



efc briefing

social affairs

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European Year on Poverty and Social Exclusion launched. Do not miss the opportunity to get involved!

The 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion was launched at a high-level event jointly organised by the European Commission and the Spanish EU Presidency on 21 January. EFC members Fundación Luis Vives and Fundación ONCE and the EFC secretariat took part in the opening conference which gathered more than 300 representatives active in the fields of poverty and social exclusion. The conference marked the start of a year which offers a wide range of possibilities for foundations to advance the fight against poverty and social exclusion by providing a platform for promotion, networking, knowledge-sharing and partnerships both with public and private stakeholders.

The EFC is working with EFC members and interest groups to identify opportunities to give visibility and promote EFC members and foundations' work in the context of the activities that will be organised at EU level, notably the two "European Weeks against Poverty and Exclusion" which will take place in May and October. EFC's involvement in the EU Stakeholders Expert Group on the 2010 European Year, which aims to provide a platform for a regular exchange of views and information between the European Commission and EU stakeholders, offers EFC members and interest groups an opportunity to contribute to the implementation, follow-up and assessment of the European Year and therefore to use it to advance their own areas of interest/work. In this context, we **would like to invite you to contact the EFC secretariat** at mhernandez@efc.be if:

- You are already or planning to get involved in the activities of the European year both at national and EU level (organising your own activities, working with the National Implementing Bodies or with other stakeholders, etc.).
- You are interested in getting involved in the activities planned which are explained in this information note or others.
- You have interesting projects in the area of poverty you would like to share with others.

For more information on the European Year and how to get involved, please check the [EFC dedicated webpage](#), read the [information note](#) on the European Year and how to get involved or contact the EFC secretariat at mhernandez@efc.be

About the conference

The opening conference of the European Year brought together more than 300 representatives from civil society organisations –including foundations-, European institutions and international organisations, national and regional administrations, social partners, experts and the Social Protection Committee. The conference also featured a wide range of national and European high-level personalities, giving the Year the importance it deserves. Amongst which the Spanish Prime Minister, Mr. Zapatero, the President of European Commission, Mr. Barroso, the Spanish Health and Social Minister, Ms Jiménez, the European Commissioner, Mr. Špidla, the representative of the President of the European Parliament Mr. Mendes de Vigo, the Vice-President of the Greens/European Free Alliance Group of MEPs, Ms Lambert, the Chairman of the Reflection Group on the Future of the EU, Mr. Felipe Gonzalez, as well as high-level representatives from Member States.

People experiencing poverty took an active part in the conference, and were given a front seat on the **round table on testimonials**, in which four persons from different countries and backgrounds- Hungary, Italy, Belgium and Spain- shared with participants their daily experiences.

Prior to the conference, media present at the event also had the opportunity to meet the **four private operators of the Operational Programme of Fight Against Discrimination in Spain**, namely Fundación ONCE, Fundación Secretariado Gitano, Spanish Red Cross and Caritas, to discuss how this tool can help promote inclusion through employment.

Specifically, the opening **conference of the European Year aimed to:**

- Deepen the understanding of poverty and social exclusion, on the basis of evidence presented over the past few years in EU reports and studies;
- Send a clear political and social message on the need to correct inequalities in Europe and to place the fight against poverty at the centre of the agenda;
- Propose long term objectives for the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the future 2020 EU Strategy;
- Encourage stakeholders and relevant actors to take initiatives within the framework of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion;
- Generate new impetus in the struggle against poverty and social exclusion and inspire people to come together to combat them.

In particular, following the keynote speeches and the testimonies roundtable, two sessions analysed:

- The **achievements and failures in the Lisbon Strategy** and the lessons learned from experience of the past ten years for future action in the aforementioned fields. Representatives from public authorities from 5 different Member States reflected on different aspects of the strategy including elderly people, personal autonomy and active aging, child poverty, the inclusion of ethnic minorities, social exclusion, the promotion of inclusion through employment and health and active inclusion.
- **Challenges ahead** in the EU and Member States in the fight against poverty and social exclusion **and future commitments post-2010**.

Highlights of the presentations and discussions include the following:

- There was a general call to place the fight against **poverty and exclusion at the centre of the EU agenda** and to make **social cohesion a horizontal priority**, with the involvement of all key players. Although in the European Union this policy area mainly concerns national governments, recent numbers show that almost **3 out of 4 Europeans want that the EU adopts a more active role**.
- In this sense, Commission's President recalled the focus on **social cohesion objectives in the [Treaty of Lisbon](#)** (i.e. the [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), the social transversal clause, Article 11 on participatory democracy, and the concept of the social market economy). He also referred to the integration of a strong **social dimension in the impact assessments** that the Commission undertakes before presenting any policy proposal as a tool.
- The current and future EU presidencies –Spain, Belgium and Hungary- clearly outlined their ambition to see a **strong social pillar within the new EU2020**, which will replace the current Lisbon Strategy. Indeed, as stated by the Spanish Health and Social Minister, strengthening Europe's social dimension is at the core of the Spanish Presidency¹ and will be also at the heart of the Belgian and Hungarian ones. Building upon his [presentation the day before](#) in the European Parliament, Mr Zapatero stressed the strength of the European social model, a distinguishing factor of the EU.
- **Employment** was presented **as a key element to fight against poverty and exclusion**. However, it was also acknowledged that it is not enough to have a decent life and other elements should be considered. Therefore the importance of issues discussed such as minimum income, active inclusion, access to health and education and to basic services to all persons living in the countries. This is of particular relevance for those persons in our societies who do not have access to work.
- The situation of **specific groups** including women, children, elderly, people with disabilities, Roma, migrants and ethnic minorities as well as unemployed were central to the discussions.
- Mr Zapatero pleaded for a **European Social Pact** between European institutions and social partners, with no mention to civil society. Civil society organisations recalled the importance of involving civil society, a diverse sector which includes a wide variety of actors which play an active role in the field. There is need to further develop and strengthen the civil dialogue.
- There was a joint call from the Belgian and French secretaries of state **for quantified EU targets to reduce poverty by 2020** (and to make them as binding as the [Stability Pact](#)) **and a shared analysis of John Monks (ETUC), Member of the European Parliament Jean Lambert and Ludo Horemans (EAPN) on the need to address jointly extreme poverty and extreme wealth**.
- Mr Spidla stressed that the ability to bring the European Year to the **public sphere and the media** is essential as well as **cooperation between different stakeholders**. The European Year 2010 must afford policymakers, economic players, the cultural world and the media the opportunity to hold a dialogue, including those that do not normally work together.

The event organisers will publish a detailed report on the conference in the near future. Further information on the conference is available at: <http://www.2010againstpoverity.eu/news/news/news10.html?langid=en>

¹ See EFC Briefing <http://www.efc.be/EUAdvocacy/EU%20Communiquus%20%20Briefings/befc1009.pdf>