, in providing authoritative estimates of the extent of poverty, transformed the debate about poverty and about anti-poverty policies, in Ireland and throughout Europe. In 1989 the ESRI were at the forefront of research on poverty and have remained so ever since.

The developments in the 1970s and the 1980s show how discussion about poverty and action on poverty in Ireland were influenced by political factors both within Ireland and at the European level, by the experience of action-research projects that were part of the European poverty programmes and by research. Changes in the language and terminology in which a social issue, such as poverty, is discussed can also influence policy in relation to that issue, as events would show.

From Poverty to “Social Exclusion”

The year 1989 was a year of dramatic political events in central and Eastern Europe. Hungary opened its border with Austria in May of that year; the first non-communist government was elected in Poland in September, and the Berlin Wall was breached and rendered irrelevant on 9 November. These and related events in central and eastern Europe, and especially the re-unification of Germany in 1990, reshaped European society and led to wide-ranging political change in many countries, and to changes in the EU.

The year 1989 was also a watershed for social policy in the EU. In the lead-up to the completion of the Single Market, the Council of Ministers during the French presidency in September 1989, adopted a “resolution on combating social exclusion” (Council of the European Communities, 1989 b; emphasis added). ‘Social exclusion’ was a new term, not previously used in formal documents: it represented a new understanding of policy objectives. One of the tests for national and European policies would become their capacity or incapacity to prevent or combat social exclusion.

The term “social exclusion” originated in France (see Castel, 1990) and was taken up by President Delors. “We will in future”, he was to say in 1993, “continue to distinguish between poverty and social exclusion...; although exclusion includes poverty, poverty does not cover exclusion” (quoted in Bruto da Costa et al., 1994). The aforementioned 1989 resolution called on the member states to review their social policies with a view to preventing or combating “social exclusion”, and it empowered the Commission to monitor what the Member States would be doing in this regard. The instrument of this monitoring was to be a so-called Observatory on National Policies to Combat Social Exclusion, in effect a network of expert correspondents in each of the Member States who would report annually on policies and developments in their own countries in relation to social exclusion (Room et al. 1991; for further discussion of “social exclusion” see Ó Cinnéide, 2000).

The historic events of 1989-'90 in central and eastern Europe were followed by significant population movements and political developments. There was a recession in Europe in the early 1990s and the unemployment rate in the twelve EU member states increased to 11.5%. In the EU it was decided that co-ordinated employment measures were urgently needed to deal with the crisis. A policy making system was devised to enable and encourage EU member states collectively to agree on and implement common policies to deal with unemployment. The results would be evaluated and would feed into a subsequent round of policy making. This new system, the “Open Method of Co-ordination” (“OMC” for short) was adopted initially at the EU summit in Essen in 1994. This two-year cyclical process, with its common objectives, common targets, peer review and lessons for the next round of policy-making, was given a constitutional foundation in the Treaty of Amsterdam (Article 118), which was approved at the eponymous city in June 1997 and came into force on 1 May 1999. In due course this new method of shared policy-making was to be adopted in other areas of policy.

The year 1989 saw a number of other developments that were important for European social policy, including the adoption by eleven of the twelve member states of the Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers, or the Social Charter as it came to be known. (The UK excluded itself, but signed the Charter later in 1998.) According to the preamble, the charter was adopted “in the spirit of solidarity it [being] important to combat social exclusion” (Commission of the European Communities, 1990; emphasis added).

Also, in 1989 the Council approved what became known as Poverty III, the third European poverty programme. Whereas the two previous programmes referred to above (those of 1975–1980 and 1984–88) had focussed on the concept of poverty and how it could best be tackled, the third programme was concerned with social exclusion, and was described as “a programme concerning the economic and social integration of the economically and socially less privileged groups in society” (Council of the European Communities, 1989a). The ideal of the participation of the poor in local initiatives was retained but the emphasis shifted to the role of state agencies at the regional and local levels and on how they could and should, in association with the social partners, take co-ordinated and effective action to combat social exclusion

Why was Poverty III about “social exclusion”? In the work of the Observatory referred to above “social exclusion” was seen as much broader, or more extensive, than “poverty”. Secondly, as suggested by the 1989 resolution, there was a focus on the implications of the experience of, or perceptions of, social exclusion for the policies that were developed or adopted. The EU was interested in social exclusion not as a sociological concept but as a means of establishing how extensive the social problems labelled “social exclusion” were in the various member states, and the extent to which national policies alleviated or exacerbated them.

In time the term social exclusion came to be widely used in Ireland not just by academics, but

also by policy campaigners and policy-makers, including politicians. Perhaps they saw it as being advantageous to adopt the language of the EU itself and to make national initiatives accord with European objectives and strategies. Or it may be that the term “social exclusion” was seen to be a softer, less threatening term than “poverty” by those who did not want to acknowledge the extensiveness and persistence of poverty. Furthermore, the term “social exclusion” could be seen as a dynamic rather than a static term. It alerted policy makers and researchers to factors that were previously overlooked, as having to do with causes and not just results. “It is presented as relating to dynamics and processes, to multi-dimensional disadvantage and to inadequate social participation; whereas poverty is presented as static and descriptive, uni-dimensional and narrowly financial” (Nolan and Whelan, 1996; p.191).

From Social Exclusion to Social Inclusion

Poverty III ended in 1994 and after that there was a hiatus. The European Commission had prepared proposals for a fourth programme, building on the experience of the previous three programmes.

The original proposals for Poverty 4, formally termed “Medium-term action programme to combat exclusion and promote solidarity – a new programme to stimulate innovation 1994–99”, suggest that it would be based on the same principles as Poverty III: multidimensionality, partnership and participation. The projects to be run European-wide would be divided into 44 local model actions (subdivided into urban and rural), 19 national model actions and and Transnational networks. (Harvey, 1994)

However, the proposals were not adopted by the Council because of opposition from Germany and the United Kingdom (with its Conservative government led by John Major). When, at the beginning of 1995, the Commission proposed to go ahead with grant-aiding some of the proposed activities the case was referred to the European Court of Justice. In a decision of the Court formally handed down eventually in 1998 the Court decided “that the Commission was not competent to

commit the expenditure necessary to fund the projects ... and that it acted in breach of Article 4(1) of the Treaty, so that the decision to commit that expenditure must be annulled." In effect all such expenditure had to be approved by the Council (ECJ, 1998).

While in the EU there was a pause in relation to action on poverty, in Ireland public policy and action got a stimulus from another source. In March 1995 the United Nations convened a World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen. At the summit Ireland was represented by the Taoiseach (a new Fine Gael Taoiseach as in 1973, again in a Coalition Government with the Labour Party, and also this time with the Workers Party) and senior ministers. The Summit pledged to make "the conquest of poverty, the goal of full employment and the fostering of social integration overriding objectives of development". Inspired by the experience of the conference the Government decided to prepare an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Ireland. After a good deal of discussion, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) called *Sharing in Progress* was published in April 1997. This NAPS set a ten-year target to reduce consistent poverty in Ireland to 2% by 2007, or even to eliminate it. It was co-ordinated by the NAPS unit in the Department of Social and Family Affairs, which eventually became the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI).

In the EU in due course an alternative way forward in relation to anti-poverty policy and action was found, but it was not put in place until the landmark meeting of the European Council in Lisbon on 23, 24 March, 2000. The Council discussed social affairs as part of a very wide agenda and resolved as follows:

The European social model, with its developed systems of social protection, must underpin the transformation to the knowledge economy. However, these systems need to be adapted as part of an active welfare state to ensure that work pays, to secure their long-term sustainability in the face of an ageing population, to promote social inclusion and gender equality, and to provide quality health services. (emphasis added)

The "Lisbon agenda", or the "Lisbon strategy", was based on a total review of the EU's policies and programmes. New economic targets were adopted but also the promotion of "social inclusion" was a key theme, and the Strategy included the objective "to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty" in Europe by 2010 and achieve greater social cohesion. The method by which this was to be achieved was not EU legislation or programmes of poverty projects but by the collaborative EU policy-making system, the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) mentioned above.

The system works in a two-year cycle as follows:

- (A) common policy objectives are agreed at EU level by the Council of Ministers and
- (B) common indicators of policy change are defined;
- (C) in each member state national action plans to implement the objectives are adopted and implemented;
- (D) progress in implementing the plans is monitored and national reports on the results are submitted for peer review at the European level;
- (E) a joint EU Report, prepared by the Commission, reports on progress in each member state, as described in the national reports, and this leads to the setting of new common objectives and the next iteration of the process.

Later in 2000 at its Nice meeting the European Council approved a new National Action Programme on Social Inclusion, or NAPs/inclusion for short, to provide incentives to all member states to adopt a proactive, planned and comprehensive policy approach to tackling social inclusion. The following year, 2001, marked the beginning of that EU-wide process. The process and the results are described in other articles in this volume.

Since 2000 significant developments in two other areas have contributed greatly to EU anti-poverty policy, that is in relation to research and to the mobilisation of poor people themselves, and secondly, organisations representing poor people at the European level.

The financial and economic crisis that hit Europe in 2008 poses the greatest threat to economic progress and social well-being yet. The EU has had to respond decisively and comprehensively. The blueprint of its response is EUROPE 2020 A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth published by the European Commission in March 2010 (EU, 2010). The Commission proposes seven flagship initiatives under priority themes. One of them is a “European platform against poverty... to ensure social ... cohesion such that the benefits of growth and jobs are widely shared and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are enabled to live in dignity and take an active part in society.” At this critical juncture it is important that poverty is still high on the policy agenda of the EU.

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03

EAPN Ireland Briefing on the Development of a Social Europe

Introduction

Agreed action at an EU level can have a real positive impact on the social standards of everyone living in the EU, including in Ireland. However, this has only been achieved in a limited way to date. Social objectives have not come naturally to the European Union which was originally conceived as a way to bind post-war economies together by breaking down barriers to the free movement of people, goods, services and capital. However, the stated values of the EU do provide the foundation to support the development of better, more inclusive social standards for Europe.

“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.”
(Ref: Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union)

There has never really been a single European social model and the social models of Member States have developed independently. However, the majority of EU Member States adhere to general guiding principles such as redistribution through taxation; publicly funded and sometimes publicly delivered services; and a commitment to social rights and entitlements.

As these welfare states developed independently of the EU, national sovereignty in most areas of social policy has often been a contentious issue, with some states exhibiting an acute wariness of what they see as ‘EU interference’ even when it comes to common EU social standards.

Early Developments

However, social policy has always been a part of the role of the EU almost from the beginning of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957. Initially, reforms were influenced by concern for equal competition and workplace regulation at EU level, including gender equality, health and safety,

protection against redundancy, etc. These were related to the economic priorities of the Union and ensuring there was a level playing field among the members. Progress in areas like pensions, service provision and social assistance was notably slower. From 1974-1994 there were three Poverty Programmes through which anti-poverty groups accessed funding from the European Commission in order to find innovative ways of addressing poverty at national level and also involved transnational projects involving groups from different Member States. These programmes supported the growth of community development and social partnership approaches. The third Programme introduced the concept of 'social exclusion'. Proposals for a fourth Poverty Programme in 1994 were opposed by the UK and Germany and so it didn't go ahead. EU Structural Funds, which began in 1958, also reflected popular pressure to balance economic growth with social cohesion and have played an important role in this through providing EU funding for social inclusion activities. This continues up until today in the current Structural and Investment Funds 2021-2027 where a minimum of 25% of European Social Funds Plus in each country have to be spent on measures to promote social inclusion.

The Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 incorporated the Agreement on Social Policy into the revised Social Chapter of the Treaty. This involved giving the EU a legal role in relation to some areas of employment and industrial relations.

Strengthening EU Treaties

Progress on providing a legal basis for the EU involvement in social policy was given a major boost with the Lisbon Treaty in 2007. This saw the introduction of a so-called cross cutting 'Social Clause' (Article 9 TFEU) which requires the EU, in defining and implementing all of its policies to: "take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion and a high level of education, training and protection of human health."

The Lisbon Treaty also incorporated the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which had previously been agreed in 2000, into EU Treaties thus giving it a legal basis. A major ongoing challenge however, is how these developments can result in real social progress.

Introduction of a 'soft law' approach

The Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 also provided the legal base for the European Commission to coordinate work by Governments on a range of areas including employment and social inclusion. This allowed for the introduction of a process known as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the EU. This is a 'soft law' approach which allows EU Member States to work together on areas which are the responsibility of Member States and not the EU. The OMC approach is coordinated by the European Commission and was first used for the European Employment Strategy which began in 1998.

In 2000 EU Member States agreed on the Lisbon Strategy. This gave equal priority to employment, economic and social goals of the EU (environment added in 2001). The main process for making progress on the Lisbon priorities was the OMC. This included a strategy for addressing poverty and social exclusion involving the preparation of National Action Plans Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPs Inclusion) by Member States every two years.

These Plans were based on agreed objectives with the overall aim of 'making a decisive impact on poverty by 2010'. While there was difficulty in achieving concrete outcomes or policy changes the process was important in keeping a focus on poverty in the EU. By 2010 there was no reduction in poverty in the EU as a whole. Ireland was one of the few countries where consistent progress had been made on reducing poverty.

In 2010 the EU Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion saw the end of the Lisbon Strategy and the beginning of Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Europe 2020 included a commitment to deliver on 5

targets, three of which are social targets. These were targets on education and employment and the commitment to 'lift at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020' i.e. reducing it from 117 million to 97 million people. At this stage the economic crisis was in full swing in the EU and austerity policies were being implemented in many countries, including those such as Ireland which were in 'Troika' programmes. Levels of poverty and social exclusion rose to over 123 million people in 2012. Despite reversing much of this approach, and after a period of economic stability, the EU only achieved half of its Europe 2020 poverty target by 2020, with more than one in five people in the EU at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

The EU response to the economic crisis also resulted in the Europe 2020 being implemented as part of the European Semester. The European Semester is the annual process of reporting and recommendations between the Member States and the EU on a range of areas, but mainly on economic priorities.

Progress on areas of social importance and on specific social targets, which now mainly focuses on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights mentioned below, continues to be monitored and reported on as part of the European Semester process.

European Pillar of Social Rights

In 2017 the European Union adopted the European Pillar of Social Rights and in 2021 an Action Plan for its implementation was agreed. The Pillar includes 20 principles and rights which are aimed at improving employment and social standards across the EU.

The principles and rights cover the areas of i) equal opportunities and access to labour market ii) fair working conditions and iii) social protection and inclusion, including access to quality services and adequate social welfare supports and addressing child poverty and the inclusion of people with disabilities.

The Action Plan includes a range of policy commitments and three targets aimed at implementing the Pillar. The targets are on employment and training and to achieve a reduction of at least 15 million (including 5 million children) in the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2030. Following the UK leaving the EU in 2020 the population was around 448 million people and 91 million, or one in five, were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Why is the EU important in addressing poverty and improving social rights?

The respect for human dignity, human rights and equality are at the core of EU values included in the EU Treaties which also include the 'Social Clause' and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. These provide the basis to push for a stronger social Europe with minimum social standards and rights which all EU countries have to implement.

The commitments in the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the target for reducing poverty and social exclusion, provide a minimum standard for an integrated approach for addressing poverty in Ireland and the EU. It is crucial to use these commitments to push for an integrated strategy to deliver on them.

People across the EU experience many similar struggles and it is important to build solidarity with each other while also using the opportunities for mutual exchange and learning.

EU policy, good and bad, has an impact on all our lives and it is important that we work to influence it and try to ensure that all EU policy is consistent with improving the quality of life of everyone in the EU and moves us closer to ending poverty and inequality.

It became clear during the economic crisis that EU social policy, even if it is ambitious, cannot be effective if it is dependent on a soft-law approach and if wider EU policy, usually made based on harder law, undermines it. This includes economic, environmental and migration policy. It also depends on how the EU addresses its priorities of the

climate and digital transitions and challenges such as recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, the energy and cost-of-living crisis and the impact of the war in Ukraine. Therefore, the achievement of a vision for a more inclusive and just social Europe free of poverty can only be achieved if all EU policy supports its realisation.

This is something which the European Anti-Poverty Network, and their allies across Europe, continues to work for.

04

Key moments in EU Social Policy

1975	Treaty of Rome Equal pay between Men and Women – Became law in 1975
1957	European Social Fund Initially funded mostly training but later expanded to community development
1973	Social Action Programme
1974– 1992	<p>Pilot Schemes Against Poverty</p> <p>Poverty 1 (1974-1980): Research and community projects: 24 projects in Ireland, including 13 focusing on Community development/community action</p> <p>Poverty 2 (1985-1989): Targeting disadvantaged groups</p> <p>Poverty 3 (1989-1992): Introduced the concept of 'social exclusion' and taking partnership approaches.</p> <p>1994: UK and Germany blocked proposals for Poverty 4</p>
1986	Single European Act Health and safety at work, Economic and Social Cohesion
1989	Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers (Social Charter) Focused on rights related to the workplace including gender equality. Not signed by the UK.
1992	Council recommendation on Minimum Income Historic agreement by Member States to guarantee adequate minimum resources for a dignified life. Provided the basis for the Active Inclusion Recommendation in 2008.
1997	Treaty of Amsterdam Action against poverty written into Treaties. Gave the EU competence to combat discrimination on a range of grounds and allowed for coordination on employment, economic, social inclusion and other policy areas. Known as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC).
1997	EU Year Against Racism Resulted in setting up of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism in Ireland.
1998	European Employment Strategy Beginning of OMC on Employment. Member States produced National Employment Action Plans.

2000	<p>Lisbon Strategy (Agenda) Competitiveness, Employment and Social Inclusion to be progressed with equal importance. Environment added in 2001.</p>
2000	<p>Social Inclusion Strategy (Open method of coordination) Common Objectives and National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion. Commitment to 'make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty' by 2010.</p>
2000	<p>EU Charter of Fundamental Rights Proclaimed' but not included in the Treaties until 2007.</p>
2000	<p>Directives on Equality in the workplace and Race Equality Grounds covered in Employment Equality Directive are sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation'.</p>
2004	<p>Directive on Equal treatment between women and men in access to goods and services</p>
2007	<p>Lisbon Treaty 'Social Clause' introduced and EU Charter of Fundamental Rights included in Treaties.</p>
2008	<p>Active Inclusion Recommendation Integrated approach to addressing the needs of those excluded from the labour market involving access to adequate minimum income, quality services and inclusive labour markets.</p>
2010	<p>Troika Programme In November 2010 Ireland entered an agreement with the Troika as the result of receiving a loan to address its budget deficit. This involved agreeing to a programme of policy reforms. This programme ended in November 2013, with some ongoing monitoring as part of the European Semester process. The Troika was made up of the European Commission, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.</p>
2010	<p>European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion</p>
2010	<p>European Semester Process An annual process for the coordination and surveillance of fiscal, economic, social and environmental policy.</p>
2010	<p>Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth Among its five targets, three of which are social, is the target 'to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion by 2020'.</p>
2013	<p>Social Investment Package Commission Communication on Investment Package accompanied by a Recommendation on Investing in Children – breaking the cycle of disadvantage.</p>
2017	<p>European Pillar of Social Rights The Pillar contains 20 principles and rights. It is under three areas i) equal opportunities and access to labour market ii) fair working conditions and iii) social protection and inclusion</p>
2021	<p>European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan It contains a number of concrete measures for implementing the Pillar and three targets including 'reducing by at least 15 million the number of people (including 5 million children) at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2030'.</p>

05

EAPN Ireland Position Paper on the Future of Europe

The European Union is a wealthy region which is motivated by the experience of two world wars to working across national boundaries to create a more inclusive society with respect for diversity and with higher social standards and quality of life for all.

This is clearly stated in the values the EU has agreed in its Treaties:

“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.”

- Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union

While the EU can point to some important successes it continues to fall well short of realising these values. There are persistent high levels of inequality and poverty, with many in the EU feeling

that their dignity and human rights are not being respected, and that the EU is benefiting those who have the greatest power, influence and wealth over those who do not. This includes the 92 million people, or one in five of the EU population, who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

The causes of poverty are driven through incomes that are not adequate to provide people with a decent living, inadequate access to services such as housing, health, care or education and training and poor-quality jobs. Poverty is deepened for many because of the barriers they face due to their ethnic background, gender, family status, disability, class, migration status etc.

Connected to this is how the EU is addressing ongoing challenges such as migration and climate change and new opportunities including digital innovation.

Covid-19 has exposed and deepened the inequalities which exist in the EU. It has shown us that if we want to achieve the ambition outlined in the agreed EU values, then returning to the pre-pandemic status quo is not an option.

Failure to address these challenges, opportunities and inequalities in an inclusive manner, and to implement agreed positive commitments, builds dissatisfaction with the EU and its aims and creates social divisions rather than solidarity. This

is exploited by those seeking to gain power and influence by undermining the rule of law, increasing intolerance, hatred and division and resisting the upward social progress that is inclusive and leaves no-one behind.

The EU is currently undertaking a process called the Conference on the Future of Europe. The Conference is a process to engage EU citizens in debating EU challenges, priorities and to propose changes for its future.

This EAPN Ireland position paper puts forward our priorities for the Future of Europe, outlining a way forward to address its challenges and opportunities so that the EU can live up to its own values.

EAPN Ireland's Proposals

1. Build back better and put the creation of a more Social Europe at the heart of all EU policy

In the wake of the lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic, which highlighted existing inequalities the EU needs to build back better.

This includes:

- **Putting people and the creation of a more Social Europe at the heart of all EU policy** including its recovery plans and the European Semester with no return to austerity.
- **Ensuring economic, employment, environmental policies are balanced** and mutually reinforcing to build a fairer, more inclusive and more sustainable European economy and society. The UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a framework for this integrated approach.
- **Ensuring that Europe's economy is at the service of people's well-being** and delivering on EU values of human rights and dignity, solidarity, social justice, intergenerational cooperation, equality and of a just green and digital transitions.
- **Putting in place stronger governance, monitoring and reporting** to ensure that member states' policies are consistent with the goal of creating a more Social Europe through upward social convergence.
- **Developing policies to ensure the effective redistribution of wealth**, including through progressive taxation, to reduce inequality and support investment in public services and effective social protection systems.
- **Using a strengthened Social Scoreboard** linked to the European Pillar of Social Rights to monitor implementation of all policy.

2. Put social rights at the centre of an integrated plan to combat poverty, social exclusion and inequality and achieve upwards social progress across the EU

The 2017 European Pillar of Social Rights, and its Action Plan agreed in 2021, with the target to lift at least 15 million people out of poverty or social exclusion by 2030, provide the basis for a more integrated strategy to address the structural causes of poverty, social exclusion and inequality. This is based on recognising the multidimensional and interconnected nature of poverty.

An integrated strategy includes:

- **Proofing all EU policy, including the climate and digital transitions, to ensure it is consistent with the delivery of the European Pillar of Social Rights.**
- **Introducing a stronger legislation for social rights** to ensure at least a floor of minimum standards are in place across the EU.
- **Ensuring access to an adequate income for all** through:
 - Introducing a **Minimum Income** framework directive for adequate, accessible and enabling welfare supports
 - Ensuring that the proposal for an EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages results in **decent wages** for all workers.
 - **Ensuring decent employment** for all through quality standards for all jobs and an end to precarious working conditions.
 - **Providing access to affordable high-quality universal public services for all** including health and social care, education and training, childcare, housing, transport, energy, water and sanitation and internet.
 - **Ensuring basic needs are met first across the population and no-one is left behind.**
 - Ensuring everyone can achieve their right to **access the education and training needed for full social and economic participation** including life-long learning, literacy and numeracy and digital skills.

3. Strengthen the focus on those groups most at risk of poverty and social exclusion

Some groups and communities in society are at higher risk of poverty and social exclusion. In order to move forward in creating a more Social Europe that is fair and inclusive we have to ensure that no-one is left behind. This includes:

- **Migrants and Asylum seekers**
 - Implementing a common migration and asylum policy based on respect for rights and equal treatment.
 - Ensuring a fair redistribution on asylum seekers across the EU.
 - Ensuring effective implementation of the EU Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion supported by adequate funding & well-designed integration initiatives.
- **People living in areas of social disadvantage:** Giving recognition to and addressing the underlying causes of the issues impacting on those families and individuals living in disadvantaged areas or in precarious tenure experiencing cumulative disadvantage by being separated from satisfying employment, from an adequate income, from social networks and from decision making processes and structures.
- Achieving better integration into society and workplace and building welcoming, vibrant and cohesive societies that celebrate diversity.

- **Roma and Travellers:**
Implementing and building on the European Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation.
- **Homelessness and housing exclusion:**
Building on the European Platform on Combating Homelessness and committing to end homelessness by 2030. Enabling the greater use of EU Funds to develop social housing.
- **Children in vulnerable situations:**
Actively implementing the European Child Guarantee.
- **People with disabilities:**
Active implementation of new EU Strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities for the period 2021-2030.

4. Ensure greater protection of human rights and equality

The EU Treaties include respect for human rights, the combating of social exclusion and discrimination and the promotion of equality. These are detailed in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Pillar of Social Rights. However, EU law which backs up these commitments is weak. EU Equality Directives focused on the workplace cover the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, race and ethnic origin, and equality between women and men, while outside the workplace this is limited to race and ethnic origin, and equality between women and men. Many across the EU feel the impact of discrimination, racism and inequality. This includes under grounds not covered by EU or supporting national legislation, particularly because of someone's class or disadvantaged socio-economic background. Failure to protect people and to create a more inclusive society based on equality and respect for diversity leaves fertile ground for greater division, for far-right populism and for anti-EU sentiment.

Addressing this includes:

- **Strengthening the enforcement of human rights and equality instruments** to counter discrimination and racism and promote diversity, inclusion and equality.
- **Amending the EU Employment Equality Directive** to include discrimination on the ground of socio-economic disadvantage.
- **Including socio-economic disadvantage as a ground in the proposed 2008 equality Directive** on non-employment areas and completing the passing of this Directive into legislation.
- **Actively implementing the EU's gender equality strategy** and putting equality between men and women at heart of all policy areas.
- **Enhancing family friendly working and affordable and accessible childcare.**
- **Strengthening measures against domestic violence.**

5. Ensure a sustainable future for all

The climate crisis is a global threat and needs immediate and urgent action to ensure a sustainable future for people and planet. Those in poverty are at greatest risk from the effects of climate change and must be protected. Action includes:

- **Introducing a transition to a low carbon economy and society** to achieve the goal of climate neutrality with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
- **Ensuring that the transition to a low carbon economy is just and inclusive** and measures are poverty proofed.
- **Introducing measures to prevent the causes of energy and fuel poverty.**
- **Ensuring the homes of those on low incomes are adequate insulated and warm.**

6. Strengthen Europe's role in developing a fairer world

As one of the wealthiest and most powerful political blocs in the world the EU has an obligation to ensure it actively supports the creation of a fairer world, with the realisation of human rights and the elimination of poverty. This includes:

- **Delivering on global commitments of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.**
- **Living up to obligations under the UN Convention and Protocol relating to the status of Refugees** to protect the human rights of all asylum seekers and refugees.

7. Promote more inclusive and participative democracy

The most effective decisions are made when those most impacted are involved. This includes those experiencing poverty and social exclusion and their organisations. However, more powerful elites and interests are controlling the democratic process and social dialogue is not resulting in the change needed to bring about fair and inclusive societies with civil society organisations not recognised as equal social partners. Across the EU autonomous community organisations are under-valued, under-resourced and at times actively undermined, threatened and silenced in their attempts to act as independent advocates for those who are the most marginalised and least powerful in society. There is a need to refocus on building more effective democracy and social dialogue that benefits all in society.

This includes:

- **Making participation and empowerment** of all people, especially those at risk of poverty and social exclusion, a key goal of all policies.
- **Resourcing and respecting the autonomous advocacy role of civil society organisations** representing those experiencing poverty and social exclusion.
- **Recognising civil society as equal social partners in social dialogue** reflecting their role as guardians of the common good.
- **Strengthening trade union rights.**

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