The Social Platform would like to thank the Slovenian Presidency for inviting Social NGOs to the Troika meeting preceding the Informal Meeting of Ministers of Employment and Social Affairs in Brdo on 31 January – 1 February 2008. This paper is our common response to the questions raised in the background paper on implementation of the European common principles of flexicurity prepared by the Slovenian Presidency for the meeting. It is submitted as a contribution to the debate among Ministers.
The Social Platform believes that a broader context analysis is indispensable to develop a more human and positive rationale for reforms including labour market reforms. In addition to globalisation, technological change and demography the following trends need to be given more attention to enrich the implementation of the European flexicurity principles: rising inequalities, discrimination, migration, public health issues, strengthened role of the third sector, diversity of families and new role for women and men.

The Social Platform calls on Ministers and on the EU to support a change in the title of the Lisbon strategy to “growth, jobs and inclusion” and to add an additional guideline (using the format of the new social horizontal clause of the Lisbon Treaty) to better assess the impact of the economic and employment guidelines on social cohesion and inclusion.

The common principles adopted by the Council do not sufficiently address the issue of discrimination. The recognition of some of the difficulties faced by particular groups is welcomed but should go hand in hand with the fight against discrimination in all forms and in all spheres of life, the recognition of the diversity of European population and a more positive discourse on migration.

The Social Platform calls on Ministers and on the EU to ensure full enforcement of legislation and policies on gender equality, non-discrimination and equal opportunities and to support new European legislation fighting discrimination in areas outside employment in order to ensure uniform protection for all article 13 groups.

Gender is a fundamental structuring element that impacts on access to and full participation in paid and unpaid work. A combination of policies and strategies are vital to reverse the male dominant model of an uninterrupted career path that leads to full employment rights, social security provisions and full pensions in old age.

The Social Platform calls on Ministers and on the EU to strengthen European legislation for the conciliation of private and working life for women and men and to ensure sustainable public funding for quality care services for all dependents by amending the Lisbon macro-economics guidelines.

A life cycle approach to people’s lives demonstrate how important it is for individuals to have access to a guaranteed adequate minimum income. Social protection and minimum income enable all citizens to choose between employment, caring for their family and relatives, training and socially meaningful activity. A compulsory and adequate first pillar pension system remains the most efficient way to address flexicurity in relation to frequent job changes, career interruptions and participation in life long learning opportunities while at the same time securing an adequate income in old age.

The Social Platform calls on Ministers and on the EU to guarantee an adequate minimum income to all people across Europe and to ensure an individual right to social protection and to pension disconnected from employment records.

Social NGOs are increasingly recognised as essential partners in employment policies. They are particularly valued for being at the forefront in helping people through the provision of key employment services and by voicing the concerns of those at risk or experiencing discrimination and exclusion.

The Social Platform calls on Ministers and on the EU to Recognise and make use of the expertise of NGOs at all levels and create partnership in dialogue (policy-making) and in action (implementation of policies) both at EU and national level.
INTRODUCTION

The background paper of the Slovenian Presidency is based on an analysis of change focusing on globalisation, technological change, competitiveness and demography. This context analysis is very similar to the one that underpins the rationale for the Lisbon “Growth and Jobs” strategy.

The Social Platform supports the importance of these trends but believes that this picture is not complete. More trends need to be identified to address the changing social reality and to improve the quality of policy responses at European and national levels. The need for a more thorough social analysis has been recognised by President Barroso when launching the consultation - that will end mid-February 2008 - on social reality and on the new social vision for 21st century Europe.

The following box shows the difference in number between the trends usually taken into consideration in European debate and the one that the Social Platform believes should be given more attention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key trends identified in the Slovenian background paper</th>
<th>Key trends identified by the Social Platform in its position on the post Lisbon</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Globalisation</td>
<td>Similar trends:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Intensive technological change</td>
<td>• Globalisation of the economy but not of social standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increasing need for competitiveness</td>
<td>• Growing demographic challenge - moving towards a society for all ages</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Growing demographic challenge</td>
<td>Additional trends:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Rising inequalities in the distribution of European wealth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Increased recognition of the diversity of European societies and the need to fight all forms of discrimination</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Migration</td>
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<td>• Longer and healthier lives (but is that gained once and for all?)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Increased diversity in family patterns - new roles and responsibilities for women and men</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Strengthening of the third sector with more active and engaged citizens.</td>
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The Social Platform believes that this broader contextual analysis is indispensable to develop a more human and positive rationale for reforms including labour market reforms. Instead of focusing only on trends that have an immediate economic impact, social/societal elements are given an equal attention and incorporated in economic analysis. This can help decision makers to address more adequately the complexity of people’s lives and their changing environment.

This second box explains why these additional trends should become more central in the Lisbon strategy and in the flexicurity debate (first column) and how this could be done (second column). For a detailed analysis of these trends and of Social NGOs’ policy recommendations, the Social Platform invites Ministers to read the full text of its common position on social and demographic change1.

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1 “Social NGOs ready for the post-Lisbon: From ‘Growth and Jobs’ to ‘Sustainable and Social’, Recommendations to EU decision makers on how to address social and demographic change”. Common position adopted by the Social Platform’s Steering Group on 18 December 2007, available on www.socialplatform.org
### Trends that should be better addressed at EU level

<table>
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<th>Why?</th>
<th>How?</th>
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| **Rising inequalities in the distribution of European wealth** | ✓ Acknowledge the growing inequalities and put an immediate end to the social moratorium declared since 2005;  
✓ Change the title of the Lisbon strategy to “growth, jobs and inclusion” thereby better acknowledging the current EU momentum and concerted political action to promote social inclusion of all EU citizens;  
✓ Add an additional social guideline (using the format of the new social horizontal clause of the Lisbon Treaty) to better assess the impact on social cohesion and social inclusion of the economic and employment guidelines;  
✓ Ensure the effective implementation of the European Youth Pact and the European Gender Pact;  
✓ Ensure that flexicurity reforms are primarily aimed at improving the situation of precarious workers- as well as people furthest away from the labour market - and do not further deteriorate working and living conditions and income. |
| Growth and jobs indicators in Europe were generally more positive in 2007. But it is hard today to measure the benefits of this relative success on the promised “greater social cohesion” and “decisive impact on the eradication of poverty”.  
On the contrary, Social NGOs draw attention to an increase in poverty and exclusion (including the re-emergence of extreme forms of poverty) even among workers. |  
• Demographic changes  
• Diversity in families  
• New role for women and men |
| Families are changing and so are the roles and responsibilities of women and men. Next to the dominant “male-bread winner” and “two incomes, two kids” family models on which most of employment and social policies are based, there exists a diversity of family structures which realities is often ignored by policy-makers (i.e. single parents families of which a majority is headed by women, elderly women having to care for both their grand children and their parents and still expected to work, recomposed families, same sex families etc...) | ✓ Urgently invest in quality care services (no only for children but for all dependents) by amending the Lisbon macro-economics guidelines to prioritise on this objective;  
✓ Ensure that adequate support is provided to disabled people in order to ensure their full participation in society;  
✓ Recognise the economic value of care services provided by family members (mainly women), the role of the not for profit sector in this field and the job creation potential of this sector;  
✓ Support the strengthening of European policies and legislation for the conciliation of private and working life for women and men (i.e. family-friendly settings, care leave, flexible working hours and compensation policies for carers as key elements of any modern societies);  
✓ Guarantee reasonable and predictable working time (daily/weekly) for both women and men to ensure the conciliation of work and private life. |
| Longer and healthier lives (but is that gained once and for all?) | Longer life and improved health is a real achievement of European social protection systems. However NGOs are concerned by new risks to health and worsening of working conditions (i.e. mental health, work related stress, psychosocial risks etc...) and inadequate work structures to ensure job retention for people becoming disabled in their working lives. | ✓ Monitor more actively the impact of precarious and flexible work on people’s health, including mental health, and on public expenditure and take the necessary actions; ✓ Adopt a health and mental health promoting approach at the work place, in combination with initiatives aimed at integrating people with mental health problems into the labour market; ✓ Flexibility structures should mean job retention strategies as well as reasonable adjustments to include disabled workers. |
| Diversity and equality | Living in Europe today means a Europe of people with diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnic origins, people with disabilities, different sexual orientations, different ages, different religions... While these differences are increasingly recognised and valued, too many people still suffer from discrimination. | ✓ Implement effectively and ensure full enforcement of legislation and policies on non-discrimination, equal opportunities and equality between men and women; ✓ Support enhanced EU anti-discrimination legislation based on Article 13; ✓ Ensure an active follow-up to the Jumbo JLS-EPSCO Council and promote a holistic and rights’ based approach to migration. |
| Migration | | |
| Strengthening of the third sector with more active and engaged citizens | Citizens’ associations draw from community, neighbourhood, social and other connections to input in decision-making and to provide effective services. They have become an increasingly common channel through which people seek to exercise citizenship and contribute to social well-being. | ✓ Recognise and make use of the expertise of NGOs at all levels and create partnership in dialogue (policy-making) and in action (implementation of policies). |

As a last introductory remark, the Social Platform would also like to stress that the implementation of the European flexicurity principles raises (again) the issue of the EU added value. Is this flexicurity process yet another intergovernmental exchange of information? What is the added value of these principles for people? What role for the European Commission, the Parliament and civil society in the implementation of these principles?
RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS

Question 1: While establishing and implementing comprehensive flexicurity arrangements, in what way should the common principles of flexicurity be applied so as to take into account the specific situation of young people and older workers and in particular the gender dimension?

The common principles adopted by the Council do not sufficiently acknowledge the issue of discrimination despite the fact that it is clearly an EU field of competence (article 13). The recognition of some of the difficulties faced by particular groups is welcomed but should go hand in hand with the fight against discrimination in all forms and all spheres of life, the recognition of the diversity of European population and a more positive discourse on migration. As the background paper implicitly recognises, discrimination in one area of life, such as education, impacts on other areas, such as employment.

What is common to young, older workers, women, disabled people, LGTB or ethnic minorities is that they face greater prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination, often on more than one ground at a time. Even with adequate levels of training, they are not treated equally in recruitment process, job advancement, access to training or earnings.

In this area, the EU has a major responsibility in ensuring the effectiveness of the implementation of EU directive 2000/78 on non discrimination in Employment, the directive 2000/43 on equal treatment on grounds of racial or ethnic origin as well as the body of European legislation in the area of gender equality in employment. Member States should also promote positive action measures ensuring workplaces free of discrimination and support the work of equality bodies and specialised NGOs.

To get a job - or to remain in a position – groups vulnerable to discrimination also encounter difficulties in getting services necessary for their employability. The EU and Member States must pay particular attention to the barriers in access to quality education and training, to care services, to quality transport services, or to good and services. These are supporting and necessary tools for the employability of these groups. Therefore, the Social Platform calls on the Member States to support enhanced measures and legislation to combat discrimination on the basis of Article 13 and to ensure a unanimous adoption of new European legislation fighting discrimination in areas outside employment in order to ensure uniform protection for all article 13 groups.

Finally it is also crucial for Member States to make links with migration policies. The Social Platform believes that rights gap that is created by the categorisation of third-country nationals and conditional rights will unavoidably lead to less favourable working and residence conditions for third-country workers who are considered to be less qualified. This will reinforce existing inequality patterns and discrimination in society with ultimately damaging effects on the integration of all third-country nationals. Social NGOs believe that all migrants residing within the EU should be treated equally. This is key to build an inclusive European society, free of racism and discrimination.

Question 2. What combination of policy measures have proven to be/could be useful to ensure a gender mainstreaming approach? What have been the effects of such policy measures in the evolution of the labour market and social protection systems?

Gender is a fundamental structuring element that impacts on access to and full participation in paid and unpaid work. When combined with other factors, such as age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, etc, gender inequality exacerbates. Women and men do not share the same level of power in and out of the labour market. Therefore, a combination of policies and strategies are vital to reverse the male dominant model of an uninterrupted career path that leads to full employment rights, social security provisions and full pensions in old age. Such policies and actions include but are not limited to:

2 Lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual people (lgbt)
3 Council directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.
Reconciliation of work and private life is one of the most important determinants of women’s and men’s decisions about the number and spacing of their children and the type and length of both their paid and unpaid work. Equality between women and men in employment and in the public sphere depends very much on equality in the private sphere, especially in the equal sharing of care-work and the reduction of women’s time-gap. Therefore, sustainable public funding for quality care services for all dependants that are part of social protection systems at a cost that is affordable for all women and men is a prerequisite for guaranteeing equality in the choices of women and men to participate in paid and unpaid work. Progress reports on the implementation of the Barcelona targets in relation to child care states very clearly that these targets are not met by most Member States. Other legislative measures are equally important to reconcile work and private life (improvements in relation to maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave and other types of care leave) as well as specific actions, such as tax incentives for companies that put in place family-friendly working practices.

Together with care provisions, pay is also a determinant in decisions about who carries out the unpaid caring responsibility. Due to the persistent pay gap, issues relating to sectoral and occupational gender segregation, gender-specific employment patterns (part-time work for example), structural inequalities in access to education and training, biased evaluation and pay systems, stereotypes, hourly wage gaps, a position gap, an income-distribution gap and a time gap all need to be addressed.

Women’s exclusion from full pension rights, which leads to higher level of poverty among women in old age, is directly linked to the male dominant model of an uninterrupted career. It is therefore crucial that years spend out of the formal labour market due to caring responsibilities for example are counted as productive years and are taken into consideration in a life-cycle approach to guaranteeing full pension rights.

Gender mainstreaming is a long term process that requires resources and a number of different actors and tools as well as a firm commitment to the strategy itself, including from the highest political level. It involves many areas of decision-making and a complete change of focus in decision-making to a more participatory model. Tools include sex disaggregated statistics and data, gender impact assessments, budgeting and resources and the direct involvement of women into each stage of planning, decision-making, implementation, actions, follow-up and monitoring.

**Question 3.** How can/should social protection systems be changed in order to better respond to the emerging challenges/interaction between labour law and social protection rules in order to support effective transitions?

A life cycle approach to people’s lives demonstrate how important it is for individuals to have access to a guaranteed adequate minimum income. The right to social protection and to a minimum income should be disconnected from employment records and guaranteed to all individuals as a fundamental right. Social benefits that use the family structure as the central unit to calculate entitlements discriminate against women, the young and the elderly and should therefore be revised.

Minimum income schemes should be separated from other benefits aimed at covering extra costs of specific groups (people with disabilities, single parents, etc). People furthest away from the labour market need the possibility to combine minimum income and other social benefits with income through employment, including supported employment. There should be also alternative working time conditions and access for people with disabilities, to ensure easier access to the labour market. This supports their reintegration into society and facilitates transitions into the mainstream labour market.

Labour law must integrate a compulsory and adequate pension system for all individuals regardless of their employment status or the number of years in paid employment. Indeed, a compulsory and

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4 Report on the 2007 Cambridge Review of the National Reform Programmes, EMCO/27/141107/EN-Final-rev 1
adequate first pillar pension system, based on the individualisation of rights, remains the most efficient way to address flexicurity in relation to frequent job changes, career interruptions and participation in lifelong learning opportunities while at the same time securing an adequate income in old age.

Periods of time spent outside of the formal labour market including periods of maternity, paternity and parental leave, career breaks and part-time employment (in particular in order to fulfil caring responsibilities for dependent people) and participation in lifelong learning activities should be included when calculating pensions and social protection entitlements.

Social protection and minimum income must enable all citizens to choose between employment, caring for their family and relatives, training and socially meaningful activity.

**Question 4. What specific measures could/should be used in order to establish trust among and guarantee support of young people, older workers and women for the changes introduced? What should be the role of social partners? How can other stakeholders contribute to that end?**

In its introduction the Social Platform explained how important it is to adopt a broader contextual analysis to ensure the success and the support of reforms. This broader contextual analysis also calls for new partnership both in dialogue and in action. Social NGOs are increasingly recognised as essential partners. They are particularly valued for being at the forefront in helping people through the provision of key services (pre-employment skills, language skills, job counselling, care for dependents, support groups for unemployed etc...) and by voicing the concerns of those at risk or experiencing discrimination and exclusion.

The Social Platform favors participatory forms of democracy to reinforce trust and supports a political framework in which civil society actors are genuinely recognized as partners at all stages of the decision-making process.

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The Platform of European Social NGOs (the Social Platform) is the alliance of representative European federations and networks of non-governmental organisations active in the social sector. The Social Platform promotes social justice and participatory democracy in the European Union. Together we work to build a united, strong European social NGO sector, and to create a European Union based upon our common values.

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