

# socialplatform

To:

Mr. Xavier Bertrand, Minister For Labour, Family and Social Affairs  
Commissioner Vladimir Špidla, Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities  
Jan Andersson, Chair of the European Parliament Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

1st July 2008

Dear President,  
Dear Commissioner,  
Dear Chairman,

**Re: Social Platform recommendations for the European principles on Active Inclusion**

Each woman and man in Europe has the right to fully participate in society. Making this right a reality is the objective of the members of the Social Platform, a broad coalition of 40 pan-European networks of NGOs committed to social justice and equality.

The Social Platform welcomes the Commission's initiative on Active Inclusion and trusts that the upcoming Commission's Recommendation<sup>1</sup> will be a step forward in promoting a more inclusive and cohesive society.

The Social Platform is keen to be part of this debate. Based on 19 written contributions from its members<sup>2</sup>, we will first point out what must be the overarching principles of Active Inclusion (points 1 and 2) and will then present our principles on the three strands of Active Inclusion: adequate income support (point 3), access to quality social services (point 4), and full participation in society and integration in the labour market (point 5). Lastly, we will look at how the process can best be implemented (point 6).

The Social Platform believes that in order to have a successful active inclusion policy:

**1) Active Inclusion cannot be a substitute for social inclusion, but is part of it**

If employment remains one of the important paths to social inclusion, it is certainly not the only one. The "growth and jobs" strategy cannot be the only guide for European social policy. Social NGOs therefore want to make clear to the EU decision makers that:

- Integration into the labour market must not be a precondition for the entitlement to minimum income and for access to quality services.
- But, minimum income and access to quality services are necessary preconditions for integrating the labour market.

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<sup>1</sup> This Recommendation, to be issued in September 2008, will be the basis for Council conclusions and a European Parliament resolution.

<sup>2</sup> All contributions are available on our website, [www.socialplatform.org](http://www.socialplatform.org)

- Active Inclusion must aim for the inclusion of all in society. Its overarching principles must be respect for human dignity and fundamental rights, freedom from discrimination, and respect for individual needs and preferences. Policy makers must not decide what is best for people experiencing poverty but instead respect their dignity and support them when they make decisions for themselves.

## **2) People furthest away from the labour market should participate in designing the common principles on Active Inclusion**

- The EU initiative on Active Inclusion will not be successful if it does not involve in policy making those who are currently excluded from the labour market and organisations which have experience working with them.
- Active Inclusion must focus on people with multiple disadvantages and complex needs. It must take account of a complex and diverse social reality and each situation needs to be addressed specifically: for example people living in poverty, people who are homeless, men and women from ethnic and religious minorities who are not offered a job, or people with disabilities who face multiple barriers to employment.
- The successful implementation of an Active Inclusion strategy depends on adhering to the principles of participatory democracy at all stages and social NGOs must be a key partner in designing the common principles on Active Inclusion.

## **3) People must have the right to an adequate minimum income irrespective of their chance to participate in the labour market**

- 78 million people live in, or are at risk of, poverty. An adequate minimum income is essential to fight poverty and social exclusion, and also to ensure a life in dignity for those for whom paid employment would never be an option.
- Employment is not the sole means of being active in our societies. People are also active when involved in voluntary, social, or cultural activities or when caring for other individuals. Thus, the right to minimum income should be granted irrespective of people's chances to participate in the labour market or previous employment record.
- For women and men to live in dignity, the minimum income level should be based on the Council recommendation 92/441/EEC.<sup>3</sup>
- To ensure dignity for all in the EU, minimum income schemes should be applied in a comparable manner in all Member States.
- Women and men should be supported in taking up the rights they are entitled to. They should be well informed of the minimum income schemes which must be transparent, accessible to all, and sustainable over time.

## **4) People must have universal access to quality services**

- Even with an adequate minimum income and an offer of employment, many people will never be able to keep their job if they don't have access to affordable and accessible quality services. For example, all workers need housing and transport to their workplace. Parents need to be able to leave their children in a

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<sup>3</sup> Council Recommendation of 24 June 1992 on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems (92/441/EEC)

quality care facility. People with disabilities need accessible education, transport and other services to reach the employment market. Others may need ongoing vocational training and life long learning opportunities.

- The definition of services within the context of Active Inclusion should not be limited to social services but widened to include also health services and all services of general interest, such as public transport, access to energy, education, quality childcare and care services for other dependent people.
- Everyone should have equal access to available, affordable and quality social and health services. Social NGOs have defined nine golden quality principles to characterize the access to these services.<sup>4</sup>

## **5) People should have the right to fully participate in society and to be integrated in the labour market**

The focus of “activation policies” should be to pave the way to social inclusion and to full participation in society, which can include access to employment. It should not focus only on this last objective.

Social NGOs believe that Active Inclusion is a necessary additional approach for those furthest from the labour market. However, this must not result in separate services for the poor. It should be an integral part of social inclusion policies and employment policies such as the Employment guidelines or the Flexicurity principles<sup>5</sup>.

The effective right to minimum income and access to services enables people to be active in our societies and to have access to employment. However, to bridge the gap between those who are unemployed and the job market, the following conditions need to be fulfilled simultaneously:

- People need to know that they will be better off with a job than without. Their living conditions must be improved with a quality job and not worsened with a precarious one. The rise in atypical and precarious work patterns has created new poverty and health risks among the employed population. Today, the ‘working poor’ represents 17% of the self-employed and 6% of employees in the EU<sup>6</sup>.
- People must not be rejected from the labour market. Discrimination faced by women and specific groups in society often prevents them from getting a job (people with disabilities, older workers, LGBT people<sup>7</sup>, young people looking for a first job, migrants or ethnic minorities and any person belonging to one of multiple discriminated identities). Legislation on gender equality, equality and non-discrimination needs to be extended and implemented to remove structural barriers to employment.
- To get a job, people need to be supported by tailor-made, targeted services. Decades of experience and many projects funded under the EQUAL programme have shown that certain groups in society need individualised support in order to gain employment. They also need family-friendly settings, flexible working hours, care leave, compensation policies for carers and the creation of qualitative care facilities.
- Active Inclusion must not stop once people get into the labour market. Individualised support must also be maintained in order to enable people to retain their job position.

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<sup>4</sup> The common position is available at <http://tinyurl.com/SGI-final>

<sup>5</sup> See the proposal for the next [European Employment guidelines \(2008-2010\)](#) and [Flexicurity principles](#) at [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/employment\\_strategy/guidelines\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_strategy/guidelines_en.htm)

<sup>6</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Working and Living Conditions, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people

## 6) Legislation is the most cost-effective tool to achieve social objectives

- Inequality in Europe is on the increase as more and more people are excluded from society. The OMC "soft law" approach has not proven to be sufficient to create the conditions for an inclusive society, where every woman and man is recognised and valued within their own right as contributors to society - whatever role they may play. Social NGOs hope that a strengthened social OMC can contribute to creating a more favourable and needed environment for the Active Inclusion approach to be successful. Meanwhile, the Commission should also consider legislation as a means to achieve Active Inclusion.
- But, legislation alone is not sufficient. The Active Inclusion strategy must be matched by sufficient financial means to achieve it.
- To be efficient, basic principles must be accompanied by indicators based on qualitative and quantitative data in order to measure progress and set benchmarks against which policies can be measured and evaluated.
- Legislation and policies under the Active Inclusion strategy must effectively interact with and complement other policies under the OMC.

We would like to stress again the importance of the wording and the content of the principles on Active Inclusion for social NGOs. We would also be very interested to discuss with you any initiatives to reinforce the participation of civil society in this area.

Yours sincerely,



Conny Reuter  
President



Roshan Di Puppo  
Director

CC:

- Employment and Social Affairs Ministers
- Nikolaus Van der Pas, Director General, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities