

Consultation for the PES Manifesto for the European elections 2009 (New Social Europe) – Answers to selected questions

What should the EU's priorities be for Social Europe?

For Caritas Europa combating poverty and social exclusion is a main priority for EU action in this area.

What are the biggest problems facing working people and citizens today?

Caritas Europa observes that poverty is a persisting challenge. It is not resolved yet. On the contrary, the at-risk of poverty rate has been rising over the last couple of years in most EU Member States. According to Eurostat figures, more than 79 million people in the EU currently live in poverty or are at risk of falling into poverty. The difference in income between the rich and the poor has widened within most Member States over the last decade.

Child poverty is particularly evident. According to a recent report of the European Commission, one in five children in the EU live below the poverty line. These are truly alarming figures given their impact on the level of persistent poverty. Giving children a good start is essential for their further lives. Losing out on it at this stage has long-lasting effects on the individual and, in both social and economic terms, the society as a whole.

How can the EU promote gender equality?

Caritas Europa welcomes the double approach of gender mainstreaming and positive measures for men and women in EU policies as an instrument to address specific gender-related phenomena such as the feminisation of poverty.

However, the organisation underlines that policies still need to respond better to particular vulnerabilities of either women or men. An example of this is that, so far, little attention is paid to the feminisation of migration. Migration often leaves particularly women severely exposed to violence, including sexual violence, health risks and often as a consequence, to poverty. Poverty is also often a cause for migration.

Which priorities and policies should the EU develop in the area of immigration and integration of migrants?

Integration is a long-term multidimensional and dynamic process. It aims at ensuring equal opportunities for the participation of all members of society irrespective of cultural or religious background, age, gender or nationality. Integration takes place throughout the social structure of society and implies mutuality as well as shared rights and responsibility.

In its advocacy paper "Integration: A Process Involving All", Caritas Europa defines the following principles as basic prerequisites for integration.

- **Respect for fundamental rights**

Democratic structures and the rule of law, together with freedom of expression and other fundamental rights codified in international law and in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights are to be respected by all human beings. Governments have the responsibility to guarantee that every person can enjoy these human rights.

- **Equality**

Equality requires that all members of the society, especially those at risk of exclusion, be accorded equal treatment. Migrants should therefore be treated in the same way as any other members of the society. Providing equal opportunities requires special measures such as accessibility to rights and services, information, orientation and training.

- **Participation**

Participation is the lynchpin of integration – the two are inseparable. There can be no integration without participation and there can be no participation without an integration process taking place. Governments, opinion leaders and civil society in general have to develop a strategy that facilitates participation and makes the economic, social, cultural and physical environment accessible and welcoming to migrants.

What should the EU budget be spent on?

In its contribution to the Consultation in View of the 2008/2009 Budget Review – Reforming the Budget, Changing Europe (SEC - 2007 - 1188 final), Caritas Europa underlines that the EU budget spending priorities should not focus too strongly on purely economic issues. For the organisation the argumentation that social inclusion quasi automatically goes hand in hand with economic progress falls short of reality. While progress may have been made in recent years as regards jobs and growth, this has not resulted in greater social cohesion. Economic growth and high-quality jobs are not a guarantee of social progress and social cohesion. On the contrary, the lack of priority and visibility of the social dimension in the EU budget and its policies is in contrast to alarming social challenges.

The introduction of a pillar for social cohesion in the EU budget is not enough. EU spending should be consistently analysed and monitored in view of the effect it might have on the reduction or increase of the relative poverty level. When designing, implementing and monitoring policies, the leading principle should always be the focus on the situation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion as they are the most vulnerable. The effects EU policies might have on the relative poverty level of any grouping (unemployed, lone parents, children etc.) in any geographical locality in the EU and elsewhere have to be consistently assessed and EU policies - if necessary - have to be modified accordingly. This poverty proofing principle should apply equally in all EU policies and in all EU funding in view of its impact on poverty levels in the EU and outside.

Regarding the effects on developing countries and their potential adverse effects in other parts of the world, Caritas Europa very much welcomes the introduction of the Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) instrument, established in 2005, as a valuable instrument that should be maintained by all means and strongly reinforced. Issues of concern include for example subsidies to the agricultural sector in the EU or the promotion of bio-fuel within the EU that may have adverse effects for farmers and peoples in the South.

In order to ensure effectiveness of both poverty proofing and PCD, the EU should clearly show every year how the EU budget does have a positive impact on the reduction of poverty in the EU and in developing countries or, at least, how it does not have a negative impact. The EU, in its coordinating function in social policy, should also strongly encourage the Member States to use these instruments in the design, implementation and monitoring of their national policies.