



# Citizens' Agora: EU should analyse the social impact of economic policies

Committees: Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

**The EU should analyse the social impact of all the economic measures it has taken so far, paying special attention to the most vulnerable groups of our society, agreed participants in the third Citizens' Agora, on economic crises and various forms of poverty, hosted by the European Parliament on 27 and 28 January. All three workshops and the consensus conference called on EU to put the citizen at the centre of all its policies.**

All three parallel workshops concluded that social exclusion and the new forms of poverty are some of the most serious problems that the EU has to face today. The consensus conference, which brought together 20 people over 60 years old who are in a situation of precariousness, concluded that much more attention has to be given to the vulnerable group of older people.

## **Assess the social impact of austerity measures**

The first workshop, on the economic and financial crisis and new forms of poverty, called on Parliament and other EU Institutions to monitor the social impact of budgetary austerity measures, highlighting that poverty existed even before the crisis. The workshop proposed that population groups affected by poverty should have access to basic banking and social services. It also called on Parliament to become a platform for debates with civil society and to put more pressure on the European Commission to table legislative initiatives on issues such as minimum income and household debt. The workshop also proposed that members and officials of EU Institutions should undergo training on the subject of poverty.

## **Guarantee protection of fundamental rights of all migrants**

The second workshop, on migration flows and integration processes, highlighted the issue of fundamental human rights, asking for the networking of civic platforms at European level in the field of immigration and integration. Participants called on Parliament to encourage recognition of the academic qualifications and professional experience of third-country nationals and to include in the proposed single permit directive a basis for guaranteeing protection of fundamental rights of all migrants. All participants agreed on the need to combat all forms of racism and discrimination in Europe and to promote an open concept of citizenship which includes all residents.

## **Make the citizen the focus of European policies and concerns**

The third workshop, on the access of persons in situation of precariousness to a decent and sustainable way of life, stressed the need to take a holistic approach when dealing with poverty. Participants argued that special attention should be given to vulnerable groups, including women, young people, the elderly, people with disabilities and immigrants. The workshop called for action to reduce the wage gap between men and women by 1% per year and proposed drawing up a roadmap with specific objectives and a range of indicators for combating poverty, with annual progress assessments.

## **Re-establish the inter-generational link and "educate" policy makers**

# Press release

The consensus conference looked at issues to do with the "cultural divide" (difficulties in participating in social life due to poverty) and the "digital divide" (lack of financial means and skills required skills to get easy access to new technologies). It highlighted the need to re-establish the inter-generational link, by acknowledging older people as a source of knowledge and valuable experience for society as a whole.

Participants also suggested that policymakers should spend part of their working time every year with civil society, to enable them to grasp the consequences of their policies. They also suggested that EU and its Member States should adopt cost-reduction schemes for the elderly and ensure effective access to all goods.

Participants asked for simpler and more accessible new technology devices to be developed and stressed that EU could encourage the creation of places and centres where older people can get free access to new technologies. These new technologies should not be seen only as tools, but also as means that improve the quality of social life and provide cheap communication channels with family members living far away.

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