



January 2007
AK Position Paper

European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion

About Us

The Federal Chamber of Labour is by law representing the interests of about 3.2 million employees and consumers in Austria. It acts for the interests of its members in fields of social-, educational-, economical-, and consumer issues both on the national and on the EU-level in Brussels. Furthermore the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour is a part of the Austrian social partnership.

The AK EUROPA office in Brussels was established in 1991 to bring forward the interests of all its members directly vis-à-vis the European Institutions.

Organisation and Tasks of the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour

The Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour is the umbrella organisation of the nine regional Chambers of Labour in Austria, which have together the statutory mandate to represent the interests of their members.

The Chambers of Labour provide their members a broad range of services, including for instance advice on matters of labour law, consumer rights, social insurance and educational matters.

More than three quarters of the 2 million member-consultations carried out each year concern labour-, social insurance- and insolvency law. Furthermore the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour makes use of its vested right to state its opinion in the legislation process of the European Union and in Austria in order to shape the interests of the employees and consumers towards the legislator.

All Austrian employees are subject to compulsory membership. The member fee is determined by law and is amounting to 0.5% of the members' gross wages or salaries (up to the social security payroll tax cap maximum). 560.000 - amongst others unemployed, persons on maternity (paternity) leave, community- and military service - of the 3.2 million members are exempt from subscription payment, but are entitled to all services provided by the Austrian Federal Chambers of Labor.

Herbert Tumpel
president

Werner Muhm
director

Executive Summary

The Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour (hereinafter: AK) welcomes the European Commission's commitment to combating poverty and social exclusion as part of the European Year 2010.

The plan's success (as well as the European Commission's creditability with regard to its ability to combat poverty) will need to be measured by the specific measures and their results.

The AK would like to point out that a successful fight against poverty and exclusion requires many policy areas to be involved (including the macro policy, where the main way is paved for poverty to develop). The fair distribution of acquired wealth needs to be made into a decisive political objective much more than was the case up to now at EU level as the tendency that has been observed for several years towards an ever greater gulf between rich and poor will not be reversed by individual social policy measures to combat poverty alone.

Specific comments

On the group of people who are unable to evade the risk of poverty, greater focus is required.

Greater consideration for the ‘working poor’

In view of the rising number of people who, despite gainful employment, are unable to evade the risk of poverty, greater focus on this group is required.

Link up to EU incentive measures

In the past, many projects deemed positive came from EU measures and incentives that were not continued (after the incentive ran out). This is why more care should be taken in future to continue projects supported by the EU beyond the co-financing phase.

Point 2.3 Themes

We welcome the fact that the gender dimension of poverty was provided for as a specific theme (see also comments on Article 4).

Point 2.4 National Advisory Group

The obligation to integrate men and women in a balanced relationship should be provided for.

Article 2 Objectives

The objectives defined in Article 2 seem quite general and very broad in view of the limited resources. To create real value added, it would be sensible for a specific focus to be chosen in each of the Member States so that the themes and measures are not fragmented and their

effectiveness is not lost. The choice of theme (maximum two) should take place within the framework of the advisory group with a transparent reason.

It would also be desirable in principle to use specific information to break down inhibition levels among those affected in order to encourage the use of offers of help that already exist.

As regards the objective “Increasing public ownership of social inclusion policies and actions, emphasising everyone’s responsibility in tackling poverty and marginalisation”, we would like to emphasise that the task of leading the fight against poverty and marginalisation lies first and foremost with the state and the institutions assigned to it. It would be fatal for tackling poverty if states were to shirk this responsibility and delegate it to their citizens.

Article 4 Gender mainstreaming

Article 4: Gender mainstreaming specifies that “The European Year shall take into account the different ways in which women and men experience poverty and social exclusion.”

The gender-specific examination of poverty and social exclusion from the viewpoint of subjective experience should be welcomed, although it falls far too short.

Tackling poverty and marginalisation lies first and foremost with the state and the institutions assigned to it.

Gender mainstreaming needs to be picked out as a central theme.

There are different reasons and issues behind the poverty-stricken careers of men and women, social exclusion manifests itself in different ways and different approaches are needed to solve these problems. Gender mainstreaming needs to apply to all these areas vis-à-vis content and be picked out as a central theme accordingly. As regards specific implementation, we should see to it that those affected as well as experts on both genders are integrated and get a chance to have their say.

The gender aspect must also find its way into broad understanding in the area of developing countries.

For the document itself, it would be desirable if a basic requirement of gender mainstreaming, gender-sensitive language, were fulfilled in the German version. The use of gender-sensitive language should also be the defining standard for all written products as part of the measures carried out on the basis of the decision (invitations, folders, brochures, meeting documents etc.).

The AK hopes that these ideas are taken into consideration when this topic is dealt with further.

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