

## SOCIAL AFFAIRS FORUM NEWS / APRIL 2014

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### SECRETARIAT UPDATES

#### Together for Social Europe

During our 2-day SOLIDAR Social Affairs Forum on 1 and 2 April, over 30 participants from more than 20 member- and partner organisations met in Brussels to launch our new “Together for social Europe” programme.

Our next Social Affairs Forum will take place on 3 and 4 June in Amsterdam.

#### Tuesday, 3 June:

As vast and major social policy changes are being prepared and implemented in the Netherlands in the field of care, social support and youth care which have important and radical consequences for local municipalities, clients, social service providers and on civil society, we would like to discuss with you possible ways to approach these challenges collectively.

Furthermore, we will showcase Humanitas’ activities with close cooperation between our volunteers (informal care/social support) and actors in formal care/social support to discuss conditions, possibilities and risks.

#### Wednesday, 4 June:

Our regular Social Affairs Forum subdivided into four working groups will take place: Social economy working group, Social Progress Watch Initiative expert network, Volunteering and Active citizenship working group and the operation and implementation of the EaSI programme.

**Draft programme 3 June:**

<b>morning</b>	Arrival
<b>10.30-11.00</b>	Welcome, coffee and registration
<b>11.00-11.10</b>	Opening by Eva Scholte (General Director Humanitas) and Conny Reuter (Secretary General, SOLIDAR)
<b>11.10-11.45</b>	Overview of social policy developments in the field of social economy, care, social support and youth care in the Netherlands: backgrounds, aims and consequences for all stake holders  An introduction by Mr. Rob de Boer, policy officer Association of Dutch local Municipalities and the "Transition Office"
<b>11.45 – 12.45</b>	Q&A, discussion
<b>12.45 – 13.30</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<b>13.30 – 15.00</b>	Parallel sessions on 3 or 4 specific Humanitas-activities.  Focus on the (dis-)advantages of the intensive cooperation between formal and professional care/support and informal care/support (such as volunteering).
<b>15.00 – 15.30</b>	Coffee break
<b>15.30 – 16.15</b>	Plenary session to collect and discuss impressions
<b>16.15 – 16.45</b>	Conclusions
<b>16.45 – 17.00</b>	Walk to boat
<b>17.00 – 18.30</b>	Boat trip to the venue of the dinner

**Draft programme 4 June:**

<b>Social Affairs Forum</b>	
<b>Chair: Rudi Frick</b>	
<b>09:30</b>	<b>Welcome and coffee</b>

<b>10:00</b>	<b>Updates: policy developments, networks and members</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Latest EU policy developments</li> <li>- Reports from networks (Social Services Europe, Social Platform...)</li> <li>- Members' updates</li> </ul>
<b>11:00</b>	<b>Social Economy Working Group</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Follow-up on the field visit (<i>André</i>)</li> <li>- Presentation of national case studies (<i>members</i>)</li> <li>- Presentation of Belgrade Declaration (<i>Gordan</i>)</li> <li>- Discussion on new ways of financing social services (preparation of Training Academy in autumn) (<i>Anna</i>)</li> <li>- Activities in upcoming half year (<i>Eva</i>)</li> <li>- Agreement next steps (<i>Eva</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>12:00</b>	<b>Social Progress Watch Expert Network</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation of the results of feedback tables completed by national members (<i>Elsa</i>)</li> <li>- Discussion on the benchmarks included in the monitoring tool in order to develop more specific sub-indicators (<i>members</i>)</li> <li>- Activities in upcoming half year (<i>Elsa</i>)</li> <li>- Agreement on next steps (<i>Elsa</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>13:00</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<b>14:00</b>	<b>Volunteering/active citizenship Working Group</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information on the training academy on 10-12 June (<i>Dijana</i>)</li> <li>- Brainstorm on common strategy in this policy area (<i>Piotr</i>)</li> <li>- Activities in upcoming half year</li> <li>- Agreement next steps</li> </ul>
<b>14.45</b>	<b>Operationalisation of the EaSI Programme (<i>Eva</i>)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Planning and deliverables 2014</li> <li>- Finance and administration</li> </ul>
<b>16:00</b>	<b>End of the meeting</b>

The event will be held in English. For organisational purposes we ask you to **register at [http://solidar.org/spip.php?page=agenda&id\\_evenement=58](http://solidar.org/spip.php?page=agenda&id_evenement=58) before 16 May 2014.**

## **SOLIDAR Social Progress Watch Initiative expert network**

The Social Progress Watch is a monitoring tool to evaluate progress made towards our goal of a more social and cohesive Europe. The tool - developed with SOLIDAR members and partners - provides an analysis of Member States' performances in promoting quality employment, active inclusion, social cohesion, non-formal and informal learning, equality and solidarity and offers concrete recommendations on how to spur social consolidation to the European Institutions and Member States involved in the European Semester as well as other policy processes that have an impact on the social-, employment- and educational developments in the EU.

In December 2013, the Social Progress Watch Initiative was launched in the European Parliament and the first monitoring phase was carried out as a first phase in 12 EU Member States, namely: **Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.**

The information collected in this first monitoring phase has been analysed and elaborated on by the SOLIDAR Secretariat to produce a [briefing paper](#) that provides evidence-based recommendations on the direction that should be taken by the European institutions in order to achieve the social objectives of Europe 2020. The briefing paper has been presented during the round table on 1 April in the European Parliament.

During the SAF on 2 April, members and partners discussed the evidence-based recommendations provided in the briefing paper and made suggestions to make them more specific. On the basis of this discussion, after the meeting **national feedback tables** were prepared by SOLIDAR Secretariat and sent back to members asking for assessment and complementation of the national recommendations defined in the above mentioned briefing.

### **Next steps**

- In May SOLIDAR Secretariat will collect members input toward the national feedback tables that were sent to national experts in mid-April.
- By June, the Social Progress Watch Initiative will be extended to three more countries: Portugal, Romania and Serbia.
- During the next SAF on 4 June, the benchmarks included in the monitoring tool will be discussed with members and partners in order to develop more specific sub-indicators.

## **SOLIDAR Social economy working group**

After a first fruitful meeting of the Social economy working group on 29 January, where SOLIDAR members launched our new cooperation programme and developed [common framework paper](#) ('manifesto'). It highlights the importance of the role of the social economy as an essential pillar of the European social model. Social economy actors promote the quality of living together, improve the daily lives of many people and guarantee a stable environment for our social system. They share a set of characteristics that clearly distinguish them from profit seeking private businesses: the prioritisation of social and/or environmental objectives in the framework of general interest

over financial profit; the development of social innovation; democratic control by their members etc. The [paper](#) was officially published at the beginning of March.

During the second meeting of the WG on 2 April, we discussed our [factsheet on the Social Investment Package](#) which was published recently. Humanitas invited the SAF members to a field visit on 3 June in Amsterdam where case studies on innovative social economy initiatives will be presented by our members and partners.

### **Next steps**

We are currently collecting best practice examples from our members to present them at the SAF in Amsterdam.

Besides the field visit on 3 June, we will discuss strategies and actions for the upcoming six months in our next Social economy working group on 4 June in Amsterdam. Furthermore, we will discuss the changing social policy background and the implications on the daily work of our members and brainstorm on actions regarding the ratification of the Public Procurement Directive. Another topic to discuss will be new ways of financing social services.

### **Volunteering/active citizenship working group**

During the SAF on 2 April, SOLIDAR members and partners shared information about initiatives undertaken in the area of promoting active citizenship and volunteering for social cohesion. The [policy recommendations](#) developed in the framework of the European Year of Citizens 2013 were discussed and participants brainstormed ideas to organise an initiative to promote and evaluate the implementations of these recommendations.

### **Next steps**

- In the framework of the FIC project on real democracy a training academy will be organised on 10-12 June offering volunteers a platform to be trained by lobbyist- and policy makers.
- In December, a conference will be organised in Brussels to create an evaluation of the EY 2013 one year later.

## **POLICY UPDATES**

### **Enforcement Directive concerning the posting of workers adopted: Member States must put an end to exploitation of workers**

In their last session before the European Elections (22 May - 25 May), Members of the European Parliament voted on the highly controversial [enforcement directive on the posting of workers](#). MEPs endorsed a compromise, which was reached in February, with the 28 EU member states that falls short on introducing legal clarity to the 1996 directive, which has led to abuses of social legislation. Progressive forces in the EP were split about the directive as it lacks major improvements regarding tackling legal abuses such as bogus self-employment and letter-box

companies. A positive development is the improved access to information, both for companies as well as posted workers. The information must be transparent and provided free of charge, in an accessible format on a single official website, in various languages, taking the demand in the host member state's labour market into account. Nevertheless, it's a shame that the progressive forces in the European Parliament didn't manage to join forces to improve the directive significantly. A lot still needs to be done to further progress on conditions for posted workers. For example, the joint and several liability of the main contractor and the direct subcontractor regarding the failure to pay a posted worker is only mandatory in the building sector. This needs to be broadened to all sectors. **In the frame of our Social Progress Watch Initiative SOLIDAR will follow closely how member states implement within the directive's flexibility to really improve posted workers' rights and their protection.**

## Portability of supplementary pensions

A more positive outcome was reached regarding the [portability of supplementary pensions](#): MEPs endorsed new rules which allow for workers to access their supplementary pension rights in another member state than where they have gained these rights. The state pension or first pillar pension is protected and once you retire your pension rights are pulled together from wherever you have worked. But the supplementary pension (second pillar pension or occupational pension) is not protected and workers lose parts of their acquired pension rights when they retire after having worked in different member states. The new rules are a step in the right direction, allowing workers to access their supplementary pension after changing jobs as well as extensive rights that are available for information. As workers' mobility is a fundamental freedom to all EU citizens, the loss of pension rights when making use of this freedom is contradictory. In a next step, the directive needs to be broadened even further to allow a full portability of pension rights.

During their last Strasbourg session at the end of a 5-year-term, MEPs sent a very clear signal: Europe can deliver and improve its citizens' daily lives. But it needs progressive forces that work together for a more social and more inclusive Europe. **SOLIDAR will be alongside the next term's progressive MEPs fighting "Together for Social Europe!"**

In its last session before the European Elections (22 May - 25 May), Members of the European Parliament made some important decisions in areas of banking and finance which will have a direct impact on the daily life of its citizens.

### Banking Union

On Tuesday (15 April 2014) the European Parliament voted to adopt a series of [legislative files](#) as part of the decision to create a European banking union that aims to efficiently deal with issues within the banking sector that takes the lessons learnt during the recent financial crisis into account. European taxpayers and ordinary savers must not longer pay for future failures of the banking sector. The voted files lay the foundation for a mutualised resolution fund. **A major step that is still missing in this process is the introduction of a comprehensive EU-wide Financial Transaction Tax which SOLIDAR has been advocating for a long time.**

## Access to bank accounts

Another financial dossier has been voted on Tuesday, the [Payment Accounts Directive](#). More than 58 million EU citizens above the age of 15 do not have a bank account and therefore cannot fully participate in society. While banks can operate freely throughout the EU, citizens are often unable to open an account in another Member State or are unable to easily switch from one bank to another. For example, if you move to another member state banks usually ask for a registered address to open a bank account but you cannot rent an apartment if you do not have a bank account. Furthermore, customers often pay high fees for banking services and have difficulties accessing an overview of the fees they pay. The voted rules make it easier for consumers to compare fees of different banks by introducing an EU-wide standardised information sheet. They also establish an easier procedure for consumers who wish to change their bank. A basic right to a payment account has been granted to all EU citizens, as well as to asylum seekers, stateless, foreign students and holders of Green cards enabling them to participate in society. **SOLIDAR welcomes these new rules as an important step towards a more inclusive and consumer-friendly Europe.**

## End to food speculation

And more good news: MEPs enforced rules which will put an end to excessive trading in food and commodity markets. This will help rein in speculation on these sensitive markets. Speculation on foodstuff markets has had devastating consequences in the developing world, compounding food insecurity for the worlds' poorest. The situation is similar for other crucial commodities, such as energy. It was high time for the EU to take action on tackling this matter.

## Transparency register

On Tuesday, the plenary also voted to confirm an inter-institutional agreement updating rules on the transparency and the [register of lobbyists to the EU institutions](#). Despite some progress, the main problem persists: The transparency register for the European Parliament and Commission which was introduced in 2011 is still not mandatory. So far 75% of Brussels-based lobbyists have registered, but some of the most important players (like the finance industry) are still missing in the register. A [recent report](#) by the Corporate Europe Observatory and Arbeiterkammer Österreich revealed that the financial industry spends more than €120 million per year on lobbying in Brussels and employs more than 1.700 lobbyists to influence EU policy-making. As long as this big part of the Brussels lobby corps is not registered, the lobby register remains a 'toothless tiger'.

## Marching for Social Justice: the European Demonstration

On 4th April, as EU leaders prepare to gather in Brussels for their spring summit, thousands of people marched on the streets of Brussels to ask for a renewed European Union: one that would put the fight against inequalities, social investments and quality jobs on the top of its governing agenda.

The [European Demonstration](#), convened by the [European Trade Union Confederation](#) (ETUC), called the EU to take a new direction, to stabilise the economic situation and create quality jobs in a social Europe.



The ETUC highlighted that €1,000 billion were spent to save the financial sector and it is now time to spend “€250 billion for quality jobs and a good future for EU citizens” - an investment plan that could yield up to 11 million quality new jobs - and to fight tax evasion and fraud which costs €1,000 billion every year.

SOLIDAR participated in the European demonstration, as we are persuaded that only a social Europe can reconnect citizens with the European project of peace, prosperity and social justice that we are striving for.

## PROJECTS AND ALLIANCES

### PESSIS II project: national focus groups started working

The project PESSIS 2 "Promoting employers' social services organisations in social dialogue" in which SOLIDAR is involved and which was kicked-off in January, is now in full swing. Focusing on the social and economic role of the social services sector, the project is a follow up of the PESSIS project and represents the second step of a process that aims to establish a representative platform for employers in the social services sector at European level. SOLIDAR members AWO (Germany) and Volkshilfe (Austria) are leading discussions at national level on the promotion of social services providers' involvement in social dialogue and collective bargaining.

AWO (Arbeiterwohlfahrt) and IAT (Institut Arbeit und Technik Gelsenkirchen) organised a focus group in Germany on 26 March that brought together relevant German employers of social services organisations. Participants highlighted the need to focus on issues of common interest (e. g. recruiting and retaining workforce, workplace design) in order to overcome the fragmentation, which is characteristic of the German social services sector. Initial reflections on the strengths and barriers of a European social dialogue for our sector made it clear that a better representation of the German social services organisations is required. With the aim of continuing the reflection process launched by the focus group, AWO, IAT and SOLIDAR will organise a round table on 23 May in Berlin to discuss how Volkshilfe organised a focus group in Austria on 3 March with participants from one of the biggest employers' association on collective bargaining agreements in the social sector in Austria. The Focus Group brought together 6 executives of Sozialwirtschaft Österreich who work on collective bargaining in Austria, together with the other members of Sozialwirtschaft Österreich. Participants agreed on the importance of the development of social dialogue in the social sector in Austria. To continue the discussion about strengths and weaknesses regarding the opportunity to participate in the European Social Dialogue, a round table was organised on 28 April, to which representatives of the Trade Union sector were also invited.

### Negotiating Improvements for working Carers of Adults (NICA) project running



To start the project the first meeting of the steering group of the NICA project took place on 23 and 24 January in London. The next meeting is planned for 27 and 28 May. The aim of this project is to conduct basic initial research on the needs of working carers, examples of existing good practice and to equip union representatives with training, guidance, materials and support to enable them to bargain for better reconciliation of their work and their duties as carers. Tools for better reconciliation can be: leaving arrangements, reduction of hours, work adjustments and flexibility in work practices, carer health and well-being/ occupational health services, awareness and understanding of supervisors and colleagues, care related supports etc.

## **Strategic Transition for Youth Labour in Europe**

On 31 March and 1 April SOLIDAR participated in the kick off meeting of the research project [Strategic Transition for Youth Labour in Europe](#) that aimed at examining the obstacles and opportunities that affect youth employment in Europe. This project is managed by the University of Brighton together with 24 universities throughout Europe. SOLIDAR is part of the Consortium Advisory Network, along with the ILO, OECD, Business Europe, ETUI, OSE and Eurofound.

On the basis of the results of EU funded past projects i.e. “Decent work for European youth – active methods and best practices” SOLIDAR as the project advisor, raised the points on the need for [fighting youth unemployment and precarious work](#) and [raising awareness on rights at work](#).

## **NEXT MEETINGS OF THE SOCIAL AFFAIRS FORUM IN 2014**

- **3 – 4 June (Amsterdam)** including:
  - Social Progress Watch experts meeting
  - Social economy working group
  - Volunteering/active citizenship working group
  - Field visit with Humanitas
- **12 – 13 November (Brussels)**

## **OTHER EVENTS**

- **19/20 May (Brussels)**: Conference on social innovation organised by DG Employment
- **23 May (Berlin)**: PESSIS 2 Roundtable organised by AWO
- **5/6 June (Brussels)**: PESSIS II Seminar followed by project mid-term coordination meeting
- **10/12 June (Copenhagen)**: True European Democracy Training Academy