

EN

EN

EN



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 14.5.2008
SEC(2008) 1896

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

**REPORT ON THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON EUROPE'S SOCIAL REALITY
AND ON A NEW SOCIAL VISION FOR 21ST CENTURY EUROPE**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	3
2.	The Consultation Procedure	3
3.	General Observations	4
3.1.	A satisfactory outcome of the public consultation	4
3.1.1.	A good response from public authorities	5
3.1.2.	Other responses reflecting a broad spectrum of interests and views	5
3.1.3.	Reactions of citizens from ten different Member States	5
3.2.	Observations concerning approach and coverage of the consultation documents	6
3.2.1.	Comments regarding the approach	6
3.2.1.1.	General agreement on wider trends and the social well-being approach	6
3.2.1.2.	Consensus regarding the importance of social policies for Europe	6
3.2.1.3.	Many questions despite general confidence in Europe's welfare states	6
3.2.1.4.	Widespread agreement on the need for a new social policy	7
3.2.1.5.	Discussion about the further procedure desired	7
3.2.2.	Some remarks on the coverage	8
3.2.2.1.	Widespread agreement with the consultation documents	8
3.2.2.2.	Further discussion requested on instruments and financing	8
4.	Specific comments concerning the seven key areas for action proposed	8
4.1.	Investing in youth	9
4.2.	Investing in fulfilling careers	9
4.3.	Investing in longer and healthier lives	10
4.4.	Investing in gender equality	11
4.5.	Investing in active inclusion and non-discrimination	11
4.6.	Investing in mobility and successful integration	12
4.7.	Investing in civic participation, culture and dialogue	13

1. INTRODUCTION

In May 2006, the European Commission adopted its *"Citizen's Agenda"*¹, announcing its intention to conduct a stocktaking of Europe's social reality in order to ensure that European social policies evolve in line with changes in European society. A public consultation on "Europe's Social Reality"² was launched in February 2007 to look at societal trends and challenges. This consultation generated a better understanding of the changes underway in European societies today: globalisation, demographic trends, mobility. It generated a debate and an exchange of views. Building on the initial results of the consultation, a Communication on "Opportunities, Access and Solidarity: Towards a New Social Vision for 21st Century Europe"³ was adopted in November 2007 (COM (2007) 726 final). It set out a range of possible responses to the societal challenges that Europe faces and the context for renewing the social agenda over the medium term.

In line with the Commission's general principles and standards governing consultation of interested parties, this report describes the consultation procedure and analyses the approximately 150 contributions received.

The objective of this report is to provide an overview over the wide range and diversity of ideas, opinions and suggestions contained in the contributions received. Without claiming to be exhaustive, the report identifies the main trends, views and concerns arising from the contributions. In order to ensure full transparency, the report is complemented by the publication of the full text of the contributions received on the internet.

The report provides a short description of the consultation procedure, some general observations on the contributions received as well as a summary of the positions set out in the individual contributions aligned with the seven key areas for action suggested in the November 2007 consultation document (for ease of reference, these seven key areas of action are listed in Annex 1). Annex 2 provides a list of all contributions received.

This is a report on the public consultation. It does not aim to draw policy conclusions from the consultation process. Such conclusions will be drawn in preparation of the package of the agenda for opportunities, access and solidarity in mid-2008.

2. THE CONSULTATION PROCEDURE

When launching the public consultation, the Commission initially set a deadline of 31 December 2007 for the submission of contributions from interested parties. Following the presentation of the second consultation document in November 2007, this deadline was extended to 15 February 2008. The official consultation period covered almost 12 months, significantly longer than the eight-week period established as a minimum standard for this type of consultation.

¹ A Citizen's Agenda – Delivering results for Europe, COM(2006)211, 10.5.2006

² Europe's social reality, A consultation document from the Bureau of European Policy Advisers available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/citizens_agenda/social_reality_stocktaking/docs/background_document_en.pdf

³ Opportunities, access and solidarity: towards a new social vision for 21st century Europe, COM(2007) 726, 20.11.2007

The Commission received a number of requests for extension of the deadline. Although the Commission did not formally extend the consultation period, it informed interested parties that comments received after the deadline would also be taken into account to the greatest extent possible. Many contributions were received towards the end of the consultation period or after the official deadline. This report takes account of all contributions received up to mid-March 2008.

The consultation documents have been made available, together with a number of relevant background documents, on a website created specifically for this purpose (“Social Reality Stocktaking”).⁴ Comments could be submitted to the Commission in all Community languages, either by mail or by e-mail to a dedicated mailbox.

For the information of interested parties, the Commission has placed the contributions received on its Social Reality Stocktaking Website, with the explicit consent of the contributors. Only one respondent did not agree to the publication of comments. In accordance with established practice, individual citizens are not identified by name or address but are instead categorised by national origin.

In parallel to the public consultation, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions also provided their views on the future social agenda and related matters⁵. The Commission has actively followed their work as well as the work of other bodies at European and national level. Furthermore, the Commission is paying attention to the on-going debate in the European Parliament on the Employment Policy Guidelines 2008-2010⁶. Finally, the Commission took into consideration a Eurobarometer poll on the European social reality published in February 2007. While all this work and all further information received will be taken into account in the preparation of the new agenda for opportunities, access and solidarity, this report deals only with the written contributions received specifically in response to the public consultation.⁷

3. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

3.1. A satisfactory outcome of the public consultation

The fairly long consultation period (from February 2007 until February 2008) produced a satisfactory result in terms of volume, scope and depth of contributions. Some 150 mostly comprehensive contributions were received from all across the EU and from a wide range of sources such as public authorities, a national parliament committee, social partners, NGOs, various interest groups, universities and research institutions, religious groups and churches as well as individual citizens. This result is comparable to the outcome of other European-level consultation exercises.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/citizens_agenda/social_reality_stocktaking/contributions/contribution_en.htm

⁵ European Parliament, Rapport Lynne (2007/2104(INI)); Committee of the Regions, L'avenir du marché unique et le bilan de la réalité sociale européenne (Rapporteur: M. PARSONS, CdR 339/2006, mars 2007) et Comité Economique et Sociale Européen, Bilan concernant la réalité de la société européenne (Rapporteur : M. OLSSON, Avis Exploratoire CESE 94/2007 du janvier 2007).

⁶ European Parliament, current draft Report Van Lancker (CNS/2007/0300)

⁷ To be noted also that the European Commission representations supported consultation and debate on the social reality stocktaking in a number of Member States.

The open character of the consultation generated quite a significant number of contributions. In a number of cases the contributions received presented results of a further consultation process at national or local level.

3.1.1. A good response from public authorities

The responses received from public authorities indicate that the consultation received significant political attention. As intended by the European Commission, the consultation was seen as a first step in the process of formulating a new social policy based on a new social vision. Contributions were received from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Spain, France, Italy, Malta, Austria, Poland, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

A number of contributions were also received from regional and local governments such as a joint position from the German Bundesrat, reflecting the position of the German Länder, a contribution from the Greater London Authority as well as various contributions on the part of Irish Community Councils, showing some direct involvement and interest of this level of government. Finally, there were contributions from national Parliaments, such as from the Joint Committee on European Affairs of the Irish Parliament, and contributions submitted directly by Members of Parliament based on their consultations on this matter at local level.

3.1.2. Other responses reflecting a broad spectrum of interests and views

Apart from individual responses received from social partner organisations at national level, most of the major social partner groupings at European level, such as ETUC, BUSINESSEUROPE and the Confédération Européenne des Cadres, sent comprehensive contributions reflecting their interest in having a say in defining the new social agenda.

Further contributions came from NGOs with a more general scope of activity in the social field such as CARITAS Europe, Care for Europe and the Social Platform, as well as from NGOs with a more specific area of activity dealing with poverty, children, youth, health, disability, family issues, etc. As for religious groups, contributions were received from both the Catholic and the Protestant Church at European level as well as from various other bodies at national level.

3.1.3. Reactions of citizens from ten different Member States

26 contributions were received directly from individual citizens in ten different Member States. This showed an interest in this subject matter that goes beyond the institutionalised representation of interests. These contributions covered the same areas as those from Member States, NGOs and other bodies, i.e. transport, educational matters, health, sustainability, public services, work-life balance, effects of privatisation on various markets, etc.

The citizens' contributions, like the others, advocate a new social policy and more dialogue. However, rather than putting forward numerous detailed policy suggestions, this type of contribution sought to describe the way in which the policies affect them personally. This added an extra dimension to the consultation exercise.

3.2. Observations concerning approach and coverage of the consultation documents

3.2.1. Comments regarding the approach

3.2.1.1. General agreement on wider trends and the social well-being approach

Most of the contributions endorse the description of the social trends that have shaped European societies in recent times as set out in the consultation documents: globalisation and the shift towards a knowledge society as well as demographic trends are recurring topics that keep reappearing throughout the whole set of responses. In this context, the notion of well-being was quite well received even if some insisted that it was difficult to use as a subjective indicator.

On the other hand, some contributions also draw attention to changing values and family composition as important factors to be taken into account in order to have a wider view of the social challenges ahead.

It should be noted that two contributors, one from a Member State and another from a research institution, are concerned about the limited scope of the first consultation document, which covers only observations regarding the new social reality. In their view, wider strategic aspects related to the formulation of a new social policy at European level, such as a general discussion of the appropriateness of the current social policy instruments, should also form part of this discussion.

3.2.1.2. Consensus regarding the importance of social policies for Europe

Most of the contributions across all categories of contributors appear to be based on the firm belief that the confidence of citizens in the European project one way or another depends greatly on credible social policies at European level.

In this context, a number of contributors firmly believe that Europe still has the strongest welfare states and public services in the world, with universal democracy and with the social well-being and the fundamental rights of its people at the centre of its political, social and economic life. Continuing this theme, some contributions stress the role of Europe's functioning social systems as a factor conducive to productivity and competitiveness and, as such, as a precondition for successful economic policies. Others also highlighted the role of economic success for creating and sustaining an inclusive society.

3.2.1.3. Many questions despite general confidence in Europe's welfare states

While many contributions express continuing confidence in the welfare state, there still appears to be widespread concern that globalisation might be used as a pretext to pursue economic growth at all costs, causing large-scale de-localisations as well as a race to the bottom in terms of employment standards.

In the same vein, a number of contributors mainly from trade unions as well as the NGO sector have doubts that economic growth alone will automatically reduce unemployment, social exclusion and poverty. Against this background, some contributors argue that the European Union has been perceived by many as part of the problem stemming from globalisation rather than as part of the solution. Others recognise that some of our current welfare states have not followed the profound changes that have taken place in our economies and societies and hence are contributing less to providing new opportunities than they could.

Most of the contributions underline the fact that the well-being of Europe's citizens as a key objective for all economic and social policies clearly goes beyond material wealth. Some contributors further stress that spirituality also constitutes a key component of well-being.

3.2.1.4. Widespread agreement on the need for a new social policy

Against this multifaceted background, most of the contributors directly or indirectly point to the need for a new impulse in terms of social policy at European level. Especially in view of the challenges emanating from globalisation, European ageing populations and changing work patterns, these contributors consider a fundamental re-assessment of social policies indispensable.

In this context, most contributions appear to indicate that the key lies in striking the right balance between social policies on the one hand and the drive for economic growth and competitiveness on the other. One Member State contribution, however, seeks to place more emphasis on an individual dimension, calling for the inclusion of a principle of "individual responsibility" in social policy considerations.

Some contributors make the additional point that the formulation of a new social policy will probably be impossible without a new discussion about the shared values underpinning today's European Union and its approaches in terms of economic and social policy in times of globalisation.

3.2.1.5. Discussion about the further procedure desired

Having regard to the wider political process in the field of economic and social policies, some contributors point out that the Lisbon Strategy remains the appropriate platform for the formulation and implementation of social policies. In this context, other contributors argue that the current focus of the Lisbon Strategy on growth and jobs is much too narrow and recommend adding social guidelines to the existing set of integrated guidelines.

One contribution from the NGO sector went even further, advocating a shift in the Lisbon Strategy away from its perceived narrow growth and jobs focus towards a renewed social and sustainable development strategy. On this basis and in view of the horizontal social clause of the Lisbon Reform Treaty, this contribution further requests that the Lisbon Strategy be renamed "Growth, jobs and inclusion".

Other contributors, particularly from Member States as well as from employers' federations, argue instead that the current set of procedures in the field of social policies has generally worked well and that no new processes or procedures are required. This viewpoint is generally associated with a request to respect the existing competences at national and regional level on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity. In this context, both sides of the social partners on European level underline the importance of the social dialogue which, at times, could even replace legislation by the European Commission.

Lastly, a number of contributors are very hopeful that some elements of the forthcoming Lisbon Reform Treaty, such as the commitment to a social market economy aiming at full employment and social progress, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the horizontal social clause, will prove to be conducive to the formulation and implementation of social policies.

3.2.2. *Some remarks on the coverage*

3.2.2.1. Widespread agreement with the consultation documents

A large majority of contributors of all categories directly or indirectly express strong appreciation of the coverage of the consultation documents. Quite a lot of contributions, for instance, confirm the strong link between Europe's future social reality and further development of the Union's Single Market. Other contributors underline the importance of a stable macroeconomic framework promoting growth, investment and fiscal sustainability. In this context, some contributions even call for supportive macroeconomic policies as a necessary pre-condition for ensuring the well-being of European citizens.

Only a very few contributors specifically refer to areas which they would have liked to be addressed in more detail in the consultation documents. In this latter regard, one Member State contribution highlights the issue of pensions as a crucial element of social security that should have been looked at in more depth. Other contributors felt that issues such as the disabled, housing and the situation of the homeless deserved wider coverage. One respondent felt that the significant number of forced migrants in Europe should have been examined.

A considerable number of contributions call for the issue of active citizenship, including voluntary activities of citizens, to be given greater consideration. Lastly, two contributions request that language and presentation of the consultation documents be differentiated more clearly by gender.

3.2.2.2. Further discussion requested on instruments and financing

In terms of process, one contribution underlines the appropriateness of the open method of coordination (OMC) as a suitable means to advance reform in the area of social policies. A number of other contributions (including from Member States), however, emphasise the need to further improve the OMC.

One contribution expresses concern that the OMC might lead to new legislation rather than supporting Member States in their wider efforts to reform policies in the fields under consideration. Another contribution points to the need for appropriate indicators whereby the OMC can deliver concrete results. A number of contributions suggest that the forthcoming social agenda should also launch a process of reassessment of the current social policy instruments in the light of globalisation and other major challenges.

Finally, a number of contributions, largely from the NGO sector, stress the need for appropriate funding of social policies. In this context, some contributions from the public domain highlight the fiscal constraints on social policies as determined by the budgetary situation of their respective government and by the pressures stemming from current demographic trends and future challenges. Two others underline the significant contribution of lottery revenues in this regard. From the EU-funding perspective, one Member State contribution refers to the ongoing discussions about the forthcoming review of the EU budget and its possible implications for the funding of structural and cohesion policies.

4. SPECIFIC COMMENTS CONCERNING THE SEVEN KEY AREAS FOR ACTION PROPOSED

Most contributions commented to some extent on the seven key areas for action proposed in Section 4 of the Social Vision Document of November 2007 (see Annex 1).

Some contributions addressed the whole range of issues from the particular point of view of their respective reference groups such as the elderly, the disabled, the poor, the mentally ill, etc. Others focused on a selected number of points of specific interest.

The thrust of the comments put forward is presented below, following the order in the social vision document.

Where possible and useful, comments expressing agreement with the presentation of the consultation documents are referred to first, followed by more wide-ranging comments and ending with general or practical suggestions for improvement.

4.1. Investing in youth

Most contributions agree with the suggestions made in the consultation document on youth: the need to focus on early school leavers, pre-school child care, and reintegration of young people with educational difficulties. One Member State contribution underlines the importance of the general principle of individual empowerment as a route to a prosperous, fair and cohesive society.

In a wider perspective, some contributors express a general concern that today's social systems are not suited to coping with the needs of young people. In this context, one contribution refers to the European Youth Pact, which has been successful in generating interest at the highest political level.

A number of contributions put youth issues more squarely into a wider family context. This wider perspective leads to calls for addressing a whole range of further policy issues such as recognition of the role of families in European policies, recognition of the work done in private households, etc. (see below under 4.5.). In the view of these contributors, the current political focus on childcare issues is much too narrow; their expectation is that all policies should be evaluated in terms of their potential impact on children.

Almost all contributions dealing with youth issues suggest that early intervention is critical so as to avoid the possible emergence of problems at a later stage. One particular contribution advocates better harmonisation of working and school hours so as to allow more time for working, learning and training as well as for family caring duties. Another contribution recommends that detailed policy options be elaborated at European level as to how to deal with the cost of child care.

Some contributions raise issues of child poverty as part of a wider poverty problem (see section 4.5.). In this context, one contribution particularly suggests the introduction of a basic income scheme on national or preferably even on European level in order to tackle child poverty but also allowing a much wider margin of civic engagement.

In line with the suggestions for other key areas of action, many contributors consider that young people should be given a voice and that active citizenship of young people should be promoted as a constitutive and indispensable part of any youth policy.

4.2. Investing in fulfilling careers

Contributions received largely agree with the presentation in the consultation document of this key area of action. The concept of flexicurity is seen by many as central to a new social vision in order to combine the need to improve flexibility of the labour market on the one

hand with the need for security for employees on the other. In the wider context, education and training are seen by some not only as a means to develop human capital and to provide entry into the labour market but also as a means to promote equalisation of life chances and potentially reduce social exclusion.

Some contributions reveal particular concern with regard to the rise in atypical work arrangements such as part-time, fixed-term or self-employment. These are perceived as being likely to harm Europe's prospects of reaching the Lisbon goals, particularly as a large share of atypical work usually falls on women. By contrast, one Member State contribution highlights the problem of labour market rigidity and protection, recommending improvements in labour market flexibility.

Some contributions argue that the assumption that low-level service sector jobs genuinely provide "a ladder of opportunity" is not supported by empirical evidence. In a wider perspective, one contribution points to the risks of loss of professional and neighbourhood ties (forming social networks) if there is too much flexibility in the labour market.

Individual contributions highlight the need to provide a wide range of employment opportunities for people with disabilities, the need for empowerment of disadvantaged children and youngsters, the need for promotion of educational equality as well as the importance of not losing sight of individual problem groups such as the long-term unemployed. One Member State contribution specifically proposes to put skills at the heart of the Lisbon agenda.

One Member State contribution suggests looking at possible ways to improve the use of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, which is due to be reviewed in the second half of 2008. In this context, the field of application, implementing procedures and the funding framework are seen as possible areas for improvement.

4.3. Investing in longer and healthier lives

Health receives considerable attention in most of the contributions, thus confirming the crucial role attributed to this area of action in the consultation document. In a number of contributions, health is seen as a factor influencing virtually all domains of the social reality of individuals. Several contributions, for instance, emphasise the specific role of mental health as one of the factors influencing individual well-being. Another contribution supports the consultation document in its focus on lifestyle-related diseases caused by poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, smoking, alcohol abuse, etc.

One contribution underlines the link between obesity and an "obesogenic" environment in today's western societies with their abundance of energy-dense food, motorised transport and sedentary lifestyles. The same contribution points out that raising spending for health promotion and prevention would not only lead to significantly lower healthcare costs but would also contribute to the sustainability of health systems. In the wider sense, some contributions see health equalisation also as a means to achieve more equality in general.

In view of the current demographic situation, one contribution points to the importance of maintaining the autonomy and independence of the elderly as one of the primary objectives of European policy. An improvement in geriatric rehabilitation is seen as one of the means to reduce demand for elderly care.

Some contributions comment on the role of the elderly as a positive economic factor whose potential should be recognised - in terms of their role as consumers and workers in an ageing society, but also in terms of preventative health care so as to avoid higher healthcare expenses at a later stage.

One contribution proposes a stronger focus on aspects of health in the workplace, for instance regarding potentially harmful physical factors in the work environment. Another contribution suggests further activity is needed in the area of work-related stress in line with the pertinent 2004 European Framework Agreement. Several contributions refer to the potential use of e-health tools to deliver healthcare services. One contribution proposes to promote "health literacy" more widely while another one suggests adding a new eldercare target to the existing set of Lisbon Strategy targets.

4.4. Investing in gender equality

Almost all of the contributions underline the need to invest more in gender equality. One contribution, for instance, suggests that gender should be considered as integral to the social reality stocktaking exercise. A number of contributions confirm the continuing need to work towards equal pay between men and women. One contribution suggests giving more detailed consideration to the causes of labour market segmentation so as to better understand gender equality issues.

Apart from the issues outlined in the consultation document, one contribution underlines the gradual harmonisation of retirement age for women and men as a key goal whereas one Member State contribution points to the advantages of independent social security coverage for women also within marriage, recognising the changing perception of partnership and the related matters of social security.

One Member State contribution strongly opposes the idea of establishing social institutions for young people and the elderly, and suggests instead supporting the family as an institution. One contribution highlights the fact that one of the direct results of gender inequality is violence against women, which has become a structural social problem.

4.5. Investing in active inclusion and non-discrimination

The contributions express far-reaching support for the line of the consultation document on this subject. In terms of general approach, several contributions put forward the view that the key challenge for social policies is to ensure genuine equality of opportunity not of outcome. In this context, some contributions emphasise the role of employment as a key factor for social inclusion. A more general concern is expressed with regard to the growth in income inequality.

Some contributors stress the crucial role of social services as an important instrument of a policy of cohesion and participation, serving to facilitate integration and participation. One contribution in particular expresses support for the development of common principles and guidelines for service quality at European level. In this context, several contributors refer to the need for establishment of social infrastructure as an objective for modern societies and a response to people's demand for security, solidarity and equality.

On this subject, one contribution points out that access to such services tends to be blocked by rising prices, lack of appropriate means of transport, discrimination with regard to

marginalised groups, etc. Generally, concern is expressed that privatisation might make many services much less accessible than before.

A number of contributions call for a change of perspective in the field of social policies in Europe, putting families as the constitutive units of society into the centre of the political discussion. With that in mind, a review of current legislation in terms of parental leave, recognition of time spent on education within the framework of social security, etc., is advocated.

In this context, one contribution calls for specific policy measures such as a pension right for “homemakers”, i.e. people who interrupt their career in order to stay at home to take care of family members in need. In terms of support for families in general, one contribution calls for the EU and its Member States to work towards a reduction of VAT on child products.

A number of contributions raise issues of poverty including child poverty and homelessness. In this context, several contributions underline the need to better understand poverty and related matters and to develop an appropriate policy approach on such a basis. One Member State contribution calls for particular attention to be paid to new forms of poverty. Against this background, one contribution proposes a new poverty programme as a complement to the existing approaches under the open method of coordination.

More specifically, some contributions request further efforts to address the problem of in-work poverty. With regard to a particular group of persons, one contribution calls for efforts to improve the situation of interns in Europe, recognising the undertaking given by the European Commission to develop a European Charter for Interns.

4.6. Investing in mobility and successful integration

In general, the contributions received support the line of the consultation document. A number of contributions see integration as a typical horizontal task in a number of policy fields such as youth and family policies, education and employment policies, etc. Some contributions emphasise the potential role of education as a strong factor supporting social inclusion and, in particular, integration of immigrants. One contribution points out in detail how racism can potentially influence all of the seven areas of action under consideration.

Another contribution underlines the fact that the free movement of workers across the European Union, whilst politically intended, is still not a practical reality as it is not sufficiently supported by suitable access to social benefits. Another contribution adds that this also applies to the right of establishment, i.e. freedom to set up a business in another Member State. On the other hand, several contributions express concern regarding the growing number of mobile workers. In this context, a strengthening of the protection of posted workers is called for.

One contribution stresses that migration policies should be based on the principles of dignity and human rights and not on security fears or racism and xenophobia. In this context, one of the Member State contributions underlines the need to establish common rules to promote efficient management of migratory flows also as a means to ensure related compensatory effects in view of current demographic developments.

In order to achieve integration and equal opportunities as well as ensure access to all types of services without discrimination, one contribution calls for a rights-based approach for which

the European Treaties, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and other Community legislation would deliver a sufficient legal basis.

Proposals are made as to how to deal with people with disabilities regarding their employment opportunities, their reduced access to services, etc., and how to progressively introduce a right of mobility for young people allowing them to spend at least one year of their career in another Member State of the Union.

4.7. Investing in civic participation, culture and dialogue

Many contributions expressly support the consultation document on this point. There is a widespread consensus in favour of support for civil engagement by all groups of society as a general means of strengthening the cohesion of societies.

One contribution points to the strong link between religious commitment and voluntary activity in terms of neighbourhood support, assistance for the sick, the handicapped, the disadvantaged, drug addicts, etc. One contribution highlights the role of older people in making a useful contribution to society and their involvement in all areas of societal and community life. This is also seen as a possible step towards their social inclusion and provides them with opportunities to contribute their accumulated knowledge, wisdom and experience to the societies they live in.

Given the strong civil engagement on the part of many members of our societies, several contributions call for a more balanced presentation of the consultation paper's points regarding the process of individualisation and the role of the citizen as a consumer.

One contributor speaks out in favour of a political framework in which NGOs are genuinely recognised as partners by decision makers at all stages of the decision-making process. This is seen as implying a shift from a top-down to a bottom-up approach to policies that ultimately aim to enhance the well-being of citizens. Recognition of civic participation or the establishment of a platform for exchange of experience at European level are seen as possible means to support such an approach.

ANNEX 1: SEVEN KEY AREAS FOR ACTION

1. Investing in youth

New social changes impact heavily on youth. Evidence shows that individual life chances are often set by the time a child reaches school, with family background and neighbourhood environment playing a key role. Essential cognitive, numeracy and literacy skills are acquired in early childhood. "Learning to learn", aspiring to higher education, attitudes toward civic participation and the choice of healthy diets and lifestyles are shaped when young. Innovative approaches are needed to enhance youth well-being and strengthen the young's ability to make a strong start in life. Particular efforts are needed to boost childcare and educational facilities for young children, adapt school curricula, reduce early school-leaving, and to ease the difficulties young people face in accessing the job market, housing and financing. Investment in childhood and youth is increasingly recognised as essential to boost life chances. It is a lifetime investment - an investment in the future.

2. Investing in fulfilling careers

In today's and tomorrow's working life, everyone will face a range of transitions, from school to work, between jobs and working statuses, between job search and training, between career breaks and care periods, between working life and retirement. There is a risk of polarisation between those who can manage and those, notably the low-skilled, who cannot. In a life cycle approach, labour markets must be made more flexible and provide the necessary incentives and safeguards to allow workers and businesses to succeed in managing change and benefit from more diversified working lives. Security and flexibility can be mutually reinforcing and should build on the other ("flexicurity") to reinforce people's capacity to enter the world of work, progress and stay longer in it, by ensuring smooth transition and pathways throughout the career. A radical policy and culture shift is taking place, away from a "job-for-life" ending with early retirement, towards "employment for life", active ageing strategies with strengthened and more accessible lifelong learning, flexible working arrangements, safe and innovative working conditions, and modern and effective social protection mechanisms at their core. This is the way to attract and retain more people in work, so that they can fulfil their aspirations, as well as work more productively.

3. Investing in longer and healthier lives

The implications of an ageing society are becoming obvious, with new health and social risks having far-reaching impacts on social protection systems. But demographic change also opens up new opportunities for the spread of innovative services, goods and technologies, for instance for elderly care, with substantial potential for growth and jobs. From a life cycle perspective, the social and financial implications of ageing require a substantial rethink of intergenerational responsibilities and the way the associated costs are shared between generations. Europe should make full use of the current window of opportunity offered by the good economic situation to introduce sustainable reforms.

4. Investing in gender equality

Too many obstacles still hinder the participation of women in work and society, with the additional risk that new ageing-related care responsibilities may fall disproportionately on them. It is essential for Europe to continue its shift from the "male breadwinner" model of social and tax policy to one of support to individual rights and the "dual earner" family,

where both women and men engage in paid employment and can reconcile professional, private and family aspects of their lives. Addressing pay gaps, reviewing tax incentives, developing affordable and accessible childcare and eldercare, the spread of family-friendly practices at the workplace with more flexible leave arrangements over the lifetime are essential priorities in this respect. Such measures will also facilitate the retention of more people in the workforce and reduce risks of poverty.

5. Investing in active inclusion and non-discrimination

Life chances are not equally distributed in today's societies. A significant share of the EU population is experiencing poverty and social exclusion and face severe difficulties in achieving a decent living and finding a job. Each situation is different: the response will require a tailored set of measures which combine income support at a level sufficient for people to have a dignified life with a link to the labour market, through job opportunities or vocational training and through better access to enabling social services. Moreover, some 44.6 million people aged between 16 and 64 - 16% of the EU working-age population - consider themselves to have a longstanding health problem or disability. Many of them are willing and able to take up work provided appropriate conditions are met. Discrimination on the basis of disability, age, religion, race, ethnic origin or sexual orientation is banned but still hinders the life chances of many. With population ageing and the possibility for almost five generations to co-exist, the individualisation of preferences and more varied flows of migration, our societies are becoming more open, diverse and complex. Acceptance of diversity, active inclusion of the most disadvantaged, the promotion of equality and the eradication of discrimination are essential priorities for Europeans to achieve personal freedom and empowerment.

6. Investing in mobility and successful integration

Europeans will become more mobile - European youth today is more mobile than in previous generations and mobility within the EU is a fundamental right for citizens to exercise, with intra-EU mobility being a welcome feature of a more integrated economy. In addition, sustained immigration flows are seen as necessary for Europe to meet the challenges of an ageing and shrinking working-age population. These flows will probably be more varied than traditional immigration patterns, with an increasing number of people leaving and then returning to their country of origin. All of this means that European societies will become more open, diverse and complex. New forward-looking approaches are needed to promote better integration of migrants, encouraging mutual respect in a two-way process of exercising rights and meeting obligations.

7. Investing in civic participation, culture and dialogue

Active participation in collective activities such as culture, sport, civic and political activism contributes to the coherence and solidarity of Europe's communities and can thus help fight risks of atomisation and isolation. Voluntary work and civic engagement also play a prominent role in strengthening social cohesion. In today's Europe, cultural exchanges are as lively and vibrant as ever. Increased leisure time has created an unprecedented demand for new cultural goods. Europe's cultural diversity is a source of human enrichment and inspiration world-wide. It is also an economic asset, with innovation and creativity being an important trigger of economic activities and jobs in a knowledge-based world.

ANNEX 2: LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

- 1 Amt der niederösterreichischen Landesregierung
- 2 Asociación Salud y Familia
- 3 Assembly of European Regions (AER)
- 4 ATD Quart Monde - ATD Fourth World
- 5 Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour
- 6 Ballinamore Area Community Council
- 7 BDA Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände
- 8 BDJ-KB Bund der Deutschen Katholischen Jugend – Bundesvorstand
- 9 Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege e.V. (BAFW)
- 10 Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales, Berlin
- 11 Bundesministerium für Soziales und Konsumentenschutz, Wien
- 12 Bureau Members of the European Parliament Interest Group on Carers
- 13 Business Europe
- 14 Caisse nationale des allocations familiales
- 15 Care for Europe
- 16 CARITAS Europe
- 17 CARITAS Italiana, organismo pastorale della CEI
- 18 CECOP – The European Confederation of Workers' Co-Operatives, social co-operatives and social participative enterprises
- 19 Christian Science Committees on Publication
- 20 Claremorris, Co. Mayo
- 21 COFACE – Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union
- 22 Combat Poverty Agency
- 23 Comité español de representantes de personas con discapacidad (CERMI)
- 24 Commission des Episcopats de la Communauté Européenne (COMECE)
- 25 CONFEDERATION EUROPEENNE DES CADRES (CEC)

- 26 Consejero Coordinador de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales, Spain
- 27 Danish National Centre for Social Research SFI
- 28 Délégation Européenne du Mouvement Mondial des Mères
- 29 Deutsche Sozialversicherung Arbeitsgemeinschaft Europa – maison européenne de la protection sociale
- 30 Deutscher Caritasverband e.V.
- 31 Ennis
- 32 Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)
- 33 Equality Authority
- 34 Equal Opportunities Committee, ASTI
- 35 EURISPES INSTITUTE
- 36 EURO HEALTH NET
- 37 EUROCHILD aisbl
- 38 EURODIACONIA – European Federation for Diaconia
- 39 European Anti Poverty Network – Réseau européen des associations de lutte contre la pauvreté et l'exclusion sociale
- 40 European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland
- 41 European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA aisbl)
- 42 European Casino Association
- 43 European Children's Network (EURONET)
- 44 European Council for non-profit organisations – Comité européen des associations d'intérêt général (CEDAG)
- 45 European Disability Forum
- 46 European Evangelical Alliance
- 47 European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)
- 48 European Foundation for Street Children
- 49 European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound)

- 50 European Foundation on Social Quality (EFSQ)
- 51 European Liaison Committee for Social Housing (CECODHAS)
- 52 European Network Against Racism
- 53 European Network of Occupational Therapy in Higher Education (ENOTHE)
- 54 European Older People's Platform (AGE)
- 55 European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
- 56 European Social Network
- 57 European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) - Confédération Européenne des Syndicats (CES)
- 58 Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD)
- 59 FEPEM
- 60 The Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health
- 61 Finnish-Estonian project New Life
- 62 Föderation der Katholischen Familienverbände in Europa (FAFCE)
- 63 Galway
- 64 Gesundheit Österreich GmbH
- 65 Gewerkschaft der Privatangestellten, Druck, Journalismus, Papier
- 66 GlobalArtsCollective.org
- 67 Global Policy Institute
- 68 GMB Brussels Office
- 69 Haro – for Freedom of choice, Equality and Parenthood
- 70 Homeless Link
- 71 Hounslow Council, Homelessness Prevention and Options Team
- 72 International Union for Health Promotion and Education
- 73 Italian Permanent Representation to the EU
- 74 Jesuit Refugee Service Europe (JRS Press Europe)
- 75 Joint Committee on European Affairs of the Irish Parliament
- 76 Kathy Sinnott (MEP for Ireland South, Employment and Social Affairs Committee)

- 77 Kommissariat der Deutschen Bischöfe Katholisches Büro in Berlin
- 78 Lobby européen des femmes / European women's lobby
- 79 Local Government Association (LGA)
- 80 Loughborough University / Universiteit
- 81 Maison Européenne de la Protection Sociale - European Social Insurance Platform
- 82 Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim
- 83 Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority
- 84 Mental Health Europe - Santé Mentale Europe aisbl
- 85 Ministerium für Arbeit, Gesundheit und Soziales des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen
- 86 Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Czech Republic
- 87 Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Bulgaria
- 88 Ministry of Labour, Sweden
- 89 Ministry of Social Affairs, Estonia
- 90 Mothers at Home
- 91 National Consumer Council
- 92 New Women for Europe
- 93 Notre Europe
- 94 OKRA TREFPUNT 55+
- 95 Older Women's Network (OWN Ireland)
- 96 ONCE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DIRECTION
- 97 Osservatorio Parlamentare (Istituto de Cultura Politica)
- 98 Permanent Representation of Finland to the EU
- 99 Permanent Representation of Malta to the EU
- 100 Permanent Representation of Poland to the EU
- 101 Le portail français sur les questions européennes "Toute l'Europe"
- 102 Représentation permanente de la France auprès de l'Union Européenne
- 103 Roscommon

- 104 Senatsverwaltung für Integration, Arbeit und Soziales
- 105 Small Firms Association
- 106 Social Cohesion and the European Youth Pact
- 107 Social Economy Europe
- 108 Social Platform
- 109 SOLIDAR
- 110 South East England Brussels Office
- 111 Stadt Bibliothek Bremen - Eigenbetrieb der Stadtgemeinde Bremen
- 112 Syndicat des Personnes Actives au Foyer (SPAF)
- 113 UK Permanent Representation to the EU
- 114 Union of Czech and Moravian Production Co-operatives
- 115 Union Sociale pour l'Habitat
- 116 Unite the Union
- 117 Université de Vilnius
- 118 UUSI-ELAMA
- 119 VERDANDI
- 120 Vlaamse Ouderenraad
- 121 Wirtschaftskammer Österreich
- 122 Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP)
- 123 ZEDAT University

Individual citizens from 10 different Member States submitted 26 further contributions.