

Procedure file

Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2008/2330(INI)	Procedure completed
Renewed social agenda		
Subject		
4 Economic, social and territorial cohesion		
4.10 Social policy, social charter and protocol		
4.15 Employment policy, action to combat unemployment		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	EMPL Employment and Social Affairs		09/09/2008
		PPE-DE SILVA PENEDA José Albino	
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	ECON Economic and Monetary Affairs		14/01/2009
		UEN RYAN Eoin	
	ENVI Environment, Public Health and Food Safety		21/01/2009
		PSE FERREIRA Anne	
ITRE Industry, Research and Energy	The committee decided not to give an opinion.		
CULT Culture and Education			16/12/2008
	PPE-DE VISSER Cornelis		
LIBE Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs	The committee decided not to give an opinion.		
FEMM Women's Rights and Gender Equality			14/01/2009
	PPE-DE PANAYOTOPOULOS-CASSIOTOU Marie		
Council of the European Union	Council configuration	Meeting	Date
	Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs2916		16/12/2008
European Commission	Commission DG	Commissioner	
	Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion	ŠPIDLA Vladimír	

Key events			
02/07/2008	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2008)0412	Summary
16/12/2008	Debate in Council	2916	Summary

18/12/2008	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
31/03/2009	Vote in committee		Summary
03/04/2009	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0241/2009	
05/05/2009	Debate in Parliament		
06/05/2009	Results of vote in Parliament		
06/05/2009	Decision by Parliament	T6-0370/2009	Summary
06/05/2009	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information

Procedure reference	2008/2330(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Strategic initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 54
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	EMPL/6/67635

Documentation gateway

Non-legislative basic document		COM(2008)0412	02/07/2008	EC	Summary
Document attached to the procedure		SEC(2008)2156	02/07/2008	EC	
Document attached to the procedure		SEC(2008)2157	02/07/2008	EC	
Committee draft report		PE418.024	17/12/2008	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE418.417	03/02/2009	EP	
Committee opinion	FEMM	PE418.261	13/02/2009	EP	
Committee opinion	CULT	PE418.242	05/03/2009	EP	
Committee opinion	ENVI	PE418.332	17/03/2009	EP	
Committee opinion	ECON	PE418.428	25/03/2009	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0241/2009	03/04/2009	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0370/2009	06/05/2009	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2009)3564/2	11/11/2009	EC	

Renewed social agenda

PURPOSE: to present a Commission Communication for a renewed social agenda for 21st century Europe.

CONTENT: the communications begins by noting that technological advances, globalisation and an ageing population are changing European societies. In recent years the pace of change has accelerated. Europeans are living longer, healthier lives in new family configurations and working patterns. At the same time, too many people are inactive or unemployed and too many young people leave school early. As a result, there are still too many people living in poverty (especially children and older people) and in social isolation. The Commission describes the new issues that have emerged ?globalisation and rapid technological change, demographic change, immigration and climate change as well

as societal changes, with increased competition for scarce resources, including food and energy and continuing turbulence in the financial markets.

Actions in the social field are primarily the responsibility of the Member States and have to be taken closest to the citizen at national and sub-national level. The EU's powers and responsibilities in the social field are limited. However, the EU, with its blend of shared values, common rules and solidarity mechanisms, is uniquely placed to work in partnership with the Member States and stakeholders and foster cooperation to manage socio-economic change, particularly the change driven by globalisation and technology. The challenge is to build on that strong base by pursuing a renewed social agenda. The focus needs to be on empowering and enabling individuals to realise their potential while at the same time helping those who are unable to do so. This agenda cannot be confined to traditional social domains; it must be cross cutting and multidimensional, covering a wide range of areas from labour market policies to education, health, immigration and intercultural dialogue.

The renewed social agenda set out in the Communication is built around opportunities, access and solidarity.

Generating opportunities requires a continued effort to creating more and better jobs and increasing welfare. It means dismantling barriers, facilitating mobility, fighting discrimination, fostering gender equality, supporting families and tackling new forms of social exclusion.

To exploit opportunities, individuals need access ? to education, health care, social services of general interest. They should be able to actively participate and integrate in the societies in which they live. Those individuals and regions that cannot cope and are left behind by the rapid pace of change need support. Therefore, the renewed social agenda is also one of solidarity ? stepping up efforts to fight poverty and social exclusion and explore new ways to help individuals adjust to globalisation and technological change. To do so, the EU has to innovate in the way it sets policy frameworks, in its legislation, in bringing people together in the exchange of best practice and in catalysing new approaches.

Actions to move towards these goals are primarily the responsibility of the Member States at national, regional and local levels. The scope for action is wide and calls for priority setting. Hence, the agenda focuses on key areas ? youth, human capital, longer healthier lives, mobility, social inclusion, anti-discrimination and equal opportunities as well as participation and civic dialogue - where EU action demonstrates clear added value and full respect for the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Actions in each of these areas contribute to the three goals of opportunities, access and solidarity.

The paper discusses further action under each of the following topics: children and youth; investing in people, more and better jobs, new skills; mobility; longer and healthier lives; combating poverty and social exclusion; fighting discrimination; and opportunities, access and solidarity on the global scene.

Amongst several measures, the Commission intends to introduce a Directive to improve the functioning of European Works Councils to ensure effective social dialogue on restructuring operations; and a Directive on the application of patients' rights in cross-border health care. This will establish a Community framework for cross-border healthcare on the basis of the case-law of the European Court of Justice.

The paper also discusses the instruments that the Commission will use. These include legislation, social dialogue, the Open Method of Coordination, EU funding, and the involvement of Civil Society. The Commission intends to exploit the scope for synergies between them in a comprehensive approach and a "smarter mix" of policy tools. The coordination and surveillance of economic and budgetary policies also play an important role in this respect.

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On the basis of a Presidency questionnaire, the Council held a public exchange of views on the social impact of the crisis, the employment situation and monitoring of the implementation of the Social Agenda.

All the delegations welcomed the Commission communication entitled "A European Economic Recovery Plan" and stressed the added value of an approach coordinated at European level. To prevent the economic crisis from becoming a social crisis, the delegations advocated employment support measures, taking care not to neglect social protection and to protect the most vulnerable in particular. In that context, several delegations stressed the advantages of the flexicurity approach for which the Council defined common principles (see Council doc. 15497/07) at its meeting on 5 and 6 December 2007.

The ministers also argued in favour of measures to reinforce social cohesion. The majority of delegations also supported reinforcing the open method of coordination for social protection and social inclusion. Several delegations considered that short- and long-term measures should be combined and stressed the importance of having the Member States continue with the reform of their social systems.

The majority of delegations supported the idea of facilitating payments by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund. Some delegations wanted a monitoring system to be set up to monitor labour market developments in the EU.

Many Member States outlined the measures taken at national level to deal with the economic crisis and advocated maintaining a balance between the European initiative and those national measures.

The presidency trio comprising Spain, Belgium and Hungary (the countries holding the EU presidency from the beginning of 2010 to mid-2011) requested the ESPCO Council to adopt conclusions at its next meeting on 9 March 2009 relating to the employment section of the European Economic Recovery Plan and wanted the plan extended to include considerations on social protection and inclusion.

In European Economic Recovery Plan, the Commission proposed to simplify the criteria for ESF support and to revise the rules of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund so that it can intervene more rapidly in key sectors, either to co-finance training and job placements for those who are made redundant or to keep in the labour market skilled workers who will be needed once the economy starts to recover. The Commission also asked Member States to consider reducing employers' social charges on lower incomes to promote the employability of lower skilled workers.

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The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by José Albino SILVA PENEDA (EPP-ED, PT) on the Renewed Social Agenda, recalling that the major negative consequence for the EU arising from the current financial and economic crisis will be the dramatic increase of unemployment which will more severely affect the most vulnerable social groups. Moreover, recalling that employment still does not guarantee a route out of poverty for many people in the EU, MEPs stress that, in 2006, 16% of European citizens were at-risk-of-poverty and children, large families, single parents, unemployed people, people with disabilities, young people, elderly people, ethnic minorities and migrants are especially vulnerable.

In this context, MEPs analyse the Commission's proposals in its renewed social agenda and consider that two large categories of measures should be implemented: priority actions and instrumental actions.

Priority actions: in this area, MEPs focus on the following points:

European social models: given the economic recession, MEPs call on the Council and the Commission to reaffirm the importance of a strong social Europe, incorporating sustainable, effective and efficient social and employment policies. They therefore call on the Commission to develop an ambitious Social Policy Agenda for the period 2010-2015. The Commission is also called upon to: (i) put forward a coherent policy plan on decent work in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU; (ii) combine the renewed social agenda with other initiatives such as the European pact for gender equality, the European Youth Pact and the European Alliance for families.

MEPs are concerned that the measures proposed in the Commission communication are insufficiently coherent to impact on the current levels of poverty and exclusion in the EU and to address the current challenges to social cohesion. They therefore call for proposals to achieve a balance between economical freedoms and social rights, particularly: (i) a directive providing for basic labour rights for all workers (regardless of employment status); (ii) a review of the Council Directive in order to reduce gender pay gaps; (iii) a directive on cross-border collective bargaining. MEPs also consider that social policy should cover key actions such as combating discrimination and modernising the European social models while strengthening their values.

Although Member States are facing a serious economic crisis, MEPs consider that this is not the time to reduce social expenditure but rather to reinforce structural reforms and support social services of general interest, by reaffirming the importance of their universal access, quality and sustainability. Therefore, MEPs call on the Commission to reaffirm the crucial role played by public services in the European Union by proposing a framework directive on services of general interest, guaranteeing their legal security. Moreover, MEPs stress the need to find ways to modernise and reform the national security systems to eradicate poverty with a long-term perspective (by reforming pensions systems and health care services through the improvement of their access and the establishment of a progressive taxation system).

MEPs also call on the Member States to provide for schemes for a national minimum wage (as not all do). They also call for measures to take into account the social consequences of the environmental and climate crises.

Social and employment policies: MEPs welcome the proposals included in the Commission's work-life balance package, but further measures are needed to encourage employers' openness regarding flexible work arrangements. They therefore call on the Commission to make a proposal on a better reconciliation between private, family and professional life optimising the use and knowledge of ICT and new forms of work organisation, taking into consideration the needs and well-being of children. Member States are also called upon to provide for guaranteed minimum income schemes for social inclusion.

In order to combat early school leaving, MEPs call for school curricula to be adapted to tomorrow's job market, taking account of society's needs and technological developments. They call for the promotion of the concept of Second Chance Schools and informal and non-formal learning. In particular, MEPs call for the elimination of low-level and segregated education which has irreversible negative effects on marginalised groups, particularly on Roma. They also stress the need for more effective lifelong learning and training actions. MEPs stress, in particular, the need to improve education in Europe by dynamising the process of compatibility and comparability of the Member States' educational systems and promoting University-business cooperation.

In the light of the crisis, measures are also needed to ensure better worker participation in the decision-making process within companies. MEPs therefore reiterate their call for the further strengthening of the functioning of European works councils.

Other channels could also be explored, such as the possibility for unemployed persons to easily start their own entrepreneurial activity, via credit guarantees, reduced interest rates or a lump sum of unemployment benefits which, while also mitigating income loss, will help unemployed people find new jobs. MEPs also stress the importance of the social economy and microcredit to promote the social and economic reintegration of unemployed persons (particularly the long-term unemployed).

With regard to women, MEPs stress the vital need to support mothers, by means of family allowances during infancy and the creation of a suitable framework for their return to the labour market.

MEPs also call for the promotion of a stronger link between the implementation of flexicurity and the enhancement of social dialogue, respecting national customs and practices. Moreover, while recognising that Member States have competence for wage policy, MEPs suggest that social partners at national level discuss new methodologies for wage policies which could include higher financial participation of employees in companies' proceeds. According to MEPs, such schemes could allow for channelling employees' extra earnings to special capital funds created by companies. The debate should also focus on 'decent living wages', which guarantee minimum wages significantly above the adequate income level, to enable people to move out of poverty and to benefit positively from work.

Immigration: MEPs draw attention to the negative impact (possible brain drain) that immigration may have in the development process of the countries of origin. They therefore stress the importance of ethical recruitment from third countries, particularly with regard to health-care professionals. MEPs also stress that the long-term impact of immigration on the demographic change is uncertain since it depends on the volatility of migration flows, family reunification and fertility rates. Moreover, MEPs emphasise that immigrants can, when legally employed, contribute to the sustainable development of social security systems. Immigration policy should also promote a coherent and efficient strategy for the integration of migrant people on the basis of equal opportunities. Furthermore, MEPs consider that strengthening of the implementation and enforcement of existing labour laws under national and Community law and under ILO conventions must be a priority for the EU institutions and the Member States, as well as strengthening anti-discrimination laws.

The EU at an external level: MEPs consider that, in its external relations, the EU could have a more proactive role in promoting core social and environmental standards. MEPs also call for the setting of a decent work agenda capable of promoting compliance with ILO conventions. Moreover, MEPs consider that the EU should aim for a globalisation process that is more socially inclusive and economically and environmentally sustainable. The Commission is also called upon to actively promote the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Structural Funds: MEPs suggest strengthening the potential of structural funds, through simplification, flexibility and improvement of procedures, with the aim to help Member States to optimise the output of social and employment policies. According to MEPs, the renewed Social Agenda must make a clear commitment that EU structural and cohesion funds will help to achieve the objectives of the Social Agenda. They therefore call on the Member States to use the European Social Fund (ESF) and all the other Structural Funds not only in order to improve the employability of people but also the social infrastructure. They also call for particular attention to be given to the regions that are most affected by globalisation as well as to regions in the new Member States that are in the process of social convergence.

Instrumental actions: with regard to instrumental actions, MEPs make the following points:

Social and civil dialogue: according to MEPs, flexibility and acceptance of change by citizens can increase through more mutual trust which can be enhanced by a more effective and transparent social dialogue as well as ensuring more effective participative democracy in policy design and delivery. The social dialogue should encourage policies on health and safety at work and, in general, promote improvements in the quality of life. MEPs call on the Commission to launch a debate on how workers who are not in full-time employment (temporary workers, part-time workers, workers on fixed-term contracts) can be brought into the social dialogue. They also call for the promotion of awareness of the results of social dialogue as well as a wide debate between European stakeholders, national public authorities, employers and employees and civil society, about the social agenda for the post-2010 period.

MEPs also favour an effective dialogue between Parliament and civil society (which should be involved from the beginning of decision making processes). MEPs stress the importance and value of the consultation process as an effective tool in empowering citizens by enabling them to directly input into the policy process at EU level. They therefore call on the Commission to take further steps to raise awareness of future EU consultations via the media and other appropriate forums. According to MEPs, it is urgently necessary for the European institutions, national social partners and civil society to adopt a "social pact" encompassing social actions with realistic, binding targets and indicators.

EU law: MEPs call for an improvement of the law making process at the EU level, by making it clear why actions at the EU level are needed, ensuring the quality of the content and delivering strong and independent impact assessments covering the social, environmental and economic effects. In this context, MEPs stress that effective cooperation between Member States should be a priority and that better EU law-making should actively seek the involvement of civil society, thus bringing it closer to the EU.

Open Method of Coordination (OMC): MEPs consider that there should be a better linkage at the EU-level between economic and social policies, and their contribution to the eradication of poverty and social exclusion. They also stress the need for the adoption of a legally binding charter of fundamental social rights. Moreover, there should be a better linkage at the EU-level between economic, environmental and social policies.

Lastly, MEPs consider that the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy should cover a strengthened OMC.

Renewed social agenda

The European Parliament adopted by 403 votes to 51, with 12 abstentions, a resolution on the renewed social agenda.

The Parliament recalls that the major negative consequence for the EU arising from the current financial and economic crisis will be the dramatic increase of unemployment which will more severely affect the most vulnerable social groups. Moreover, recalling that employment still does not guarantee a route out of poverty for many people in the EU, the Parliament stresses that, in 2006, 16% of European citizens were at-risk-of-poverty and children, large families, single parents, unemployed people, people with disabilities, young people, elderly people, ethnic minorities and migrants are especially vulnerable.

In this context, the Parliament analyses the Commission's proposals in its renewed social agenda and considers that two large categories of measures should be implemented: priority actions and instrumental actions.

Priority actions: in this area, the Parliament focuses on the following points:

European social models: given the economic recession, the Parliament calls on the Council and the Commission to reaffirm the importance of a strong social Europe, incorporating sustainable, effective and efficient social and employment policies. It therefore calls on the Commission to develop an ambitious Social Policy Agenda for the period 2010-2015. The Commission is also called upon to:

- put forward a coherent policy plan on decent work in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU;
- combine the renewed social agenda with other initiatives such as the European pact for gender equality, the European Youth Pact and the European Alliance for families.

The Parliament is concerned that the measures proposed in the Commission communication are insufficiently coherent to impact on the current levels of poverty and exclusion in the EU and to address the current challenges to social cohesion. It therefore calls for proposals to achieve a balance between economical freedoms and social rights, particularly: (i) a directive providing for basic labour rights for all workers (regardless of employment status); (ii) a review of the Council Directive in order to reduce gender pay gaps; (iii) a directive on cross-border collective bargaining. The Parliament also considers that social policy should cover key actions such as combating discrimination and modernising the European social models while strengthening their values.

Although Member States are facing a serious economic crisis, the Parliament considers that this is not the time to reduce social expenditure but rather to reinforce structural reforms and support social services of general interest, by reaffirming the importance of their universal access, quality and sustainability. Therefore, the Parliament calls on the Commission to reaffirm the crucial role played by public services in the European Union by proposing a framework directive on services of general interest, guaranteeing their legal security. Moreover, it stresses the need to find ways to modernise and reform the national security systems to eradicate poverty with a long-term perspective (by reforming pensions systems and health care services through the improvement of their access and the establishment of a progressive taxation system).

Furthermore, the Parliament notes that some Member States have introduced the concept of a minimum wage. It suggests that other Member States might benefit from studying their experience and calls on the Member States to provide for regulations on such matters as minimum wages or other legal and generally binding arrangements or through collective agreements in accordance with national traditions that enable full-time workers to make a decent living from their earnings.

The Parliament also calls for measures to take into account the social consequences of the environmental and climate crises.

Social and employment policies: the Parliament welcomes the proposals included in the Commission's work-life balance package, but further measures are needed to encourage employers' openness regarding flexible work arrangements. It therefore calls on the Commission to make a proposal on a better reconciliation between private, family and professional life optimising the use and knowledge of ICT and new forms of work organisation, taking into consideration the needs and well-being of children. Member States are also called upon to provide for guaranteed minimum income schemes for social inclusion.

In order to combat early school leaving, the Parliament calls for school curricula to be adapted to tomorrow's job market, taking account of society's needs and technological developments. It calls for the promotion of the concept of Second Chance Schools and informal and non-formal learning. In particular, the Parliament calls for the elimination of low-level and segregated education which has irreversible negative effects on marginalised groups, particularly on Roma. It also stresses the need for more effective lifelong learning and training actions. The Parliament stressed, in particular, the need to improve education in Europe by dynamising the process of compatibility and comparability of the Member States' educational systems and promoting University-business cooperation.

In the light of the crisis, measures are also needed to ensure better worker participation in the decision-making process within companies. The Parliament therefore reiterates its call for the further strengthening of the functioning of European works councils. Other channels could also be explored, such as the possibility for unemployed persons to easily start their own entrepreneurial activity, via credit guarantees, reduced interest rates or a lump sum of unemployment benefits which, while also mitigating income loss, will help unemployed people find new jobs. The Parliament also stresses the importance of the social economy and microcredit to promote the social and economic reintegration of unemployed persons (particularly the long-term unemployed). With regard to women, the Parliament stresses the vital need to support mothers, by means of family allowances during infancy and the creation of a suitable framework for their return to the labour market.

The Parliament also calls for the promotion of a stronger link between the implementation of flexicurity and the enhancement of social dialogue, respecting national customs and practices. Moreover, while recognising that Member States have competence for wage policy, the Parliament suggests that social partners at national level discuss new methodologies for wage policies which could include higher financial participation of employees in companies' proceeds. According to the Parliament, such schemes could allow for channelling employees' extra earnings to special capital funds created by companies. The debate should also focus on 'decent living wages', which guarantee minimum wages significantly above the adequate income level, to enable people to move out of poverty and to benefit positively from work.

Immigration: the Parliament draws attention to the negative impact (possible brain drain) that immigration may have in the development process of the countries of origin. It therefore stresses the importance of ethical recruitment from third countries, particularly with regard to health-care professionals. The Parliament also stresses that the long-term impact of immigration on the demographic change is uncertain since it depends on the volatility of migration flows, family reunification and fertility rates. Moreover, it emphasises that immigrants can, when legally employed, contribute to the sustainable development of social security systems. Immigration policy should also promote a coherent and efficient strategy for the integration of migrant people on the basis of equal opportunities. Furthermore, the Parliament considers that strengthening of the implementation and enforcement of existing labour laws under national and Community law and under ILO conventions must be a priority for the EU institutions and the Member States, as well as strengthening anti-discrimination laws.

The EU at an external level: the Parliament considers that, in its external relations, the EU could have a more proactive role in promoting core social and environmental standards. It also calls for the setting of a decent work agenda capable of promoting compliance with ILO conventions. Moreover, the Parliament considers that the EU should aim for a globalisation process that is more socially inclusive and economically and environmentally sustainable. The Commission is also called upon to actively promote the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Structural Funds: the Parliament suggests strengthening the potential of structural funds, through simplification, flexibility and improvement of procedures, with the aim to help Member States to optimise the output of social and employment policies. According to the Parliament, the renewed Social Agenda must make a clear commitment that EU structural and cohesion funds will help to achieve the objectives of the Social Agenda. It therefore calls on the Member States to use the European Social Fund (ESF) and all the other Structural Funds not only in order to improve the employability of people but also the social infrastructure. It also calls for particular attention to be given to the regions that are most affected by globalisation as well as to regions in the new Member States that are in the process of social convergence.

Instrumental actions: with regard to instrumental actions, the Parliament makes the following points:

Social and civil dialogue: according to the Parliament, flexibility and acceptance of change by citizens can increase through more mutual trust which can be enhanced by a more effective and transparent social dialogue as well as ensuring more effective participative democracy in policy design and delivery. The social dialogue should encourage policies on health and safety at work and, in general, promote improvements in the quality of life. The Parliament calls on the Commission to launch a debate on how workers who are not in full-time employment (temporary workers, part-time workers, workers on fixed-term contracts) can be brought into the social dialogue. It also calls for the promotion of awareness of the results of social dialogue as well as a wide debate between European stakeholders, national public authorities, employers and employees and civil society, about the social agenda for the post-2010 period.

The Parliament also favours an effective dialogue between Parliament and civil society (which should be involved from the beginning of decision making processes). It stresses the importance and value of the consultation process as an effective tool in empowering citizens by enabling them to directly input into the policy process at EU level. It therefore calls on the Commission to take further steps to raise awareness of future EU consultations via the media and other appropriate forums. According to the Parliament, it is urgently necessary for the European institutions, national social partners and civil society to adopt a "social pact" encompassing social actions with realistic, binding targets and indicators.

EU law: the Parliament calls for an improvement of the law making process at the EU level, by making it clear why actions at the EU level are needed, ensuring the quality of the content and delivering strong and independent impact assessments covering the social, environmental and economic effects. In this context, the Parliament stresses that effective cooperation between Member States should be a priority and that better EU law-making should actively seek the involvement of civil society, thus bringing it closer to the EU.

Open Method of Coordination (OMC): the Parliament considers that there should be a better linkage at the EU-level between economic and social policies, and their contribution to the eradication of poverty and social exclusion. It also stresses the need for the adoption of a legally binding charter of fundamental social rights and considers that the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy should cover a strengthened OMC.