

Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe

Towards Better Social Cohesion and Tolerance in Times of Austerity

Conference organised by “Public Policy Exchange” (PPE)

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The mission of PPE is to initiate and develop avant-garde platforms for capacity building, policy development and networking, and to serve as a progressive interface between practitioners, non-state actors and policy/decision makers at EU, national, regional and local levels in Europe.

According to the latest figures provided by Eurostat (2013), 122 million people were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the European Union, a condition which refers to those who fall under at least one of the following categories: at-risk-of-poverty after social transfers, severely materially deprived or living in households with very low work intensity.

Certain groups in the population have emerged as particularly exposed to the risk of poverty, in particular children, young people, single parents, households with dependents, people with a migrant background, certain ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. Also, the gender divide is clearly visible and women are generally more at risk than men.

In recent years, the European Union has been affected by the consequences of several events such as the economic and fiscal crises and its consequences, such as the imposition of austerity measures taken to overcome the crises at both EU and national levels. The crises have not affected Member States uniformly; an element that has contributed to intensify infra-EU differences and spark tensions. Additionally, at an external level, the political, social and economic events across North Africa and Middle East have emerged with their problems impacting European policymakers and national governments, and contributing to further aggravate the magnitude of poverty and exclusion in our societies.

As exclusion begins very early in life, promoting inclusiveness through early education and job opportunities is crucial for the growth process of all human beings. The right to inclusive education is universal and must extend to all. However, to promote an efficient action there is a need to integrate the existing policies with more socially inclusive strategies, such as the right to benefit from functional social protection and quality health care systems, as well as the development of inclusive policies at a local level that focus on the integration of communities.

The European Parliament and the European Commission are committed to fostering upward social convergence towards the EU 2020 strategy, which aims to lift 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion by improving the use of EU funds to support inclusion within Member States, and by directing 20% of the European Social fund to fight poverty and social exclusion

This timely international symposium examined the current state of the Europe 2020 strategy to reduce poverty and social exclusion and evaluate the need to adopt and develop newer strategies to stimulate inclusiveness through education and employment. It provided a vital platform to discuss the need to reform the current social protection systems in the EU and has explored how all stakeholders must coordinate and cooperate in order to build a more inclusive society.

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