

SOCIAL AFFAIRS FORUM NEWS / MARCH 2014

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SECRETARIAT UPDATES

Together for social Europe – SOLIDAR members launch common programme for social justice in Europe

Our first Social Affairs Forum 2014 has just finished. For the first time, also partners and affiliate members of SOLIDAR participated in a 2-day meeting in Brussels. On 1 April we hosted two roundtables in the European Parliament and on 2 April we had our 3 working groups: social economy working group, Social Progress Watch experts' network and the new citizenship and volunteering working group.



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

We started our Forum meeting on 1 April with a round table on [‘The social dimension of EU Enlargement’](#) organized by the IRIS Network, SOLIDAR, ASB South East Europe (SEE) and FEPS involving MEPs Knut Fleckenstein, Maria Eleni Koppa and Marino

Baldini and representatives of DGs Employment and Social Affairs and Enlargement. The main questions for the debate concerned the latest developments since the adoption of the EP resolution on enlargement (based on the report of MEP Maria Eleni Koppa) in 2013 which highlighted the neglect of the social dimension of the EU enlargement process. Participants from the IRIS Network highlighted measures that are needed to be put in place, in order to strengthen the social dimension of the EU Enlargement process and to enhance the socio-economic transformation of candidate countries. And good practices were presented that showcase how



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civil society organizations are working to advance social cohesion and active inclusion in the Balkan. In addition, the IRIS Network's book "[Comparative Analysis of the Role of Civil Society in Providing Social Welfare Services in the Western Balkans](#)" was presented.

In the afternoon the [round table on "Ensuring social progress: National recommendations for achieving Europe 2020"](#) took place in the European Parliament where our members presented their first findings of a consultation in 12 Member States within the [Social Progress Watch Initiative](#) as well as national recommendations to reach the EU 2020 employment, social and education targets. The round table provided for timely and valuable input to the current debate on the mid-term review of the EU 2020-Strategy. Decision makers from the European Parliament, the Commission, the Economic and Social Committee and the Trade Unions stressed in their interventions the importance of reinforced efforts at national and EU level to reach the EU 2020 headline targets. The overarching integrated approach of the EU 2020-Strategy needs to be maintained to achieve inclusive, smart and sustainable growth. The divergence within the EU is a political time bomb which decreases the credibility of the EU institutions. At the event SOLIDAR also publicly launched the new [briefing "Europe 2020: How to spur social progress for a more inclusive Europe?"](#)

On the second day of our Social Affairs Forum, SOLIDAR members and partners discussed current topics of common interest, such as the European Elections, and then decided on our common work programme for this year in the frame work of the EaSI programme. The Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme is a financing instrument at EU level to promote a high level of quality and sustainable employment, guaranteeing adequate and decent social protection, combating social exclusion and poverty and improving working conditions. SOLIDAR has been granted - for the first time - funding from EaSI within a 4-years-cooperation programme, which allows us to launch "Together for social Europe (T4SE): Investment in social innovation and quality employment".

Due to growing divergence between and inside Member States regarding the social situation and the access to economic, social and cultural rights, healthcare and social services become crucial promoters of social cohesion and active inclusion. To that end, SOLIDAR proposed to work "together for a social Europe" and promote investment in social innovation and quality employment as a way to tackle inequality and achieve social justice in line with the EU's policy objectives.

SOLIDAR is committed to setting-up national EU strategy groups and a high-level transnational advocacy committee; developing thematic publications on EU policies; disseminating factsheets and email updates on ongoing decision-making processes; assessing national developments and publishing national progress updates; organising European conferences and European and national expert roundtables; setting-up an EU Training Academy and an online resource center for staff and volunteers; organising good practice study visits; developing national desk studies and case studies to showcase social realities; and publish an online knowledge hub.

In 2014, SOLIDAR will focus within the mentioned activities on:

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

- ▶ Promoting innovation in the social service and social economy sector to provide effective responses to the new and unmet needs of the most vulnerable groups – in particular NEETs – and make progress in empowering individuals, reducing early school leaving and promoting quality job activation.
- ▶ Promoting the attractiveness of the social and healthcare sector through the improvement of working conditions and “talent management”, the adaptation of workplaces, as well as skills and competence recognition, and promotion of vocational education training and further learning opportunities.

Our mission is clear, now it's time to act “Together for social Europe”!

Pictures of the SAF can be found here: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/31689406@N05/>

SOLIDAR Social Progress Watch Initiative expert network

The Social Progress Watch is a monitoring tool to evaluate progress made towards 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 spur social consolidation to the European Institutions and Member States involved in the European Semester as well as other policy processes having an impact on the social, employment and education developments in the EU.

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

In December 2013, the Social Progress Watch Initiative was launched in the European Parliament and the first monitoring phase was carried out in 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 have been elaborated by SOLIDAR Secretariat to produce a [briefing paper](#) providing evidence-based recommendations on the direction to 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.

Next steps

- The Social Progress Watch Initiative will be extended to other three countries: Portugal, Romania and Serbia.
- Starting from the country profiles included in the briefing paper, specific recommendations will be developed with SOLIDAR members and partners
- During the next SAF in 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, our [common framework paper](#) ('manifesto') has been developed. It highlights the important 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 the general interest over financial profit; the development of social innovation; democratic control by their members etc. The [paper](#) has been 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 and 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

Besides the field visit on 3 June, we will discuss strategy 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 implications on the daily work of our members and brainstorm on actions regarding the ratification of the Public Procurement Directive. Another topic for discussions 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 about the idea of organising 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 to volunteers a platform to be trained by lobbyist and policy makers.
- In December, a conference will be organised in Brussels to make 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

On 27 February, a deal on the Enforcement Directive concerning the posting of workers has been reached. The new directive provides the means for Member States to put an end to exploitation and abuse of posted workers as Member States can better enforce workers' rights, put an end to illegal so-called letter box companies and terminate bogus self-employment. Now it's up to the Member States to stop the exploitation of posted workers.

Workers can be posted to another Member State for a limited time by their employer, for example construction workers from Germany being sent to France for the delivery of services for a couple of months. Poland (228,000 workers per year in 2011), Germany (227,000) and France (144,000) are the main sending countries in the EU. Germany (311,000 workers per year in 2011), France (162,000), Belgium (125,000) and the Netherlands (106,000) are the major receiving countries.

With the help of this directive, some forms of abuse and circumvention could be avoided referring to real posted workers. **But the main problem of different levels of working standards will remain. The attraction of setting up letter-box-companies, bogus self-employment, agency work and undeclared work with the aim of paying only the minimum standard instead of equal pay still remains.** A comprehensive solution to this problem is only possible through a real change of the original directive on posting of workers.

Every day, workers across Europe are suffering undeserving working conditions, the disrespect of their social and labour rights and exploitation. Illegal posting happens every day and needs to come to an end. **Since 1999, when the Decent Work concept was launched by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), SOLIDAR has been working together with its members, partners and allies to promote decent work for a decent life for all.** The main elements of decent work are employment creation, workers' rights, social protection and social dialogue.

SOLIDAR is calling on Member States to ensure strict controls both in the sending country as well as in the receiving country to grant best possible protection of workers' rights. We regret that the list of administrative and control measures which can be applied by the Member State is not an open list and SOLIDAR would have preferred that Member States could apply the control measures they deem appropriate as has been suggested by the European Parliament. Now it is up to the Parliament to vote on this deal – however on the basis of the COREPER proposals.

Mid-term review Europe 2020

The EC is “[taking stock](#)” of progress made so far since the launch of the EU 2020 strategy in 2010. SOLIDAR regrets the political choice not to draw any conclusions nor to give any recommendations and to purely take account of the current situation. And the situation is disastrous. The target of lifting 20 million people out of poverty and social inclusion is out of reach; the number of people at risk of poverty might remain close to 100 million by 2020. Unemployment levels remain high with an increase in the level of structural unemployment with far reaching consequences not only for the economy, but also for the political and social fabric of the EU. SOLIDAR welcomes nevertheless the EC’s hindsight that the crisis has demonstrated the need for effective social protection systems.

In order to fight inequalities and to spur social cohesion, **SOLIDAR calls upon the European Commission and the other European institutions to be promoters of a policy change: social, sustainable and inclusive investment instead of austerity.** Redistribution of welfare, access to social services and education and poverty-fighting policies are urgently needed.

In-depth review of macro-economic imbalances

Issued annually by the EC as part of the Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure (MIP), the [communication](#) on the IDRs sets priorities for further policy actions to prevent and correct imbalances and strengthen the EU’s economic governance. The communication states that the economic recovery is gaining ground but challenges remain. It further highlights that the risks associated with excessive macroeconomic imbalances concern the ability of Member States to generate strong sustainable growth and to create jobs and put the accent on the need to bring down the unacceptably high levels of unemployment in many parts of Europe. On the basis of the main findings of the IDRs, the EC is proposing, among other things, to strengthen domestic demand and fight tax injustice in Germany, work on structural reforms and fiscal consolidation in France and Italy and continue the orderly deleveraging and structural reforms in Spain.

Although unemployment is considered as one of the main challenges to be addressed, in SOLIDAR’s view the ‘recipe’ suggested by the EC to recover Member States’ economies focuses continuously on fiscal consolidation, reduction of public debt and strengthening of domestic demand. **SOLIDAR regrets that the negative social consequences of certain one-sided austerity measures put in place by Member States have not been acknowledged in this document.**

In SOLIDAR’s view, a focus on economic growth alone does not reduce social inequalities. Therefore, SOLIDAR calls for a new growth pattern based on social, sustainable and inclusive investment, better use of social expenditures as economic stabilisers and poverty preventing policies in order to restore the European Social model. The social, education and employment targets of the EU 2020 Strategy will only be reached if we focus on the social dimension of the EU by strengthening social cohesion, raising social standards, improving job quality and security, reinforcing social dialogue, promoting the social economy as a driver of inclusive growth and spur social progress.

It’s time for social consolidation. European citizens judge the EU not by its policy papers but by its impact on their daily lives.

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 in full swing now.

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 leading discussions at national level on the promotion of social services providers' involvement in social dialogue and collective bargaining. On 26 March, AWO organised a first national focus group meeting in Gelsenkirchen which will be followed by a round table discussion on 12 May in Berlin. Volkshilfe is organising its roundtable on 28 April in Vienna.

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

After the first meeting of the steering group of the NICA project on 23 and 24 January in London to start the project, the next meeting is planned for 27 and 28 May. 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.

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](#), aiming at examining the obstacles and opportunities affecting 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 [to raise awareness on right 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

- **28 April (Vienna):** PESSIS 2 Roundtable organised by Volkshilfe
- **28 April (Brussels):** Conference on health and safety at work organised by DG Employment
- **19/20 May (Brussels):** Conference on social innovation organised by DG Employment
- **25 May (Berlin):** PESSIS 2 Roundtable organised by AWO