

solidar

SOCIAL AFFAIRS FORUM NEWS / FEBRUARY 2014

SECRETARIAT UPDATES

Social Affairs Forum - meetings in 2014

In a spirit of openness and to strengthen cooperation, we would like to give the possibility of participating and contributing to our meetings of partners – such as the social service providers in the Western Balkans – and affiliate members and have therefore restructured the Social Affairs Committee in the format of a Forum. These Forums will consist, besides updates on EU policies, networks and members, of 3 working groups: social economy working group, Social Progress Watch experts network and the new citizenship and volunteering working group. This is shaped according to our draft priorities for 2014 which will be discussed at the Forum's first meeting on 1 and 2 April in Brussels.

We are looking forward to our fruitful cooperation within the Forum!

Social Progress Watch Initiative – Follow-up and next steps

On 27 November, SOLIDAR launched the Social Progress Watch Initiative at an event in the European Parliament with MEPs Evelyne Gebhardt (S&D, Germany), Alejandro Cercas (S&D, Spain), and Josef Weidenholzer (S&D, Austria - SOLIDAR President) and SOLIDAR member Arbeiterwohlfahrt (AWO).

The Social Progress Watch is a monitoring tool to evaluate progress made towards a more social and cohesive Europe within the framework of the European Semester. 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 will offer concrete recommendations to the European Institutions and Member States involved in the European Semester on how spur social consolidation in the European Union.

The monitoring tool is based on six benchmarks corresponding to the policy priorities needed - in our view - to make concrete steps towards realising social progress in the EU: fighting unemployment (and in particular youth unemployment) through the promotion of inclusive and quality employment as well as fair mobility; improving access to healthcare and quality social services for all as well as quality employment in the healthcare and social sector; promoting access and participation in lifelong learning, with a particular focus on non-formal and



SOLIDAR is a European network of 60 NGOs active in over 90 countries working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR voices the concerns of its member organisations to the EU and international institutions across the policy sectors social affairs, international cooperation and lifelong learning. For more info www.solidar.org

informal learning; promoting, reinforcing and support social economy; strengthening active citizenship and volunteering for social cohesion; fighting discrimination and social exclusion.

Monitoring templates were sent to members and partners in the following countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Netherlands and UK.

Next steps

- A summary report including the information collected within the country monitoring templates will be available by mid-February.
- First findings of the Social Progress Watch initiative will be discussed with members during the next Social Affairs Forum on 1 and 2 April
- Presentation of SOLIDAR publication on mid-term review of the EU 2020 Strategy during a roundtable in the European Parliament on 2 April

SOLIDAR launches new social economy cooperation programme

On 29 January SOLIDAR members met in Brussels to launch our new cooperation programme that will advocate our common vision of a strong social economy at EU level. Together, we developed a framework paper ('manifesto') that highlights the important role of the social economy as an essential pillar of the European social model and that was agreed on by all members present. 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 the general interest over financial profit; the development of social innovation; democratic control by their members etc.

Within our cooperation programme we will now develop a common roadmap of actions to further strengthen the role and the development of the social economy at EU level. Based on this roadmap, SOLIDAR will make the difference between a merely business orientated approach and a sustainable approach concretely contributing to active inclusion.

Next steps

In our next Social economy working group in the framework of the Social Affairs Forum on 1/2 April we will follow-up on the road map, collect national case studies and brainstorm on actions regarding the ratification of the Public Procurement Directive. Furthermore, we will plan our activities for the upcoming half year and the necessary steps to take.



POLICY UPDATES

New EU Directive: towards a more socially responsible public procurement

On 15 January, the European Parliament adopted a new Directive on public procurement. SOLIDAR welcomes the updated legislative framework which simplifies the rules for the provision of social, health and other services provided directly to the person in Europe and provides more legal clarity on the application of the rules.

SOLIDAR is pleased that this framework puts a focus on qualitative aspects such as social, innovative and environmental considerations, including accessibility, qualification of the staff, production process or delivery conditions and will allow public authorities to give preference to bidders that offer better working conditions to their workers, favour the integration of disadvantaged workers, and offer sustainably produced goods.

The new provisions establish that public authorities have to evaluate tenders using the most economically advantageous tender (MEAT) criterion, which is determined on the basis of the price or cost but may also include the best price-quality ratio using qualitative, environmental and social criteria. We welcome the shift towards qualitative criteria which could ensure a bigger leeway for public authorities to organise public procurement in a sustainable manner with a focus on quality services instead of the cheapest offer. However, regrettably, the way in which MEAT is defined within the new directive will in fact allow contracting authorities to purchase on the basis of the cheapest option only. Thus, we call on Member States to make the consideration of qualitative and social aspects compulsory when implementing the new provisions.

Regarding the procurement of services in the social and healthcare sector, SOLIDAR welcomes the recognition of the specific characteristics of social, health and other services provided directly to the person and the application of a lighter regime to the regular procurement procedures for these services. Providers of social, health and other services provided directly to the person play an important role in the delivery of qualitative, inclusive and affordable services while contributing to social inclusion and cohesion.

In the new directives, Member States may reserve certain procurement contracts to social economy operators which at first sight is a very positive development. SOLIDAR regrets nevertheless that such reserved contracts may not be awarded twice in a row to the same social economy actor which might pose obstacles to the continuity of service provision.

Member States now have two years to implement the new provisions and show their commitment to make strategic use of public procurement for social and environmental policy goals as well to make tangible steps towards the promotion of a stronger social Europe improving access to and quality employment in the healthcare and social sector.

Social dimension of the European Semester

On 22 and 23 January the European Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs committee (EMPL) stressed the importance to develop actions to tackle unemployment and the social



consequences of the crisis within the economic policy coordination processes undertaken by the European institutions. SOLIDAR welcomes the initiative as it is in line with our demands for a policy change that puts more focus on social consolidation and on the social policy priorities of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

On 22 January, during an interparliamentary committee [meeting](#) organised in the framework of the European Parliamentary Week, MEPs exchanged their views with members of national parliaments on the importance to strengthen the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) as well as to focus on social and employment aspects when developing country specific recommendations within the European Semester process. In particular, MEP Sergio Gutiérrez Prieto (S&D, ES), rapporteur of the [report](#) on the Employment and Social Aspects in the Annual Growth Survey 2014 among others, called for the need to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the European Semester by improving the involvement of the Parliament in the overall process as well as the involvement of social partners and civil society members at all levels in the design and implementation of National Reforms Programmes.

On 23 January, the initiative report on the Employment and Social Aspects in the Annual Growth Survey 2014 was finally voted during the EMPL Committee meeting. SOLIDAR strongly supports the demand for the European Commission to ensure that social aspects are considered at the same level as economic ones by strengthening the binding role of the social scoreboard – included in the AGS – and to take urgent actions to fight youth unemployment, improve access to social services and participation in lifelong learning opportunities and promote the social economy model. In SOLIDAR's view, promoting quality employment and strengthening social consolidation should be the EU's priority, in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy, as also highlighted in our briefing '[European Semester 2014: Ensure Social Progress](#)'. This is why we have set up the [Social Progress Watch Initiative](#), a tool to monitor and evaluate progress made towards a more social and cohesive Europe.

New programming period for EU funds 2014-2020 started

As the new programming period 2014-2020 for the EU's structural and investment funds has just started, the European Social Funds (ESF) with a budget of 76 billion Euro will focus on professional (employment) and social inclusion and is meant to support the achievement of the Europe 2020 strategy. 20% of the ESF budget are earmarked in each country for social inclusion and the fund will also support the implementation of the European Youth Guarantee. This is a big step forward. From now on, the ESF will be able to support projects that tackle the root causes of poverty and not simply projects aimed at labour market participation. This is vital for ensuring European funds can help people affected by poverty who are far from the labour market like disabled people, migrants and the elderly.

The partnership principle which is regulated for this new programming period by a [European Code of Conduct on Partnership](#) needs to be implemented at member state level and monitored at EU-level. This code stipulates transparency in selection of partners, adequate information and timing, capacity building and support for platforms for mutual learning and best practice



exchange. To achieve its aim of an improved consultation, participation and dialogue, the Commission and the managing authorities in the member states need to involve a broad variety of partners from the very beginning and the quality of partnerships needs to be measured against clear indicators. As civil society organisations and social economy actors have a direct outreach towards the target groups of the ESF, they can add real value to the designing, implementing and monitoring of the ESF. We have to bear in mind that this process will take time to become a qualitative tool to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the ESF.

All in all the ESF in the new programming period is an excellent example of what we as SOLIDAR can be proud of and what we have achieved together with other social NGOs through campaigning, cooperating, advocating and working closely with allies and partners in the European Parliament and Commission: earmarking of 20% for social inclusion, 23% (and not the 25% requested) for structural funding in EU-budget, partnership principle and preventing from conditionality rules which would double punish those countries suffering from austerity policies. The ESF reaches out to more than 15 million people every year and is therefore probably the EU tool with the biggest impact on the daily life of its citizens.

PROJECTS AND ALLIANCES

PESSIS II project kicked-off

The project PESSIS 2 "Promoting employers' social services organisations in social dialogue" in which SOLIDAR is involved, kicked-off in January. 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 aiming at establishing a representative platform for employers in the social services sector at European level. SOLIDAR members [AWO](#) (Germany) and [Volkshilfe](#) (Austria) are also involved in the project and will lead discussions at national level on the promotion of social services providers' involvement in social dialogue and collective bargaining.

"Improving the Provision of Social Service Delivery in South East Europe through the Empowerment of National and Regional CSO Networks" project

On 9 and 10 December, the regional network meeting "Promoting active inclusion and social cohesion in Western Balkan" organised by ASB South East Europe, Social Inclusion and Poverty Unit Serbia, Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and SOLIDAR took place in Belgrade, bringing together 50 social service providers. During the meeting, the baseline study "[Comparative Analysis of the Role of Civil Society in Providing Social Welfare Services in the Western Balkans](#)" has been presented and, additionally, a new [network of social service providers](#) in the region has been established. The study has been created as part of the project "[Improving the Provision of Social Service Delivery in South East Europe through the Empowerment of National and Regional CSO Networks](#)" funded by the European Commission's Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA).



SOLIDAR is a European network of 60 NGOs active in over 90 countries working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR voices the concerns of its member organisations to the EU and international institutions across the policy sectors social affairs, international cooperation and lifelong learning. For more info www.solidar.org

It presents the legal and institutional framework for the provision of social welfare services by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the role of the NGOs in providing social welfare services in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Kosovo and Serbia. The general conclusions and recommendations outlined in the baseline study build upon the report on [Active Inclusion in the Western Balkans](#) developed by SOLIDAR and partners like ASB (Germany), Educational Centre (Serbia), Lokalna Inicijativa Razvoja (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Organization for Civil Initiatives (Croatia), Centre for Legal Aid and Regional Development (Kosovo), and SOS Telephone (Montenegro).

INNOSERV project concluded

On 29 January the final conference of the [research project INNOSERV](#) - in which SOLIDAR is a partner - took place in Paris. Over the last two years, the project partners that included academic researchers and European NGOs worked together to define and explore innovation in the social service sector with the final aim of setting a research agenda for positive developments in social services across Europe. As also stated by Dr. Prof. Johannes Eurich (project coordinator) during the final conference, *“the research focused on social service innovations which help to improve people’s life and promote a fair and sustainable model of society in times of rapid social changes”*. In line with this perspective, SOLIDAR considers innovation not an aim in itself but one of the means to enhance social progress and to improve the delivery of affordable and high-quality social services, which are crucial for developing social cohesion, realising social inclusion and safeguarding the fundamental rights of individual service users. Working with academic researchers and other European networks in this project was a valuable opportunity for SOLIDAR to improve our knowledge about social innovation – which is currently a buzz-word in EU social policies – as well as to contribute to shape the future of research in social services, embracing the evidence-based experiences of our member organisations working in the sector.

European Year of Citizens 2013 concluded

The closing conference of the European Year of Citizens took place in Vilnius. SOLIDAR has been actively contributing and Secretary General Conny Reuter addressed to the plenary on behalf of the Alliance on the value of civil dialogue. The recommendations prepared by the EYCA to which SOLIDAR contributed to a great extent – were handed over by the Alliance Chair Jean-Marc Roirant to Viviane Reding, Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, who committed to take them into consideration in the preparation of the final report for this European Year published by the European Commission. Strengthening active citizenship and volunteering is an important component of the SOLIDAR work. We believe that people’s empowerment and social engagement such as volunteering are crucial aspects of the creation of a more cohesive society in which every individual can fully participate in realising her/his own potential and contributing to the well-being of their communities. An open and inclusive society, providing room for all to participate in decision making processes, is necessary to increase social cohesion and to advance the values of solidarity, social justice and social responsibilities. Thus SOLIDAR was very happy to participate in the work of the EYCA during 2013 and will continue to actively contribute to the implementation



of the recommendations in 2014 when – as announced by Commission President Barroso – the European Year on Active Citizenship will continue.

Negotiating Improvements for working Carers of Adults (NICA) project started

On 23 and 24 January the first meeting of the steering group of the NICA project met in London to start the project which will run until November 2014. The aim of this project is to conduct basic initial research into the needs of working carers and 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: leave arrangements, Hours reductions, 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.

Beside background research by Eurofound used in the early stages of the project to focus discussion, the key aspect will be to gain insights from the project's participating organisations.

There will then be a series of round table discussions in partner countries in which packages of practical needs, issues, benefit possibilities and negotiating strategies will be examined

Further work will then be done to synthesise the outcomes of these round tables in a training course and materials to help shape unions' bargaining objectives and negotiation of changes in conditions for working carers. The final conference is foreseen for October in Brussels and will be organized by the SOLIDAR secretariat.

NEXT MEETINGS OF THE SOCIAL AFFAIRS FORUM IN 2014

- **1 - 2 April (Brussels)** including:
 - Social Progress Watch experts meeting
 - Social economy working group
 - Volunteering/active citizenship working group
 - Round table on the Social Progress Watch Initiative
 - Round table on the social dimension of EU enlargement
- **3 – 4 June (location to be announced)**
- **12 – 13 November (Brussels)**

OTHER EVENTS

- **3 March (Vienna):** PESSIS 2 Focus group organised by Volkshilfe
- **4 April (Vienna):** PESSIS 2 Roundtable organised by Volkshilfe
- **7 April (Brussels):** Study visit at SOLIDAR offices of the DEJEPS group (CEMEA)
- **19 May (Brussels) :** Conference on social innovation organised by DG Employment

