



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY

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- Member State*
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- Individual citizen*
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- Other, please specify:*

Main area(s) covered by your contribution:

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- Single market*

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- Education*
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Your reply:

- can be published with your personal information*
- can be published in an anonymous way*
- cannot be published*

A) Background for the public consultation:

B) Questions:

1) Taking stock: the Europe 2020 strategy over 2010-2014

Content and implementation

- For you, what does the Europe 2020 strategy mean? What are the main elements that you associate with the strategy?

EASPD's understanding of the Europe 2020 strategy is that it should help to coordinate EU, Member State (MS) and local and regional policies towards achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth by 2020, as well as the give targets associated to it: employment, R&D, climate/energy, education and social inclusion and poverty reduction. We agree with the Commission that the achievement of these targets is key to reaching the overarching objective of Europe 2020.,

In terms of how the Europe 2020 strategy is currently being implemented, we believe that there is an imbalance in terms of how the economic dimension has become the main focus, with the social dimension coming second. Our understanding is that both dimensions should and, indeed, must go hand in hand if the Europe 2020 strategy is to be achieved. Indeed, for EASPD, the added value of the

strategy was that it brought together these two dimensions together, aligning them as both key to achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Yet, the ultimate objective of any growth, or economic and social policy, must be to ensure the well-being and inclusion of all in society. EASPD calls on the European Commission to make sure that this approach is their overall objective throughout their efforts to achieve growth within the 2020 strategy.

The emphasis on the economic dimension is even more clear in the European Semester process, which spends more time on recommending austerity measures –linked to the stability and growth pact- then on, for example, the benefits of social (and environmental) investment, as first included in the Europe 2020 strategy.

EASPD's understanding is that if a government invests on, for example, eliminating the barriers currently blocking the job creation potential of the social services sector, then it will receive significant, employment, economic and social return on the long run; thus a key factor in achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It is this element of social investment which we associate with the strategy, rather than the many austerity measures currently recommended to member states through the Country-Specific Recommendations. We call on the European Commission to do the same.

- Overall, do you think that the Europe 2020 strategy has made a difference? Please explain.

As a whole, EASPD does believe that the Europe 2020 strategy has made a difference, in particular visible through the alignment of the structural reforms and EU funding programmes with the Europe 2020 strategy's goals and objectives. The fact that most EU activities and policies are now framed within the objective of how they can contribute to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth is something we continue to welcome; although we also believe that this should be done within a wider framework of ensuring a fully inclusive and cohesive society.

However, we also believe that the Europe 2020 was a missed opportunity and that much more can be done in this area, by realigning the economic and social dimensions of the strategy onto the same page and focusing more on what brings social cohesion than simply on what brings growth. This would also help to bring the strategy closer to the European people who currently feel the European Union is not doing enough to alleviate the problems many of them are encountering on a day-to-day basis: unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, etc. Readjusting the focus could be the perfect response from the European institutions against the euroscepticism and europhobia currently held by a significant (and potentially increasing) amount of Europeans.

More can also be done with regard to the Partnership principle, as put forth by the strategy, to further involve civil society into the policy-making process. The European Commission should make sure that they involve civil society –as partners- in all policies they are seeking to propose. This would yet again help to re-enforce the relationship between the European institutions and the European people.

- Has there been sufficient involvement of stakeholders in the Europe 2020 strategy? Are you involved in the Europe 2020 strategy? Would you like to be more involved? If yes, how?

Although EASPD welcomes the strategy's emphasis on promoting partnership, much more can and should be done to involve civil society into the policy-making process. The European Commission should make sure that they involve civil society –as partners- in all policies they are seeking to propose, in particular as most policies can now be linked to achieving the Europe 2020 strategy. This would yet again help to re-enforce the relationship between the European institutions and the European people.

Member States should also be further encouraged to involve stakeholders in the development of policies. The European Commission should also create a framework helping Member States to better involve stakeholders in the European Semester process.

Tools

- Do the current targets for 2020 respond to the strategy's objectives of fostering growth and jobs? [Targets: *to have at least 75% of people aged 20-64 in employment; to invest 3% of GDP in research and development; to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20%, increase the share of renewables to 20% and improve energy efficiency by 20%; to reduce school drop-out rates to below 10% and increase the share of young people with a third-level degree or diploma to at least 40%; to ensure at least 20 million fewer people are at risk of poverty or social exclusion*].

We agree that the current 2020 targets respond to the strategy's objectives of fostering smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, which includes quality jobs. Yet, as previously mentioned, we believe that the imbalance between the economic and social policies are not allowing for the 2020 targets to be met, in particular those linked to poverty and social exclusion, as well as of course employment. Indeed, although the objectives are there on paper, there does not seem to be sufficient political will to actually achieve them. This will remain the case as long as the EU's economic and social objectives are not realigned and put on an equal basis, alongside the aforementioned objective to focus on social inclusion rather than simply on growth. As such, we propose the European Commission to put the principle of social (and environmental) investment at the very heart of its economic policy. Doing so would help to realign EU policy with the 2020 objectives and targets and European citizens themselves.

- Among current targets, do you consider that some are more important than others? Please explain.

It is clear that all the targets should be considered of equal value if we are to achieve the overarching objective of ensuring socially inclusive and cohesive Europe, through smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Indeed, each and every target, if properly achieved, will have a positive effect on the other

targets; thus creating a virtuous circle between the targets. As an example; investing in inclusive education is key to fighting poverty and social exclusion, as well as the other targets such as R&D and finding solutions to climate change.

- Do you find it useful that EU-level targets are broken down into national targets? If so, what is, in your view, the best way to set national targets? So far, have the national targets been set appropriately/too ambitiously/not ambitiously enough?

It is particularly useful to have EU-level targets broken down into national targets. However, there is also a problem that some Member States may have chosen less ambitious targets. As such, the European Commission should consider encouraging some Member States to set more ambitious targets, including those who are performing best.

Furthermore, it is also important that policy recommendations (CSRs) to Member States should take into account the state of play of the given country vis-à-vis of their targets. This should be done by re-aligning the economic and social dimensions of the country's policies by bringing social aspects back into Europe's (macro-)economic policy.

- What has been the added value of the seven action programmes for growth? Do you have concrete examples of the impact of such programmes? [*"Flagship initiatives": "Digital agenda for Europe", "Innovation Union", "Youth on the move", "Resource efficient Europe", "An industrial policy for the globalisation era", "Agenda for new skills and jobs", "European platform against poverty"*].

The European Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (EPAP) has yet to be properly implemented in order to fully achieve its aim "to help EU countries reach the headline target of lifting 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020".

This has already been confirmed by the European Commission in its Communication on "Taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy" which states that EPAP has not succeeded in creating a coherent and integrated framework for social policies. EASPD would support this statement, with strong regrets with regard to the apparent lack of commitment by the European Commission in implementing this tool.

The most important problem of EPAP is coherence. There does not seem to be any coordination between the many instruments and process in the social field (EPAP, social OMC, the Social Investment Package, the European Semester and the EU structural funds) to achieve the poverty target.

Another flaw is the lack of added value coming out of the Annual Convention of the EPAP. Currently, not enough is done to take full advantage of these conventions. A possible solution to this would be for the Convention to issue key messages and recommendations which could be put forward and presented to the European institutions, including the European Council, and also taken into account in the European Semester.

Although EASPD welcomes the Youth Guarantee as a move in the right direction, we also strongly regret that it is not suited for persons with support needs who have equally the right to employment but who are often most excluded from the labour market. By not adapting the youth guarantee to these needs, it is in reality excluding those most vulnerable even more from the labour market. Therefore, we strongly encourage the European Commission and Member States to include within the Youth Guarantee framework, an action plan to develop programmes to help those with support needs into the labour market.

2) Adapting the Europe 2020 strategy: the growth strategy for a post-crisis Europe

Content and implementation

- Does the EU need a comprehensive and overarching medium-term strategy for growth and jobs for the coming years?

Yes. Although it is also important to act immediately to help create inclusive growth and jobs in the short-term, a comprehensive and overarching medium-term strategy would be welcomed to give a vision to all activities done by the European institutions. Such a strategy would, however, have to re-affirm the importance of focusing primarily on creating social cohesion through the alignment of economic and social policies, something which –although included in the Europe 2020 strategy- is not currently being put in place.

Such a strategy should also include action plans to [unlock the job creation potential](#) of key growth sectors such as for the social (and health) services sector. Changing demographic trends are increasing the demand for social services, yet several barriers remain which are stopping this potential from being fully taken advantage of; such as the reduction in public funding in the sector, the gender and age imbalance, the difficult working patterns, problems regarding professional qualifications and training, as well as migration in the social care sector. An EU action plan on the matter – included as part of a comprehensive and overarching medium-term strategy for growth and jobs- could play a key part in achieving the Europe 2020's objective. The 300 billion EUR Jobs, Growth and Investment Package –as promoted by Jean Claude Juncker- should also take into account [what could be achieved by unlocking the job creation potential of the sector](#).

Furthermore, we also believe that social dialogue should be further used within the framework of the 2020 strategy. Indeed, without strong social dialogue structures, it is difficult for social partners to discuss and tackle the real issues at stake, which therefore effects the attractiveness of the sector and consequently damages job creation and growth. This is particularly the case for the social services sector, which has does not have particularly strong social dialogue structures in each and every EU Member State. Therefore, the EU should do more to support social dialogue within its work and, in particular, within the 2020 strategy.

Job Creation for people with disabilities is also a key issue to be tackled if the EU is to achieve its 2020 employment targets, or go beyond and achieve a truly inclusive society. Indeed, according to statistics from the European Disability Federation, close to [80% of disabled people](#) are fully excluded from the workforce. As up to [80 million Europeans are disabled](#), it goes without saying that only

through a strong increase in the employment of disabled people in society will the 2020 strategy targets be reached. However, the employment of persons with disabilities should not only be understood as a statistical objective to be achieved, it should primarily be understood as the human right of “persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis, with others” as is stated in Art. 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a convention ratified by the European Union. Therefore, any EU strategy for growth and jobs should include persons with disabilities through a twin track approach to mainstreaming: on the one hand, mainstreaming disability into all EU policies; on the other hand, making sure that disability-specific policies and actions are also put in place to support the employment of persons with disabilities in society. These policies should also fully take into account the important role service providers play in supporting the employment of persons with disabilities, as stated in Article 27.

- What are the most important and relevant areas to be addressed in order to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth?

EASPD believes that inclusive education, equal access to employment (including for persons with disabilities) and long-term care are key areas in which to achieve what should be the overall objective to create a truly inclusive society, potentially through smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. These three terms are indeed important in enabling persons with disabilities to be fully included and participating in society; something which is key not only to growth, but to achieving these individual’s rights. In addition, political investment in the sector which supports such activities (the social and health services sector) is also key to creating millions of jobs throughout Europe; jobs whose main objective is to create additional social cohesion throughout the continent.

- What new challenges should be taken into account in the future?

For our sector, there are many significant challenges which need to be further taken into account. Due to the rise of people in need of social and health support/care throughout Europe, there is an important need to respond to this with sufficient quality, inclusive and affordable services. Yet with the diminishing public funding to the social sector, social service providers are having to do more work, with less funding. This is one of the key challenges for Europe in the coming years. Yet, it also represents an opportunity. If properly financed and supported, the social and health services sector could help to create several million jobs in Europe within the next few decades, as well as to provide important support/care for millions of Europeans.

Nonetheless, financing is not the only problem our sector is encountering. Problems such as the gender and age imbalance, the lack of professional training and qualifications, the often below-average working conditions, etc all represent key barriers to allowing the sector achieve its job creation, economic and social potential.

It is also clear that the achievement of such potential will be an important factor if the EU is to achieve its 2020 targets, not only in terms of the employment it creates in the sector, but also in the fact that an important part of the sector’s work consists in supporting those most excluded in Europe

to participate and be included in society; often but not always through employment, education and training.

A lack of uptake in technology in the health and social sector is also a key challenge which needs to be tackled in the future, especially as it could lead to new jobs throughout the economy but also improve the quality as well as diminish the cost of these important social services. It is even more necessary to invest in creating innovative technologies in the sector due to the rising demographic trends we are encountering today

- How could the strategy best be linked to other EU policies?

It is key to create an effective model for disability policy co-ordination, which would need to be consistent with mechanisms for monitoring and implementing both the Europe 2020 strategy and the UN Convention reporting processes.

Furthermore, it could be crucial to put more emphasis on the social impact assessments of all EU policies in order to get a better understanding of how each and every policy (including the recommendations made to Member States in the European Semester) affects the Europe 2020 targets, and in particular the (more) social ones. This would also be in accordance to the horizontal social clause (article 9) of the EU treaty which states that “in defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health”. It is clear to see how this article fits in with the Europe 2020 targets. The European Commission should use the objectives mentioned in Art. 9 and align them to the Europe 2020 strategy. The EU must further use and take into account social impact assessments in all its activities, including in the European Semester when recommending –for example- additional austerity measures.

- What would improve stakeholder involvement in a post-crisis growth strategy for Europe? What could be done to increase awareness, support and better implementation of this strategy in your country?

It is clear that further transparency and consultation is key to help address the concerns of many Europeans. This public consultation is an opportunity for civil society to express their views on the Europe 2020 strategy, and how it can be better implemented. It should go without saying but it is key that the European Commission properly listens to the responses to consultations if the Union is to quell the rising euroscepticism and Europhobia throughout Europe.

In order to improve stakeholder involvement, stronger guidelines for public authorities to work with civil society –as part of the partnership principle- should be put in place; in particular with regard to the European Semester which still fails to properly include the general public within its framework; at both European and, especially, National level.

Tools

- What type of instruments do you think would be more appropriate to use to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth?

As mentioned previously, to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, it is key for the Commission to improve the quality and make further use of the Social Impact Assessments for each and every EU policy and activity. Such Assessments should also go hand in hand with how they contribute to achieving the Europe 2020 targets. Furthermore, we would also recommend the European Commission to perform an ex-ante coordination of fiscal, economic and social EU policies, fully taking into account the outcome of the Social Impact Assessments.

Additionally, the European Commission should complement the Social Scoreboard with a system which triggers preventive and corrective actions once the (constantly reviewed) indicators in the scoreboard reach a certain value.

And last but not least, the European Commission should do more work in getting a better understanding of the relationship between quality of life and the quality of services, notably through further research on the matter. Only through a better understanding of how quality services affect the quality of life of many Europeans can we truly achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

- What would best be done at EU level to ensure that the strategy delivers results? What would best be done at Member State level?

It is necessary to make better use of the EPAP, and in particular to make further use of the outcomes of the EPAP Conventions; by for example, allowing the participants to present the recommendations to the other European institutions such as the European Council. .

The EU cannot achieve the 2020 strategy if it is not to better balance its economic and social policies and recommendations, and place further emphasis on social investment. A Communication presenting an action plan on how to unlock the job creation potential in the social and health services sector is key to this.

An improved use of the Social Impact Assessments of EU policies and activities, and how they help achieve the 2020 strategy, is also essential; for reasons previously mentioned.

The EU could also help provide funding for civil society networks to properly monitor the implementation of national reform programmes and progress made in the reforms of the social services sector in many MS.

- How can the strategy encourage Member States to put a stronger policy focus on growth?

The strategy can start by doing more on the concept of social investment and how investment into the social sector brings back economic and social return. A possible action would be to issue a study to get more research on data and best practices in this area. As previously mentioned, social investment is key to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as not only does it help to create jobs in

an important growth potential sector, but it can also contribute to bringing previously excluded people back into taking an active part in society.

The European Semester process could also further take into account the necessity to balance both economic and social recommendations in its country specific recommendations. Both dimensions could and should go hand in hand.

Moreover, it is important to consider that “growth” is only a means to an end, with the latter being the overall well-being of all members of society. A strong emphasis on growth should thus be understood in this context. As such, the European Commission should encourage Member States policy makers to put more focus on growth, but only if strong consideration is also given to strengthening their social sector which contributes significantly to this well-being; namely (but not only) public services, social and health services, education, housing services, etc.

- Are targets useful? Please explain.

Targets are indeed useful as they help to point Member States in the right direction and also help to hold governments accountable for their activities. However, it is also clear that the Strategy does not challenge the emphasis on growth, rather on focusing on creating a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable society; something which should –by all means- be the end objective of all public authorities. Indeed, the employment targets are important for getting people back into jobs, yet what creates an inclusive and sustainable society is the creation of quality jobs and active inclusion.

- Would you recommend adding or removing certain targets, or the targets in general? Please explain.

As such, it might be important to introduce new targets regarding employment, focusing primarily on quality jobs and active inclusion, rather than simply on employment, which could/does encourage governments to focus on the creation of poor quality jobs and working conditions, something which does not tend to lead towards sustainability, nor inclusiveness.

Furthermore, regarding poverty, it might also be important to establish targets regarding the accessibility, affordability and effectiveness of quality social (and health) services in Europe, as these type of services are often key to fighting poverty, but also social exclusion. This is especially the case due to the fact that waiting lists for quality and affordable services have strongly increased since the beginning of the financial crisis, in huge parts due to the cuts in public funding.

- What are the most fruitful areas for joint EU-Member State action? What would be the added value?

Additional research is a key area for joint EU-Member State action which has yet to be fully taken advantage of, especially in the social/human rights field. If Europe is to fight exclusion and poverty, it

is key for the Union to have more data on the current state of play, what leads to such a state of play, and what works in fighting it.

3) Do you have any other comment or suggestion on the Europe 2020 strategy that you would like to share?

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Please send your contribution, along with any other documents, to SG-EUROPE2020-CONSULTATION@ec.europa.eu.