



European Economic and Social Committee

EESC statement to the Spring European Council

Growth and social cohesion must go together as an integral part of European future governance

In the context of the 2020 strategy and its new objective for inclusive growth, its target to reduce poverty by at least 20 million by 2020, its Flagship Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion, and the new Guideline 10 on poverty and social exclusion, and in the light of the statements made in the Progress Report on the Europe 2020 Strategy that "**there can be no sustainable growth unless its benefits accrue to all**" and that "**growth and social cohesion go together**", the EESC calls upon the Council to ensure that:

- a coherent approach to economic and social policy contributes to the elimination of poverty;
- any proposed measures to reduce public deficits do not fall disproportionately on the poorest by reducing wages and benefits and cutting access to basic public services including health, education and housing;
- due account is taken of the social and economic costs of exacerbating inequalities and social exclusion vis-à-vis the poorest and most vulnerable in our societies
- proper attention is given to the social and economic benefits of investing in public services, social protection systems and inclusive labour markets in order to promote social cohesion.

The fight against poverty is at the heart of the EU agenda for growth in the economy, employment and society following the commitment of the heads of state or government to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty. However, the Commission acknowledges that the "most vulnerable in our societies have borne much of the impact of the economic crisis". The Communication on the Platform against Poverty notes that those hit hardest are the unemployed, low earners, children, young people and those experiencing severe material deprivation across all ages and communities.

As stated in its opinion on the *Annual Growth Survey*, the Committee regrets that, in this first survey, the European Commission has missed the opportunity to enhance the Europe 2020 spirit by targeting simultaneously smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, but has instead narrowly focused on fiscal consolidation.

The EESC believes that the Europe 2020 strategy must maintain a balance between economic growth and the social agenda, and that social security systems are vital as automatic social and economic stabilisers that help support development and productivity, alleviate poverty and promote economic and social cohesion, all of which are needed to secure public support for the European project.

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Background information:

- The EESC opinion on the Commission's communication *The Annual Growth Survey: advancing the EU's comprehensive response to the crisis* - COM(2011) 11 was adopted by an overwhelming majority at the EESC plenary session on 15 March 2011 and is designed to provide input to the debate at the upcoming Spring European Council. The Committee stresses the need to focus much more attention on growth drivers that will enable Member States to consolidate budgets while remaining on a sustainable growth path. The opinion presents specific proposals for the 10 points put forward by the European Commission, and hopes to direct the discussion towards the issues really at stake in the Europe 2020 context.
- The EAPN [report](#) issued in February 2011 on *The Social Impact of the Crisis and of the Recovery Policies in 2010* sends out the following messages:
 - The social impact of the crisis is being systematically under-assessed and is actually getting worse, with governments' austerity measures affecting particularly the poor and undermining a sustainable recovery.
 - NGOs are gravely weakened and their fundamental contribution to society is at stake.
 - The crisis was not inevitable and was a result of deregulation and increasing inequality, not public sector spending.
 - Another, fairer way is possible – towards prosperity for all.
 - The EU must restore the core values of the European project, and use Europe 2020 to drive an ambitious social and sustainable vision.