

SOCIAL AFFAIRS FORUM NEWS / JUNE 2014

Contents

SECRETARIAT UPDATES	1
POLICY UPDATES.....	4
UPCOMING MEETINGS OF THE SOCIAL AFFAIRS FORUM IN 2014	4
OTHER EVENTS.....	9

SECRETARIAT UPDATES

SOLIDAR Social Affairs Forum

The last SAF took place in Amsterdam on 3 and 4 June. The first day was dedicated to a study visit organised by our Dutch member Humanitas while on 4 June our regular Social Affairs Forum took place with our four working groups: 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. The action points agreed during the SAF were sent around to members by email right after the meeting and are also available [here](#).

SOLIDAR Training Academy

The SOLIDAR Training Academy will take place on 3 and 4 November 2014 in Frankfurt, Germany. A detailed programme will follow soon.

SOLIDAR General Assembly

On 25 June, SOLIDAR's Annual General Assembly took place in the European Parliament in Brussels where a report of the activities of the Social Affairs Forum during the last 12 months was presented.

SOLIDAR Social Progress Watch Initiative expert network

The Social Progress Watch Initiative has been extended to three more countries: Portugal, Romania and Serbia. A representative of the Serbian expert network presented the main findings emerged in the SPWI for Serbia.

At the meeting in Amsterdam, members discussed about how to improve the tool and to define more specific sub-indicators. As a general remark on the methodology the need to reinforce the political approach of the tool (not only figures but also inputs on policy reforms) was mentioned and to make a clearer distinction between the two functions of the tool: 1. Monitoring progress made towards the realisation of a social Europe and 2. Providing recommendations on changes/reforms needed to better meet the foreseen objectives.

A “drafting team” was appointed during the meeting with the aim of analyzing the inputs provided during the discussion and to present a proposal for a new SPWI to the working group. The drafting team is currently working on this.

SOLIDAR launched a call for a new policy fellow who will work with the Secretariat on the SPWI.

Next steps

The Secretariat will send around the proposal on how to improve the SPWI. The 15 updated desk studies produced in the framework of the SPWI 2014 will be published in September. The Secretariat will draft a response to the EC consultation on Europe 2020 mid-term review and send it around for inputs/approval by the end of September.

SOLIDAR Social economy working group

Field visit

Members of the SOLIDAR Social Affairs Forum from 16 different member organisations have travelled from all over Europe to meet in Amsterdam on 3 June for the field visit organised by SOLIDAR member organisation Humanitas in collaboration with SOLIDAR. Our members were given an insight into the daily work of Humanitas and learned about current challenges in changing policies within different areas such as social economy, care and social support in the Netherlands.

The meeting was opened by Humanitas General Director, Eva Scholte. A [presentation](#) of the social policy developments in the field of social economy, care, social support and youth care in the Netherlands was provided by Rob de Boer from the Association of Dutch local municipalities.

One of the main changes is the shift towards the decentralisation of policies. Local municipalities gain more and more responsibility regarding the provision of social services and at the same time they are required to reduce costs. This allows for adaptation to local circumstances but bears the risks of increasing differences in service provision between the different municipalities. Another

change is the increased emphasis on personal responsibility that represents a challenge for the most vulnerable people who may be not able to express their needs and be involved in a dialogue with the municipalities. This will lead to an increased call for informal care, provided mainly by volunteering and civil society organisations.

In addition, SOLIDAR members had the opportunity to participate in three different workshops that were organised by professional Humanitas staff, where different areas of Humanitas' daily work were presented: the Humanitas Home Administration Programme, the support and empowerment of carers/relatives by volunteers and the preparation, training and support of volunteers. In the plenary session with all participants we exchanged learning outcomes from the different workshops and discussed common strategies.

Following our field visit on 3 June at Humanitas in Amsterdam, we would like to raise your attention to a recent publication of the Dutch National Social Research Institute about long term care in Europe, comparing the Dutch situation with 15 other European countries. The study can be downloaded at the following link:

http://www.scp.nl/english/Publications/Publications_by_year/Publications_2014/Who_cares_in_Europe

At the same time, we are collecting case studies to show case best practices in the daily work of our members. These case studies will be presented in Amsterdam and published later on. Furthermore, we are involved in different working structures at EU level to find the best ways of advocating for a positive transposition of the Public Procurement Directive at national level.

Next steps

The SOLIDAR Training Academy will focus on two topics: Innovative social services - financing of and promotion for inclusive services. And: Attractive employment in social services for high quality services. The Academy will give space for discussions between members of the social economy working group and allow for peer learning and the exchange of best practices.

The next working group will take place in the framework of our Social Affairs Forum at the end of the year. The concrete date will be communicated soon.

Volunteering/active citizenship working group

At the SAF on 4 June, SOLIDAR members and partners shared information about initiatives undertaken in the area of promoting active citizenship and volunteering for social cohesion. In particular, updates on the CSV campaign on Common Good were provided as well as updates from several members on the humanitarian actions for the floods in Serbia and Bosnia. 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

The Secretariat will keep members updated on the organisation of a meeting in Lampedusa by the Civic Forum as well as on the developments of the humanitarian actions for the floods in Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina.

POLICY UPDATES

Mobilising for Social Justice

Our key demands for the newly elected European Parliament and the new European Commission

Today, SOLIDAR and its members met in the newly formed European Parliament to define a 'New Civic Blue Print' for Europe. Five years of austerity measures and adjustment have had a significant impact on the social situation in Europe and the rest of the world. The EU is faced with ever higher unemployment and the lowest employment figures. 24 million people are without a job –5.6 million of which are young people – and about the same number can no longer live on their income and have become the coined working poor. 120 million people are living at risk of poverty. These statistics demand that Europe takes a new direction, hence, SOLIDAR together with members and partners will step up its efforts to **Mobilise for Social Justice in Europe and world-wide.**

Together, we are contributing to **Realising a Social Europe** and are committed to promote active inclusion and social cohesion. To strengthen our cause, we need the newly elected European Parliament and new European Commission to work together with civil society in order to strengthen the Europe 2020 strategy, ensure universal social protection, foster the potential of the social economy, promote high quality and accessible social services, call for a social pillar of the European economic governance and promote people's empowerment and social engagement. SOLIDAR invests in education and lifelong learning through actively **Building Learning Societies**; coming together as a community and working towards common goals as a starting point to fight the social exclusion of unemployment and poverty. To strengthen our cause, we need the newly elected European Parliament and new European Commission to recognise the added value of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL), promote setting up national validation mechanisms for NFIL, fight unemployment and support young adults who are neither in employment, education or training (NEETs) and invest in education, qualification and training opportunities for all.

The freedom of peaceful assembly and association for civil society in the world (including Europe) now finds itself under immense pressure, undermining the guarantee to decent work, social protection and the realisation of social, economic and cultural rights. For this reason, we contribute to **Organising International Solidarity**. To strengthen our cause, we need the newly elected European Parliament and new European Commission to promote a rights-based approach to development, that ensures access to economic, social and cultural rights, promotes the human entitlement to social protection, and guarantees that the Post 2015 development framework promotes human development and social justice.

Please find [the Full Resolution here](#).

In the upcoming weeks and months SOLIDAR will be working to ensure that these recommendations become guiding principles for the new European Institutions and will seek to build strong alliances with the Progressives, Greens and Democrats.

Floods in Serbia and Bosnia: One month after the disaster

In May 2014 Serbia and Bosnia were hit by the heaviest rains and floods in 120 years. Many towns and villages were cut off leaving people without drinking water and electricity. Since then, SOLIDAR members ASB (South East Europe, SEE) and the Initiative for Development and Cooperation (IDC, Serbia) have been working together to deliver emergency aid to the municipalities of Loznica, Obrenovac and Grocka and also to a Children's Shelter that was hit by the record flooding. Please consult our website to make a donation to ASB or to other SOLIDAR members who are offering aid on site to find out about the activities carried out the last month.

Latest updates from ASB Serbia are that our member has provided food, hygienic products and water to 400 families affected by the flood in Ljig, Lajkovac, Krupanj, Mali Leskovac and Valjevo as an initial response to the flood. ASB are still providing food parcels, in addition to personal hygiene kits, family hygiene kits and bed linen to roughly 550 families in Valjevo, Krupanj and Obrenovac. Apart from these efforts ASB is also organising volunteers that aid in cleaning households and the affected environment in Valjevo, Krupanj and Obrenovac.

IDC has organised the distribution of 100 tons of aid packages with food, water, linen, mattresses, hygiene packages, filter masks, cleaning equipment, food for the babies, to the municipalities of Valjevo, Lajkovac, Ljig, Paraćin, Svilajnac, Čičevac, Kruševac and Obrenovac. The Serbian community in Austria has provided aid packages and IDC has helped with distribution from their as well as SOLIDAR's member organisation- ASB Austria. IDC has also organised the distribution of 8 tons of aid packages with wardrobes, food for the babies, diapers, mattresses, dishes, different tools, to the municipality of Smederevska Palanka. Aid packages were provided by the people of the German town of Kirchen.

In the first days after the flood ASB also distributed 200 food/water/hygiene parcels in Sanski Most and Ključ (with assistance of SAM.I partner "Zene sa Une) and 300 same parcels in local community of Janja in Bijeljina municipality. These efforts came to a total of 6 tons of food and hygiene provision and a supply of 5.000 liters of water in Bosnia alone.

Against these circumstances, on 26 May 2014 the CONCORD Enlargement, Pre-Accession and Neighborhood (EPAN) Working Group (of which SOLIDAR is member) and TRIALOG, in cooperation with the Balkan Civil Society Development Network, held an update meeting in Brussels to discuss how to tackle immediate needs and how to provide potential support for long-term social support, reconstruction, rehabilitation and socio-economic development. Participants of the meeting identified several key recommendations for decision makers at local, national and European levels to better anticipate the needs of people affected by the floods. The overarching recommendation is to focus on the most vulnerable people such as children, women, Roma and

the elderly in addition to supporting the cooperation between the authorities as well as civil society and the reform of civil protection services.

Who cares? Debate on how to reconcile work and care

In the frame of a European project in which SOLIDAR is involved together with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), European Public Service Union (EPSU) and others took part in a debate on 3 June at the International Trade Union House in Brussels. The round table tackled the issue of how to reconcile work and care, in particular for those workers who take care of a family member that has lost his/her autonomy and independence.

It was underlined that the demographic change will actually affect our societies more than predicted and that the care issue is *not an individual problem, but instead a societal challenge*. Independently from the question whether care is insured by individuals or professional service providers, accessibility and quality are the main challenges. Participants from Southern and Eastern Europe highlighted the *strong effects of the crisis on care and care provision* as the welfare state and social protection system that are suffering from austerity measures in their discussion.

From the Trade Union side, the proposal was made to think on one hand flexible working time arrangements allowing workers to insure care of their family members and at the same time to promote organising the care of workers in the grey zone of the informal care services and domestic work.

SOLIDAR's Secretary General stated that 'the competition on the only lowest price offer in care services has negative effects on the quality of the provision and that the market alone will not regulate the societal challenge. Furthermore non-profit providers can also offer professional and vocational training for family carers and offer support to those who suffer from the double or even triple burden between their work and care at home.'

The round table will be followed by workshops in autumn that will take place in Germany, Italy and Sweden before presenting policy recommendations to the EU institutions.

PESSIS II European Seminar

On 5 June, a seminar took place in Brussels in the framework of the PESSIS II (Promoting employers' social service organisations in social dialogue) project of which SOLIDAR is a partner together with member organisations AWO (Germany) and Volkshilfe (Austria). The aim of the meeting is to take stock of the discussions that took place in the last 2 months both at European and national level (in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany and Netherlands) on the way towards a European Sectoral Social Dialogue in the social service sector. The following four options were discussed by participants:

- Joining the Sectoral Committee for Local and Regional Governments;
- Joining the Sectoral Committee for the Hospital and Healthcare sector;
- Creating an Inter-Sectoral Committee for the not-for-profit sector, including the social, health, cultural and education sectors;
- Creating a Sectoral Committee for the Social Service Sector.

In addition to the projects' partners, the seminar was also attended by representatives from the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR – Employer's organisation for the local

and regional authorities) and the European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation (CEEP – Employers for public enterprises and services which carry out services of general economic interest). The outcome of the discussion is that there is an increased interest at national level to participate in the European social dialogue. However, further time for exploration and reflection will be needed to define how this participation should be structured at European level, in order to come to an agreement on the scope that an eventual Sectoral Committee should have as well as the collection of additional data on the impact and representation of the sector. The discussion will continue in the coming months and the results will be presented at the PESSIS II final conference on 23 September 2014.

Real European Seminar in Denmark on civil society democracy

On 9 – 11 June, SOLIDAR together with its members FIC (Denmark), CSV (UK), La ligue de l'Enseignement (France) and partner CGIL (Italy) and IDEAS (Ireland) met in Copenhagen for a seminar in the framework of the "[Real civil society democracy Europe](#)" project. The aim of the seminar was to improve knowledge on the rights and opportunities for civil society organisations and NGOs in order to implement effective advocacy both at national and at European level. In light of the increase of anti-democratic and EU sceptical parties as result of the last European Parliament elections, participants also reflected on the need for CSOs and institutions to find the "courage" for implementing a policy change in Europe in order to fill in the democratic deficit and to improve citizens trust in the EU project.

As stated by SOLIDAR's Secretary General: "The major challenges for the EU concerns social issues and trust in institutions. Therefore, in order to improve legitimacy and capacity building of CSOs it is important to create a European platform of civil society organisations which would help by safeguarding the diversity of CSOs - to make them pro-active agenda setters and even more relevant actors.

Moreover, participants had the chance to learn from each other's experiences on how to be included in the decision making process at national level and how to ensure that a more open and systematic consultation is put in place. In addition, the main aspect of the Danish European Policy model and Danish civil dialogue were presented by representatives of the Danish Parliament, Danish Trade Union Movement, Danish Adult Education Association, Concord Denmark and Danish Ecological Council. All inputs and recommendations that were defined by participants in the two days seminar have been put condensed in a draft report. Some of most important recommendations that were developed are:

- Government and the EU need to pursue policies that generate sustainable and inclusive growth and social investment which ensure suitable resources for consultation and capacity of CSOs especially in times of austerity.
- CSOs should be included in the design and revision of the consultation process; they should have agenda-setting capacity and the right of initiative to set priorities.
- A better coordination of the consultation process should be put in place. It should be inclusive of a wide-ranging of CSOs and should bring to the creation of a European platform of CSOs.

These recommendations will be presented to members of the European Parliament, representatives of the European Commission and other key stakeholders in a conference that will take place in December. More information will be provided in the coming months.

Successful event on TTIP on 17 June

On 17 June, the Social Platform together with SOLIDAR, the European Federation of Public Services Union (EPSU) and the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) organised a debate on the 'possible impacts of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) on social and health services'. During the discussion, it became clear that the TTIP could have a detrimental impact on essential public services such as social and health services.

Although the European Commission has been repeatedly stating that there will be no "race-to-the-bottom" to lower standards or requirements to guarantee the quality of the services or the realisation of social/fundamental rights for everybody, the legitimate concerns of the civil society cannot be dismissed. As recently leaked documents show, public services have not been excluded from negotiations. In fact, a liberalisation agenda seems to be driving the TTIP talks. As the documents reveal, the EU seeks an "unprecedented depth in market access and regulatory matters". This stance casts serious doubts about previous assurances that public services will be excluded from the final agreement.

With the article 14 of the EU Treaty, the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights and the overarching EU objective to reach a "social market economy" as a backdrop, today's debate focused on the need to safeguard the quality and accessibility of social and health services once the transatlantic markets are further integrated. Hard-fought milestones in public procurement such as the inclusion of quality standards or the reference to the need to comply with labour law and collective agreements are under threat, as they could be regarded as non-tariff barriers to trade and therefore are at risk to be removed. Economic growth and job creation will not be achieved at the expense of social rights.

If TTIP negotiators keep on brushing off the deal's potential impact on social and health services, people living in Europe, not least the 120 million living in poverty or at the risk of falling into poverty, will feel the pinch. The event also served as a platform to raise concerns regarding the lack of transparency of the negotiations, and the inclusion of an Investor-State-Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanism.

SOLIDAR, the Social Platform, EPSU and EPHA are jointly calling on the European Commission to explicitly exclude public services including social and health services from the ongoing TTIP negotiations, as well as ensuring full transparency during the entire negotiating process, including the publication of all negotiating texts.

The public has the right to know what is being negotiated on their behalf. As the European elections have shown, citizens expect the European Commission to legislate and act in their interests and to communicate better. The TTIP is THE occasion to prove that the EU takes its citizens seriously.

NEXT MEETINGS OF THE SOCIAL AFFAIRS FORUM IN 2014

- **Training Academy: 3 and 4 November 2014, Frankfurt**
- **Social Affairs Forum: tbc, Brussels**

OTHER EVENTS

- **30 June/1 July (Oxford):** Pre-distributive Social Policy: Future Changes in Welfare Societies, organised by the policy network UK
- **23 September (Brussels):** PESSIS 2 Final Conference
- **20 – 21 November (Brussels):** European Platform Against Poverty (EPAP) Convention