

Editorial

The European project, "Raising awareness of social inclusion and social protection in Belgium, Romania and Bulgaria", aims to heighten European citizens' awareness of both the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and EU and national policies on social and active inclusion. This second newsletter presents the project's progress to date and specific topics related to its core issue.

To what extent are European citizens concerned about poverty and social exclusion? A Eurobarometer survey, conducted on behalf of the European Commission's Directorate-General (DG) for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, shows that 73% of Europeans consider poverty to be a widespread problem in their country.

Recently, the Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008-2010 in Bulgaria took a new turn, following the decision to raise the country's poverty threshold from BGN 194 to 211 for 2010. The Social Agenda of the programme declaration of the newly appointed Bulgarian government focuses on two essential pillars: improving the social security of Bulgarian citizens and developing the nation's human capital and creating conditions for success for each citizen.

What are the national priorities of the three countries involved in the project with regard to the fight against poverty? The 2010 European Year for combating poverty and social inclusion is a great opportunity to achieve progress on social Europe. In this framework, the Belgian, Romanian and Bulgarian national plans highlight issues like child poverty, housing and homelessness, minimum income, limiting the intergenerational transmission of poverty and social exclusion, facilitating citizens' access to the social assistance system and promoting everyone's participation in the decision-making process for policies and measures to fight poverty and social exclusion.

This issue's news in brief section presents a snapshot of the segregation of Roma children, social injustice in health, financial inclusion and European initiatives in this area, changes related to the Open Method of Coordination, as well as an overview of the final results of the two-year European project on "Working integration social enterprises: a tool for promoting inclusion", in which the European think tank Pour la Solidarité was a partner.

News

Segregation of Roma children: a global approach

Roma children's inclusion in the education system was discussed at an event organised by the Swedish EU presidency. Experts said that mayors and local school authorities in central and eastern European states still favour segregation of Roma children, despite national policies adopted by central governments. In Romania for example, the country with the largest Roma population in the EU, 15% of Roma children have never been enrolled in a school programme. Social Affairs Commissioner Vladimir Spidla stressed that there was no single solution, but one that included jobs for parents, better housing and access to social services. Hungarian Livia Jaroka –the first- ever Roma Member of the European Parliament- said that all these facts were well-known and that it was useless to talk about national policies adopted in the capitals as long as there was no change of mentality on a local level by mayors, school directors but also the parents of non-Roma children. NGOs working on Roma issues called for the establishment of a special secretariat within the EU Commission to deal with these problems, which should include employment, health care, housing, access to justice and measures against hate crime and anti-Roma violence.

For more information, see the website of the EU Roma Policy Coalition: <http://roma.wieni.be/> or the website of the European Network on Social Inclusion and Roma under the Structural Funds: <http://www.euromanet.eu/>

“Social injustice is killing people on a grand scale”

That is what the World Health Organization (WHO) stated last year. Between member states and even between regions within the same member state, there are unequal health outcomes, which are partially due to lifestyle differences – researchers have known for a long time that people on lower incomes are more likely to smoke, tend to eat fewer fruit and vegetables and live in places with limited green spaces- but not entirely. Indeed, social status itself explains health differences. Societies with a high degree of income inequality have more social problems, from higher rates of mental illness to drug use and from obesity to low levels of trust in strangers.

In a report last year, the WHO aims to close the health gap within one generation, stressing that “unequal distribution of health-damaging experiences is (...) the result of the toxic combination of poor social policies and programmes, unfair economic arrangements and bad policies”. Three recommendations are made: improve the conditions of daily life, ensure a fairer distribution of power, money and resources, and improve data and findings on health inequalities.

For more information, see the WHO website: <http://www.who.int>

Financial inclusion: another aspect of poverty and social exclusion where European initiatives are being developed

Financial exclusion can be defined as ["a process whereby people encounter difficulties accessing and/or using financial services and products in the mainstream market that are appropriate to their needs and enable them to lead a normal social life in the society in which they belong"](#).

It was recently the topic of the European consultation on ensuring access to a basic bank account for all European citizens.

Those most likely to be financially excluded are vulnerable groups (people with low income, unemployed, lone parents, people with disabilities), as well as people living in areas where no financial services are offered.

A new and inspiring European network on financial inclusion at the final conference of the Mutual Learning on Financial Inclusion project (MuLFI project), also carried out in the framework of the European PROGRESS programme, which took place on 5-6 November 2009 in Brussels.

The European Financial Inclusion Network (EFIN) is a coalition of European stakeholders (institutions and individuals) involved in financial inclusion, including European networks active in a more specific area of financial inclusion (e.g.: consumer debt, microfinance, responsible credit,...), public institutions, trade unions, NGOs, universities and research institutes, consumer protection organisations, financial education practitioners, debt counselling organisations and financial institutions and banking associations.

EFIN promotes financial inclusion through research, debate, exchange and dissemination.

Its members base their common actions on the objective of tackling financial exclusion. In order to achieve this goal, EFIN will:

- increase knowledge on financial inclusion by all effective methods – surveys, studies, analysis, data collection, etc.; the aim is to increase and format available data and develop the use of indicators to monitor financial exclusion, provide regular assessment of financial inclusion based on available indicators, identify and evaluate policy measures with a positive impact on financial inclusion and highlight the impact of financial inclusion policies on wider social inclusion;
- serve as a forum and promote mutual learning; the aim is to increase mutual learning on financial inclusion policies, strengthen the participation of all key actors in that process and stimulate debate on specific issues which improve the general understanding of the context and the constraints of each stakeholders;
- ensure knowledge dissemination and financial inclusion promotion; the aim is to increase policymakers' awareness and information on policy measures to promote financial inclusion and to develop and promote European, national, regional and local strategies.

More information on EFIN and the outcomes of the MuFI project can be found on the website: <http://www.fininc.eu/index.en.html>

Better effectiveness and reinforcement of the Open Method of Coordination (2010-2020)

Even though the concept of Open Method of Coordination (OMC) is not explicitly mentioned in the public consultation working on the future EU 2020 strategy, launched by the European Commission Secretariat General on [24 November 2009](#), the OMC has to be part and parcel of the renewed post-Lisbon Strategy (2010-2020) in order to guarantee a better integration of economic, social and environmental policies into a new sustainable social market economy. To have a significant effect on EU social objectives, the social OMC must have the same impact as a strategy for growth and employment, through Member States' commitment to quantitative objectives and efficient indicators, able to measure the OMC's social impact. This is the reason why a renewed commitment to social Europe has to be taken -through political will- in order to reinforce the OMC for social protection and social inclusion, as mentioned in a [2008 EC communication](#).

The OMC was launched in 2000 as a voluntary self-evaluation process and complements a comprehensive mix of legislation, financial instruments (including the European Social Fund) and coordination processes that support social cohesion and solidarity within the EU. However, these globally positive results of the OMC do not mean the method cannot be strengthened, especially to improve delivery on the agreed common objectives and make better use of the commonly agreed indicators. Despite the commitments of the European Council in 2000 "to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty", there are no signs of an overall reduction in poverty rates in the EU. 16% of EU citizens (78 million) are at risk of poverty. Thus, the OMC organization clearly has to be rationalized, as shown in [Social Platform recommendations for an effective open method of coordination on social protection and social inclusion](#). The following recommendations by the Social Platform put it in a nutshell:

1. Increase visibility and the political commitment to the Social OMC and improve its coherence with the wider post-2010 strategy;
2. Increase ownership of the Social OMC and the delivery of better policy-making through the participation of national parliaments, regional actors, civil society organizations and people in poverty;

3. Set quantified targets to reduce all forms of poverty and social exclusion across the lifespan and to improve pension adequacy and quality of health and long-term care at EU and national level
4. Strengthen mutual learning, link it to policy impact and open it to more actors, especially local and national actors
5. Couple the Social OMC with EU financial instruments – most notably the structural funds

The European think tank Pour la Solidarité totally shares the Social Platform recommendations for an effective open method of coordination on social protection and social inclusion. Pour la Solidarité is currently drafting an answer to the EC public consultation on the future EU 2020 strategy, which will stress the necessity of social cohesion and more efficient social policies in Europe so as to cope with a “new sustainable social market economy”.

For further information on this public consultation, see the website:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/secretariat_general/eu2020/consultation_en.htm

WISEs, employment and inclusion

NGOs from eight European countries (Austria, Belgium, Spain, Finland, Italy, Malta, Poland and Romania) as well as key European partners like EAPN, CECOP and EMES have been involved in a two-year European project on “Working integration social enterprises: a tool for promoting inclusion” (the WISE project). This project, which has been running for the past two years as part of PROGRESS, is led by CGM, the leading consortium of Italian social cooperatives, and coordinated by DIESIS, the European support structure for the social economy. It has financial support from the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity PROGRESS (2007-2013).

On 24 November 2009, the WISE project's European dissemination seminar took place in Brussels. The participating countries have radically different situations as regards work integration social enterprises, so the four "pair/peer" reviews organised by the project brought some interesting contrasts to light.

The centrepiece of the Brussels dissemination seminar on 24 November was the launch of A WISE Way of Working, a booklet containing 10 sets of recommendations for policy-makers along with 10 examples of how WISE contributes to different EU policies. Policy on WISEs has definitely evolved over the years. WISEs have been round for at least 30 years under various names, and the steady growth in the visibility of the idea can be traced through Community initiatives such as HORIZON and more recently EQUAL. It is time for more explicit recognition! We shouldn't waste time on exact definitions, but we do need an umbrella concept to enable mutual learning and transfer.

For policy-makers, two very important points should be made.

a) Policy co-ordination: it is very positive that this seminar attracted five Commission officials from both the Employment and Enterprise DGs, but such togetherness is relatively rare. We need to find ways of avoiding ‘silo’ thinking, and there are various tools, interservice groups and the EP Intergroup to mention two. A number of Member States have instituted high-level coordination systems: Poland, with its Social Economy Working Group featured in the WISE Guidelines, Sweden, with its national thematic group, and the UK with its Office of the Third Sector. The European model, which needs to be reestablished, is the EQUAL European Thematic Group (ETG). At national level, more coordination is needed among the different bodies in charge of policies and tools for WISEs, namely employment, inclusion and enterprise policies.

b) Use existing resources: WISEs grow and replicate fastest and most easily when they are supported by their own federal bodies such as consortia. They have values and they grow by sharing with each other. Yet the value of this network of home-grown support structures seems to be a blind spot for the European institutions. Consortia, federations and cooperative development agencies are not parasites or overheads; on the contrary, they are mechanisms that clarify goals, create motivation and give practical help. They are what makes a movement work. Public policies should recognise the added value that a "movement" style of operation brings.



It's very heartening to see moves in this direction such as the Key Networks that the Employment DG supports at EU level. The WISE guidelines showcase the successful use of the Global Grant mechanism to do the same at national level.

For WISEs, we have to focus on opportunities, and this is where the Commission speakers offered a number of clear pointers. We must nurture them with the evidence and arguments they need to develop policy. We must:

- respond to the consultation on EU2020, i.e. the post-Lisbon strategy
- provide input for the Innovation Action Plan – social innovation, not just technical or process innovation, has to be part of this and the social economy is the motor of social innovation
- provide input for local development strategies
- propose subjects for the Peer Review meetings in Social Protection and Social Inclusion, a key part of the mutual learning system among Member States (in which Greek and Belgian WISEs have already participated).

The European think tank Pour la Solidarité was in charge of the Belgian part of this project and has published a national cross-cutting report with guidelines for Belgian policy makers, "Employment and inclusion: the role of the social economy". Romania was one of the eight European countries involved in this project.

- All the reports and guidelines published may be downloaded from the "resources" section of our website: www.inclusion-participation.eu/en/resources.html
- The European Guidelines "A WISE way of working" (English and French)
- The Belgian cross-cutting report "Employment and inclusion: the role of the social economy" (English and French)
- All the national cross-cutting reports, including the Romanian report (English)
- More information can be found on the project website: www.wiseproject.eu

Project

Advancement of the project

The project began on 15 December 2008 and will be completed at the end of 2010. The following is a mid-term review of its different national and transnational activities.

Activities in Belgium

Activities undertaken in recent months:

- organisation of the kick-off meeting (28 January 2009)
- organisation of a steering committee meeting in Brussels (4 December 2009)

Next steps planned:

- a one-day seminar on child poverty and education, organised by the Service for the fight against poverty, insecurity, and social exclusion (at the beginning of 2010)
- a one-day conference on poverty and older people for 400 participants organised by the King Baudouin Foundation (27 April 2010)
- a one-day conference on age discrimination in employment for 60 participants organised by the National Council of Labour (at the end of 2010)



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Activities in Bulgaria

Activities undertaken in recent months:

- organisation of the national campaign from 3 March to 2 June 2009;
- organisation of the national round-table in Sofia on 2 June 2009 on "The fight against poverty and promotion of social cohesion and inclusion: essential pillar of Bulgaria's sustainable development" (42 participants);
- organisation of the regional conference in Burgas on 28 August 2009 on "The fight against poverty and promotion of social cohesion and inclusion: essential pillar of Bulgaria's sustainable development" (39 participants);
- publication of four newsletters in two languages.

Next steps planned:

- organisation of a workshop for 30 participants in January 2010 in Sofia to analyse labour market measures to fight poverty and promote social inclusion;
- organisation of the Final Conference of the project in Bulgaria in April 2010 in Sofia with 50 participants.

Activities in Romania

Promotion of debates on social inclusion in support of reinforcement of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on Social Protection & Social Inclusion in Romania

The European Union recommends the use of a less restrictive mechanism, known as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), to harmonize policies in the field of social inclusion and social protection. Three Romanian partners – PACT Foundation (www.fundatiapact.ro), Resource Centre for Public Participation (CeRe – www.ce-re.ro) and Resource Centre for Non-Profit Organizations in the Oltenia region (CRONO - www.crono.org.ro) – have initiated a complex process to support the social inclusion of disadvantaged people. The idea is to take concrete steps towards understanding the OMC process and putting it into practice starting at the national level. There is a special focus on facilitating partnership between the government and NGOs regarding social inclusion policies and on promoting the OMC process, for all relevant actors, as an important framework for mainstreaming social inclusion policies.

Overview of the Romanian project's accomplishments after one year of implementation

In May and September 2009, the main activities of the Romanian project focused on:

- facilitating better understanding of the OMC process among Romanian project partners,
- carrying out research into the way the OMC has or should have been applied by the Romanian government in the framework of setting up the National Reform Plan and its active measures for implementation,
- and preparing the key event of the project so far - the training seminar on OMC.

At the end of July 2009, PACT Foundation signed a contract with a European expert on OMC, who is a Board member of the Irish European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), a member of the Social Exclusion network of the European EAPN (European Anti Poverty Network) in Brussels and a private consultant. The expert contributed expertise on OMC and good practices from EAPN Ireland and Brussels to the theoretical approach of the Romanian team regarding OMC, needed to prepare the training seminar.

After a call for applications was launched at the beginning of September 2009, which included an application form and a brief overview of OMC, 25 NGOs submitted applications for taking part in the Romanian OMC working group. The project initially aimed at selecting only 15 NGOs, but this has been reconsidered to ensure wider reach of the OMC due to the novelty of the subject among NGOs in Romania. Meanwhile, the first draft of the research paper on OMC was submitted, offering understanding of the whole picture of the OMC process in Europe and Romania.

The training seminar on OMC, held on 5-6 October 2009 in Bucharest, aimed to:

- raise awareness of the OMC and its use in the field of social inclusion
- present OMC experiences in other European countries
- facilitate better understanding of the OMC process - how to use it to ensure efficiency and effectiveness
- set up a mixed working group for strengthening the OMC in the field of social inclusion in Romania by promoting dialogue, collaboration and active partnership among the NGOs on social inclusion and between these and the public authorities responsible for OMC process implementation.

There were 31 participants from 23 NGOs active in the field of social inclusion, as well as nine government representatives with responsibilities coming within the OMC framework and four external Romanian and foreign experts. The first part of the seminar enabled participating NGOs to exchange views and build a common position. Discussions covered common topics on social inclusion and on influencing public policies in the area. The second part of the seminar was dedicated to the description of the principles and mechanisms of the OMC. The public authorities and external experts presented valuable information regarding: the OMC in Romania and Ireland, social inclusion indicators, recommendations of EAPN Ireland on how NGOs could efficiently collaborate with public authorities in the OMC context. The main results of research in the framework of the Romanian project were presented.

The first meeting of the working group on OMC on social inclusion took place on 3 November 2009 in Bucharest. Around 20 NGO representatives active in the area of social inclusion attended the meeting. Participants drew up and signed a common position for submission to the Ministry of Labour – Department for Social Inclusion Programs - regarding the creation of the working group, its objectives and, most importantly, stating the group's full commitment and availability to collaborate with the Ministry and other partners in order to develop an efficient mechanism for public consultation on social inclusion and to ensure the active involvement of all stakeholders. Discussions also focused on internal issues such as the need to enlarge the working group in order to achieve higher visibility and legitimacy and to ensure wide representation of NGOs engaged in social inclusion, and the way the working group will communicate and work together. For the next meeting, the group proposed to analyze the policy documents for 2008-2010 drafted by the Ministry of Labour in the framework of OMC, taking into account the area of expertise of each member, organized in smaller working groups.

The second meeting of the working group on OMC took place in Bucharest on 8 December 2009. Twenty-five representatives of social inclusion NGOs attended the meeting. Based on assessment of the policy documents drawn up by the Romanian authorities for the period 2008-2010 in the framework of OMC, the group aimed to identify whether the structures needed for social inclusion implementation are in place and whether good governance measures are being taken to ensure a proper framework for social policy implementation. Representatives of the smaller groups presented their work to the larger group to receive feedback and to prompt debate. The working group carried out a demanding yet very useful exercise of joint action and collaboration. This will help the group prepare a future common document proposing new actions for improving social inclusion policies in Romania and for facilitating social inclusion mainstreaming.

By the next meeting, the working group will prepare a coherent, well structured document comprising the group's concrete proposals for enhancing social inclusion within the OMC framework. The document will be presented to the Romanian authorities responsible for social inclusion policies, at the third meeting of the working group, to be organized in the beginning of February 2010.

The most important outcomes of the Romanian project so far:

- an active and dedicated NGO working group on OMC in social inclusion has been established
- its members have a common understanding of the OMC process
- they have stated their full commitment and availability to collaborate with the Ministry of Labour and other partners in order to develop an efficient mechanism for public consultation on social inclusion and to ensure the active involvement of all stakeholders
- the working group has agreed upon a common work method which has proven to be efficient.

The Romanian team's next steps will focus on:

- raising general awareness of social inclusion and the OMC process
- promoting partnership among relevant actors
- establishing an operational mixed working group made of members of the NGOs and government representatives to work together throughout the project's remaining meetings
- the outcome of the group's work within and between the meetings will be presented in a best practice guide to be drawn up by the end of the project
- a trans-national conference on OMC presenting best practice and progress made in Romania on this matter will take place in Craiova, Romania, in March 2010, providing the occasion to further promote the use of OMC consolidation and a better approach to the OMC process in Romania
- the research report will be made public at the trans-national conference, to be attended by Belgian and Bulgarian partners along with Romanian national and local public authorities, journalists and other interested parties.

Transnational activities

Activities undertaken in recent months:

- organisation of the kick-off meeting (28 January 2009)
- publication of the project website
- publication of the biannual project newsletter
- participation of Pour la Solidarité in the meetings organised in Romania and Bulgaria
- participation of Pour la Solidarité in the international meeting "The unemployed and the working poor in the age of crisis. The challenge of social inclusion" in Greece (16 July 2009)

Next steps planned:

- publication of the biannual project newsletter
- The final European conference co-organised by Pour la Solidarité and DIESIS at the end of August 2010
- publication of the project's final report by Pour la Solidarité in close relation with the national coordinators
- appraisal and monitoring of the project by Diesis

Publications

All the publications introduced below can be downloaded on our website.

Bulgaria:

- the minutes of the Bulgarian national round table and a selection of articles published by various Bulgarian newspapers
- the minutes of the Bulgarian regional conference in Burgas
- the first progress report by the Bulgarian partners
- the four newsletters on the Bulgarian part of the project

Romania:

The three progress reports by the Romanian partners

Transnational part of the project: the first project newsletter

On our website soon: the research report on OMC in Romania



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Figures

European citizens are concerned about poverty and social exclusion...

Are people fully aware of the extent of poverty within the European Union? How do they perceive personal and societal reasons behind poverty? Who is thought to be most at risk? Do people feel threatened by the possible prospect of poverty? How can poverty prevent people from taking full advantage of society and how easy or difficult is access to financial services perceived to be? What is people's perception about the urgency of government action to combat poverty? Which level of administration is thought to be primarily responsible?

All these questions were asked in the framework of a Eurobarometer survey on poverty and social Exclusion released in October 2009. The survey was conducted between 28 August and 17 September 2009 and nearly 27 000 citizens in all EU Member States were interviewed.

The results show that 73% of Europeans consider poverty to be a widespread problem in their country while 89% want urgent action by their government to tackle the problem.

High unemployment (52%) and low wages (49%) are the most widely perceived societal explanations for poverty, together with insufficient social benefits and pensions (29%) and the excessive cost of decent housing (26%). Concerning personal causes of poverty, a lack of education, training or skills (37%), as well as inherited poverty (25%) and addiction (23%) are the most widely perceived reasons given.

On average, 89% of Europeans say that urgent action is needed by their national government to tackle poverty. Across Europe, 53% feel that their national governments are primarily responsible for combating poverty. Although Europeans do not perceive the European Union as the main actor for fighting poverty, many nonetheless see its role as important: 28% of those interviewed it very important and 46% somewhat important.

All these figures show that the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion addresses public opinion concerns and expectations...

The Eurobarometer survey was commissioned by the European Commission's Directorate General (DG) for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and is available at the following address:

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_321_en.pdf

Focus

New facts concerning social protection and social inclusion strategies 2008-2010 in Bulgaria

It was decided at the regular Council of Ministers on 28 October 2009, to increase the country's poverty threshold from BGN 194 to 211 for 2010.

The new Bulgarian government is obliged to tackle the social impact of the crisis. The Bulgarian economy is claimed to be an open economy. Bulgaria exports two thirds and imports four fifths of the country's GDP. This type of economy therefore cannot be isolated from the impacts of the global crisis. One of the key crisis indicators is the loss of a job/employment contract.

The data shows that in Bulgaria over 56 000 jobs were lost in the manufacturing industry this year. The rest of jobs losses were in construction and commerce. Balancing public finances represents a major challenge to the local economy. Public revenue is shrinking given the budget's strong dependence on indirect taxes.



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The undeclared economy is a serious problem that has been aggravated by the crisis. Officially, the "informal" economy in Bulgaria is about 18% according to the Ministry of Finance, but its actual share is around 35%. Some of the people involved are registered workers, but at times they and their employers hide income and do not pay full insurance contributions and taxes. Recently (mid-August 2009), the relevant stakeholders responded eagerly to the invitation from the new Minister of Labour and Social Policy to discuss the need for joint action to ensure a fairer social cost of the upcoming reforms. Participants in the meeting were unanimous in the view that the Bulgarians have yet to feel the effects of the deepening economic crisis.

A legacy of the previous government, the budget deficit of more than USD 2.5 billion requires urgent and unpopular spending cuts. The three sides agreed to sign a social pact for economic development over the next four years. The social actors – trade unions, employers' organizations and NGOs – are confident and they know from the history of European countries in similar economic situations that a serious social approach has helped many countries to overcome the crisis. Cooperation with trade unions and employers is extremely urgent because the coming months are expected to see the closure of hundreds of companies and a sharp increase in unemployment. The fund shortage of the National Insurance Institute will reach half a billion euro by the end of the year. However, the minister assured that measures taken by the National Council for Tripartite Co-operation and by the state will prevent any problems with social benefits. From the beginning of the year to the present, there have been massive job cuts involving more than 22 000 workers and employees. The largest share is in manufacturing, metallurgy, textiles and the garment industry. According to the General Labour Inspectorate, in the past few months there have been repeated cases of delayed payment of wages. So there is a real need to improve social dialogue. The aim is to work together with employers and unions to ensure that Bulgaria reduces the impact of this crisis. A "hole" of around €2.5 billion in the budget and limited financial resources to mitigate the effects of the economic crisis will be a severe test for the new government. The Social Affairs Ministry estimates that unemployment will reach 8% by the end of next month. And the effect of time on an allocation of €188 million for temporary jobs is too ambiguous.

The biggest challenge will be the implementation of comprehensive measures to reduce unemployment. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has considerable financial resources for the operational programme "Human Resources Development". The planned programme budget is estimated at nearly €1.200 billion. Funds will be earmarked for training and education of unemployed people in the country to help them find their place in the labour market.

Bulgarian social stakeholders - trade unions, cooperatives and employers' organizations - are facing the challenge of tackling the consequences of the economic crisis for their members. They are urgently pressing for the following priorities in anti-crisis policies:

- Maintaining financial stability;
- Safeguarding the labour market and preventing serious damage to the social security system;
- Protecting income, purchasing power and standard of living in a time of crisis.

The Social Agenda of the programme declaration of the newly appointed Bulgarian government focuses on two essential pillars:

- Improving the social security of Bulgarian citizens. Creating a favourable and healthy living environment, to secure personal and public health through

- active social policy and incentives for citizens' professional activity;
- stability and reform of the pension system for a sustainable increase in pensions;
- improved organization of the health insurance system and protection of health;
- promotion of physical education of citizens and stimulating the development of sports, in order to attain high levels of achievement;
- ensuring and protecting Bulgaria's environment and water.

- Developing the nation's human capital and creating conditions for success for every citizen through:

- modern European education for children and young people;
- creation of conditions for a high level of development of Bulgarian science and scientific research;
- revival of the modern Bulgarian culture
- safeguarding and popularising of the national cultural and historical heritage.



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Agenda

- **Beginning of 2010 (Brussels, Belgium)**
A one-day seminar on child poverty and education, organised by the Service for the fight against poverty, insecurity, and social exclusion
- **January 2010 (Sofia, Bulgaria)**
Organisation of a workshop for 30 participants that will focus on analysis of labour market measures to fight poverty and promote social inclusion
- **April 2010 (Sofia, Bulgaria)**
Organisation of the Final Conference of the project with 50 participants
- **27 April 2010 (Brussels, Belgium)**
A one-day conference on poverty and older people for 400 participants organised by the King Baudouin Foundation
- **End of August 2010 (Brussels, Belgium)**
Organisation of the final European conference co-organised by Pour la Solidarité and DIESIS
- **End of 2010 (Brussels, Belgium)**
A one-day conference on age discrimination in employment for 60 participants organised by the National Council of Labour
- **During 2010 (Romania)**
Meetings of the working group, preparation and organisation of the final event in Bucharest, including the launch of the best practices guide and an exhibition of materials on social inclusion from all the NGOs involved in the working group

[More details on our website.](#)

Useful links

- Eurostat, Statistics in focus: "An average of just over 822 000 people were benefiting from direct job creation measures in EU-27 at any point during 2007", author : Sabine GAGEL, 76/2009, available at: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-09-076/EN/KS-SF-09-076-EN.PDF
- Europe in figures - Eurostat yearbook 2009 (with a section on social protection), available at: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-CD-09-001/EN/KS-CD-09-001-EN.PDF
- The King Baudouin Foundation carries out many activities related to poverty and social justice; Detailed information is available on the website: www.kbs-frb.be
- Download on our website the European Commission Newsletter "Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion and Assessment in Social Inclusion"
- Download the report of the European Parliament on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market



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