

SOCIAL AGENDA

ISSUE N° 24 • July 2010

Promoting Roma inclusion: the way forward

Tinker, tailor, soldier or sailor?

Gender equality: is enough being done?



EDITORIAL

For more than a thousand years, the Roma have been an integral part of European civilisation. Today, with an estimated population of 10 to 12 million people, Roma are the biggest ethnic minority in Europe, present in all 27 EU Member States. Most Roma are EU citizens. However, their situation is characterised by persistent discrimination and social exclusion. Within the EU's jurisdiction, the Roma communities have not reaped the benefits of sustained economic growth. And until recently, Roma-related issues remained conspicuously absent from the political agenda of most Member States as well as the EU. However since the turn of the century, transformations in the political, institutional and economic fields have brought about a qualitative leap in the social inclusion of Roma and the reduction of the inequalities affecting them. The enlargement of the EU to countries with large Roma minorities, accompanied by large-scale Roma migratory movements towards Western Europe, has significantly increased the salience of Roma-related issues on the European agenda. Meanwhile, Central and Eastern European states have had an unprecedented opportunity to use Structural Funds, in particular the European Social Fund, for the economic and social development of the Roma population. The EU in particular has constituted a crucial vector for placing the Roma on administrations' political agenda, and demonstrated a willingness to take leadership in addressing problems specific to the Roma. The September 2008 European Roma summit was the first initiative of its kind and helped

"Most Roma are EU citizens. However, their situation is characterised by persistent discrimination and social exclusion."

putting Roma-related issues firmly at the top of the EU's political agenda. In this edition's "Special feature", which begins on page 15, we take a close look at EU action promoting Roma inclusion. We report on the second Roma summit, which took place in Córdoba in April, and we look at the ways in which the Commission proposes to contribute to the social and economic integration of the Roma as set out in a recent policy paper. And finally, we examine the role of the Social Fund as one of the financial instruments available to member States to fund activities promoting Roma inclusion.

Elsewhere in the magazine we examine public perceptions of gender equality in the European Union, which show that fighting violence against women and closing the gender pay-gap are the most pressing issues for European citizens. The subject of this issue's feature, meanwhile, is the need to develop the new skills required by the jobs of the future.

In our regular interview we ask Commission Vice-president Viviane Reding how she intends to foster the promotion of equality and non-discrimination during her term in office as Commissioner in charge of fundamental rights. And in our "Other voices" feature on page 26 European Roma Information Office director Ivan Ivanov gives his views on Roma inclusion.

Robert Verrue

Focus On:



© Beiga Pictures

Promoting Roma inclusion: the way forward

An estimated 10 to 12 million Roma live in different EU countries, often in difficult conditions. The European Union aims at promoting their full inclusion into society at all levels. p.15



© 123RF

Tinker, tailor, soldier or sailor?

What kinds of jobs will be available in 10 years? How are the needs for skills and competences changing all over the EU? And are the right education and training being provided today to help Europeans find a job in the future? p. 7



© Van Parys Media

Gender equality: is enough being done?

European citizens believe that gender inequalities are still widespread in society, despite major progress in the last ten years. The gender pay-gap and domestic violence top people's concerns. p. 21

CONTENTS

EMPLOYMENT

Tinker, tailor, soldier or sailor?

7

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Economic crisis: counting the social costs

11

MICROFINANCE

EU offers support to budding entrepreneurs

13

SPECIAL FEATURE

Promoting Roma inclusion: the way forward

15

Promoting policies in favour of Roma population

16

Commission unveils programme for Roma inclusion

18

From commitment to action: the European Social Fund and the Roma

19

GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality: is enough being done?

21

SOCIAL DIALOGUE

From strength to strength – the European social dialogue

24

OTHER VOICES

Roma integration, a long-lasting process

26

ITEMS

News in brief

4

Interview with Viviane Reding, European Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental rights and Citizenship

27

Recent publications

28

Useful websites

28



© European Union



© Belga Pictures



© European Union



© 123RF

A magazine providing information on European employment and social policies, Social Agenda is published in English, French and German by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

Editor in chief: Robert Verrue, Director-General, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities – European Commission, B-1049 Brussels

65,000 copies of this issue were published. Subscription is free on request – please contact: European Commission, Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG – InfoCentre, B-1049 Brussels, Fax.: (32-2) 296 23 93; <http://ec.europa.eu/social/contact>

Notice: Neither the European Commission, nor any person acting on its behalf, may be held responsible for the use to which information contained in this publication may be put, or for any errors which, despite careful preparation and checking, may appear. • © European Union, 2010

Non-commercial reproduction authorised, subject to acknowledgement of the source.

For any use or reproduction of photos which are not under European Union copyright, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holder(s).

© Cover photo: Getty Images

NEWS IN BRIEF

GENERAL



The Commission's spring forecast confirms that the economic recovery is in progress in the EU. After having

experienced the deepest recession in its history, the EU economy is set to grow by 1% in 2010 and 1¾% in 2011. This implies an upward revision of ¼ percentage point for this year from the Commission's autumn forecast, as the EU countries benefit from a stronger external environment. Nevertheless, weak domestic demand continues to restrain the pace of recovery. The speed of recovery forecast varies across EU countries, reflecting their individual circumstances and the policies they pursue. Labour market conditions have shown some signs of stabilisation recently, with the unemployment rate projected to peak this year at a lower level than forecast earlier, yet at close to 10% in the EU. The temporary fiscal measures put in place have been key in turning the EU economy around, but also added to the public deficit, which is set to rise to 7¼% of GDP in 2010, before falling back slightly in 2011. ■■

EMPLOYMENT AND EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND

There could be as much as 10 million fewer jobs in the EU over the next decade as a result of the current economic crisis, though employment levels in the EU are expected to recover so that they almost reach 2008 levels by 2020, according to a new report released on 4 May by Cedefop, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training. In total, around 77 million job openings are forecast for the next decade. A large majority of these jobs, around 70 million, will be to replace retiring workers as the EU's population ages. The report confirms that the transition towards a service economy will intensify and anticipates that almost seven million new jobs will be created, predominately in knowledge- and skill-intensive occupations, such as high-level managerial roles and professional or technical jobs. In parallel, it is expected that 'routine' jobs will decline with, for example, around four million job losses projected for skilled manual workers and two million for office clerks. ■■

Ninety-three billion €, or 27% of EU funding, has been allocated to projects for investment in jobs and growth in Europe over the last three years, according to a report on the EU's cohesion programmes for the 2007-2013 period. Presented by Commissioners Johannes Hahn (Regional Policy) and László Andor (Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion), the report assesses, for the first time, the rate of progress of each country on delivering agreed EU objectives. It shows how well Member States



aligned their programmes to EU goals of jobs and growth and contributes to an open debate on achievements and challenges of cohesion policy programmes. Furthermore the report calls on Member States to improve the implementation of programmes, to make optimal use of the cohesion money, for instance in the rail sector, key energy and environment projects and the field of social inclusion. ■■

WORK ORGANISATION, WORKING CONDITIONS AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE

On 28 April the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work launched a campaign to promote Safe Maintenance at work. Failure to maintain the work environment and poor standards of maintenance are a major cause of occupational diseases (e.g. from exposure to asbestos, biological agents, etc.) and accidents. It is estimated that 10-15% of all accidents and 10-15% of fatal accidents at the workplace are maintenance-related. The Campaign is linked to the EU's health and safety strategy, which aims to achieve a 25% reduction in accidents at work by 2012. ■



The European Commission has requested the views of workers' and employers' representatives on the options for reviewing EU rules on working time, in a first step towards a comprehensive review of the Directive. The first stage consultation, launched on 24 March, asks the European social partners whether action is needed at EU level on the Working Time Directive and what scope it should take. Previous attempts to revisit the existing legislation reached an impasse in April 2009. In the meantime, other issues have been added to the debate, reflecting fundamental changes in the world of work over the past twenty years. For example, average weekly working hours in the EU have fallen from 39 hours in 1990 to 37.8 hours in 2006 and the share of part-time workers in the workforce increased from 14% in 1992 to 18.8% in 2009. There is also more and more variation in individuals' working time over the year and over working life, reflecting more emphasis on work-life balance measures such as flexitime and time credit systems, as well as increasing workers' autonomy in parallel with the expansion of the knowledge-based economy. ■

PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

The European Union awarded the "For Diversity. Against Discrimination" journalism prize to German daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* for raising awareness of discrimination. Kathrin Löther, a young student journalist from Germany, won first prize for her article "Das Lieben der Anderen" ("The Love of Others"), published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. The winning article addresses the issue of love between people with disabilities, raising awareness of this topic in a warm and human way. István Balla was the runner-up winner for his article in the Hungarian online magazine *Figyelőnet* on the living conditions of Roma children (Mit látnak Budapestből a cigány gyerekek? ("What do Roma Children See of Budapest?")). Finnish journalist Hanna Nikkanen received a special award for "Kerrossten välissä" ("Stuck in between"). Her article in the monthly magazine *Voima* tells the story of a migrant facing poverty in Finland. ■



On 7 April 2010 the Commission adopted a Communication outlining an ambitious mid-term programme to meet the biggest challenges for Roma inclusion. These include using the Structural Funds, including the European Social Fund – which together represent almost half of the EU's budget – to support Roma inclusion; taking Roma issues into account in all relevant policy areas at national and EU level, from employment to urban development and from public health to EU expansion, and harnessing the potential of Roma communities to support inclusive growth as part of the Europe 2020 strategy.

A separate report released by the Commission on the same day evaluates the progress achieved in integration over the past two years. Although the situation of many of Europe's Roma people remains difficult, significant progress has been made at both at EU and at national level. Over the past two years, the EU and its Member States have focused on making anti-discrimination laws and EU funding more effective in promoting Roma inclusion, for instance by helping to fight discrimination, segregation and racist violence as well as supporting programmes to address the vicious circle of poverty, social marginalisation, low school achievement and poor housing and health. ■

GENDER EQUALITY

On 5 March the European Commission strengthened and deepened its commitment to equality between women and men with the adoption of a Women's Charter. The Charter is a political declaration setting out five key areas for action, and commits the Commission to building a gender perspective into all its policies for the next five years while taking specific measures to promote equality. The areas singled out for action are equality in the labour market, equal pay for equal work and work of equal value, equality in decision-making, dignity,

integrity and an end to gender-based violence, and the promotion of gender equality beyond the EU. The Charter will be followed by a new strategy for gender equality which will provide a coordinated framework for action across all EU policies. ■■



MOBILITY



New rules on social security coordination in the European Union entered into force on 1 May 2010. The new rules will make it easier for people to move to other European

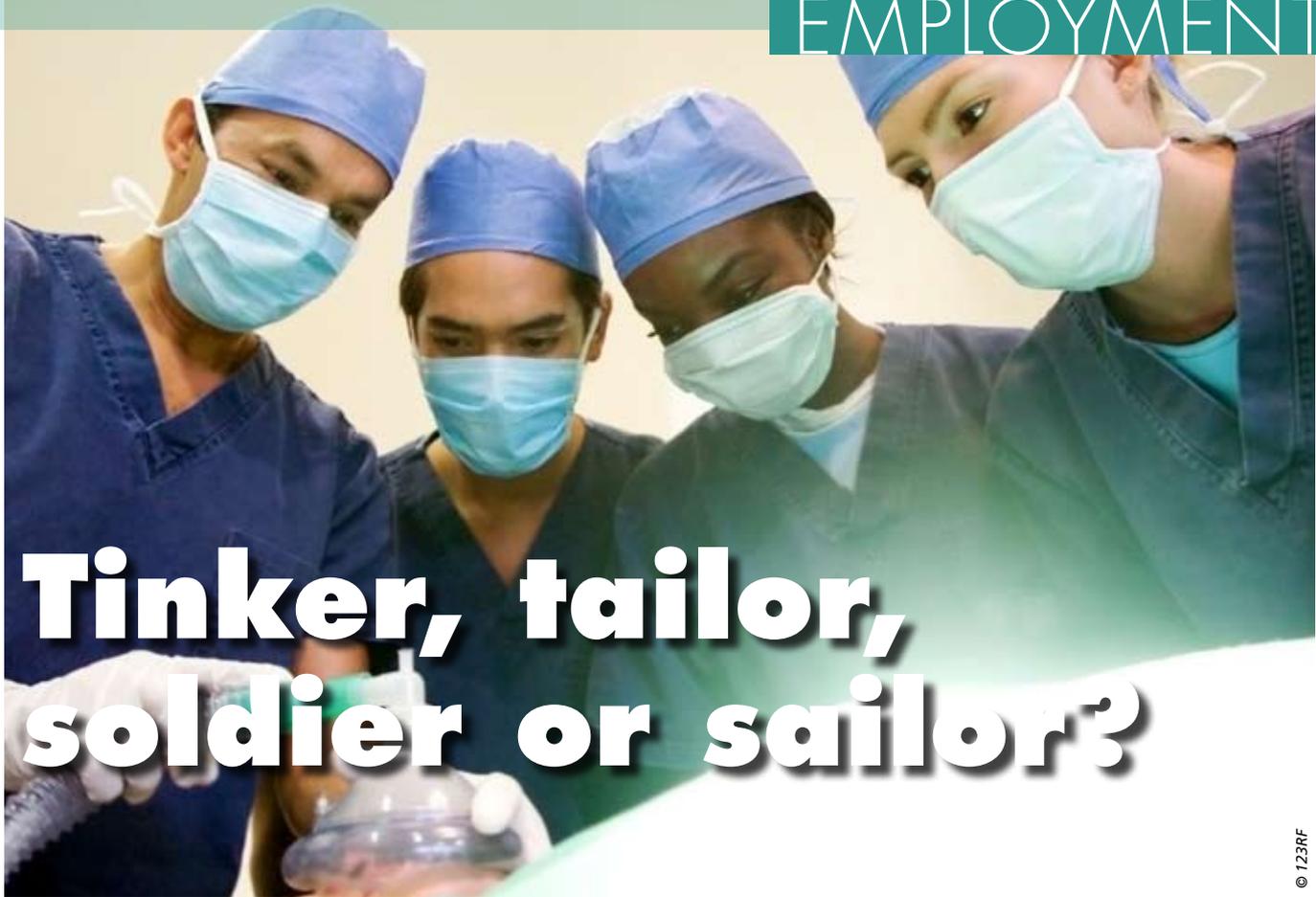
countries to work, helping to promote worker mobility in the EU – a pillar of the EU's new strategy for jobs and growth "Europe 2020". They will also help pensioners, job seekers and tourists. New rules will facilitate intra-EU mobility, namely for workers, but also for young people and other citizens. The principles that have governed coordination since 1959 will still apply, but the new rules will ensure a better protection of citizens' rights, by making the services provided by social security institutions more citizen-friendly, by enhancing co-operation among EU countries, by developing the electronic exchange of information and by simplifying existing rules. According to Eurostat, in 2008 around 11.3 million EU citizens or 2.3% of the overall EU population lived in another Member State to that of which they were a national. Over a million people cross a border every day for work. ■■

INTERNATIONAL EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

The first ever meeting of G20 Labour and Employment Ministers took place in Washington DC on April 20 and 21, 2010. Ministers reviewed the global labour market situation and looked at ways to promote job creation and strengthen social protection systems and labour market policies. Discussions also covered ways to prepare the global workforce for a post-crisis economy and how to improve the quality of jobs as well as preparing the workforce for future opportunities and challenges. Unable to attend the meeting in person due to volcanic ash paralyzing air travel in and out of Europe, Employment and Social Affairs Commissioner László Andor addressed G20 Ministers by video message. He stressed the central role of employment and poverty reduction in national and world-

wide economic strategies, laying the foundation for strong, sustained and balanced growth. ■■





Tinker, tailor, soldier or sailor?

© 123RF

Improving and adapting people's skills is crucial to creating and filling the jobs of tomorrow

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a more highly-skilled workforce is a more employable workforce. In every single EU country unemployment rates systematically vary with qualification levels. The more highly qualified a worker is, the greater the likelihood that he or she will be in work. The employment rate for those with high skill levels across the EU as a whole is close to 84%, that for medium skill levels is just over 70%, but that for low skill levels is only about 48%. And in just about every EU country the more highly qualified workers are, the more they earn on average. It is perhaps

no surprise that over the last three years in the EU the number of jobs employing people with higher level skills has actually increased, while the number of jobs employing people with low level skills has decreased. And yet, despite progress in recent years, much of Europe is still not sufficiently skilled. Nearly one third of Europe's population aged 25-64, or around 77 million people, have no, or low, formal qualifications and only one quarter have high level qualifications. Those with low qualifications are much less likely to upgrade their skills and follow lifelong learning.

Another major challenge is to ensure that people have the right skills. This is not just a question of short-term employability, but of Europe's capacity to adapt to and shape the jobs of tomorrow. During the last decade education and training systems in Europe have become more relevant and responsive to the needs of society, but labour market mismatches still exist and create the painful and wasteful situation of both skill shortages and skill gaps co-existing with unemployment.

Future demographic trends will add further pressure to tackle this challenge. Europe is witnessing a shift to a society in which the older segment of the workforce and the elderly will form a new majority. And in terms of the labour force, the only expected actual growth is amongst those aged over 50. The numbers of over-65's



© 123RF

in relation to those aged 15-64 will increase from 26% in 2008 to 38% by 2030. The growing number of older people will require more care and medical support and therapies in their homes or in senior citizen residences. By 2020, the largest number of job vacancies – both newly created jobs and vacancies to replace people leaving for retirement – is expected to come from this sector, the so-called ‘white jobs’.

But the biggest impact of demographics is on the supply side: on people and their skills. There will be fewer and fewer young people to

graduate from schools and universities, and the working age population will start to actually decline from 2013 onwards. Between 1985 and 2007, the numbers of people in the EU aged under 30 fell by nearly 30 million (or 14%): the overall population of working age in the period between 2007 and 2020 is likely to decline by 6 million. Clearly, with an increasing dependency ratio, those in work also need to become more productive in order to support those outside the labour market. To help compensate for this, it will be necessary to secure an increase in labour market participation – in particular of women and

of older workers. Proactive immigration policies, ‘reaching out’ to talent and skills, will need to be another component of a long-term solution to the threat of labour shortages in Europe. And, critically, it is vital to get the unemployed back to work, not only as an aim in itself but to reduce the waste of talent, skills and human capital that it represents.

Let’s take a look at the figures: according to Eurostat, there are 22.9 million unemployed people in the EU, including more than 5 million young people. It is an economic, social and personal burden which falls particularly heavily on the low skilled. Even in the best case, it is likely that employment growth in Europe will only recover gradually over the next decade. But it is not all doom and gloom: some 80 million job opportunities are expected to arise in the next decade, according to the latest projections by Cedefop, the EU’s reference centre for vocational education and training. Of these, almost 7 million jobs will be brand new, and most of them will require a more highly-skilled workforce. The question is, do we have the right skills to fill them?

Although there will be job openings for all types of occupations it is estimated that most new jobs will be in knowledge- and skill-intensive occupations, such as high level

Anticipating skills needs at EU level

- The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training – **Cedefop** – has begun developing medium- to long-term skills forecasting at EU level, broken down by country, with the first results published in 2008. Forecasts of skills needs measured by occupation and level of educational attainment will be updated every two years. In addition, skill supply projections will be devised to indicate possible imbalances in the labour market.
- The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions – **EUROFOUND** – through its European Monitoring Centre on Change, also conducts research and in-depth studies on change processes in specific economic sectors.
- Finally, the **Commission** is developing a range of ad-hoc studies looking at skills needs, in particular under the Sixth Framework Programme for Research and the EU’s employment and social solidarity programme – PROGRESS. In addition to these, the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTTS) analyses the impact of technological change on employment and skills structure.

managerial and technical jobs. The number of skilled non-manual workers is not expected to increase significantly, but the structure of jobs within this group is expected to change. While demand for occupations such as office clerks is estimated to fall by around a million, demand for occupations in service activities such as sales, security, catering and caring may increase by more than two million. Overall higher education levels will be required as the demand for a high qualified and adaptable workforce will increase. But higher levels of educational attainment are no longer sufficient. There will be a need for higher and broader set of skills across occupations.

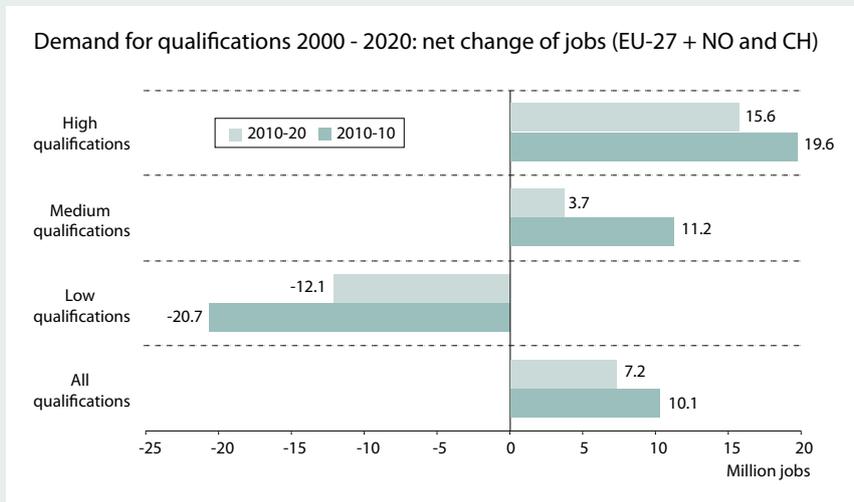
In practice this means that across sectors, generic skills will be more and more valued on the labour market. These include, for instance, problem-solving, analytical, self-management and communication skills, ability to work in a team, linguistic skills and digital competencies. In the automotive sector, for example, emerging technologies and changing demand will increase the demand for skills in design, marketing, and research. Within the tourism sector workers must develop customer service skills, knowledge of foreign languages, skills to identify opportunities for cross-promotion and cross-selling, and communication and marketing skills. So the concept of skills is becoming more focused on learning outcomes rather than years of study as employers are increasingly looking for a mix of knowledge, skills and abilities.

Skills upgrading and the matching of skills to jobs have long been strategic priorities for the EU, forming an essential part of the general objective of improving job quality, promoting a decent work agenda, gender equality and equal opportunities. In the context of the current economic downturn, the skills challenge has

taken on added relevance – and urgency - as a key to helping Europe recover from the crisis. Getting there will require a concerted effort by all involved: decision-makers, education and training establishments, employers and individuals. Providing

the right incentives for people to upgrade their skills, improving the link between education, training and work, developing the right mix of skills, and better anticipating future skills requirements will all be essential in getting the process underway.

More jobs for the better qualified



Source: Cedefop 2010

Best practice outside the EU: examples from the US and Canada

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics produces biennial detailed projections of employment by sector and occupation broken down by state. Further activities complement the project, including the O*NET system for monitoring changing skills needs within occupations. O*NET is an online database developed by the US Department of Labor offering detailed information on occupations, such as definition and description of the tasks and work activities, knowledge, skills and abilities required, wages and employment trends.

In Canada, 'Sector Councils' have been put in place in almost 30 economic sectors. These organisations comprising business, labour, education and other key stakeholders examine current and projected human resource challenges (including how training is developed and delivered), identify solutions, and coordinate and implement strategies to help firms to meet changing demands. Through their work, national occupational standards and certification programmes are devised, new entrants in the labour market are identified and prepared, and career and occupational information is enhanced.



© European Union

ESF in Germany – Re-activating knowledge

Peter Meller and his wife Olga are settling into their new home in Magdeburg, in Saxony in the east of Germany, where Peter has recently started a job as a software programmer for a small engineering firm. Although he originally studied and worked as a mechanical engineer in Romania where he grew up, he had not worked in the sector for 15 years when, in 2008, he began a work experience placement at the company where he now works full-time.

Arriving in Bergisch Gladbach near Cologne in Germany at the age of 29, he initially got a job with a small company as a mechanical engineer. However, the German engineering sector went into decline at around this time and by 1993 he was left on the unemployment line. With little prospect of securing another position as an engineer, he decided that retraining would help boost his employment prospects. He took a computer course. "Before that I had never really had much to do with computers," says Peter.

After that he began developing computer-based training, working on a freelance basis. "It was completely different from my previous work," he says. "I worked for a small company that developed courses for big

companies to train their employees to use common software." He did this for several years and eventually set up a company doing the same type of work with four other partners. However, after a while the orders dried up and he was back to working on a contract basis. He continued working like this from 2001 until 2007, but was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the irregular nature of the work. Around this time engineering began to pick up again in Germany and Peter thought there could be opportunities for him to get back into his old profession. However, when he applied for mechanical engineering jobs, he found his lack of recent experience a problem.

A training programme, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, helped him to refresh and build on his engineering knowledge and skills. His course was one of 18 AQUA (Akademikerinnen und Akademiker Qualifizieren sich für den Arbeitsmarkt) organised nationwide, each aimed at a specific professional sector. Working with universities, the courses give already qualified people the chance to build on their knowledge and improve their job prospects. Peter's course packed a full 10-semester degree programme in mechanical engineering into 10 months. "It was amazing how much

I'd forgotten, but I was also relieved that more recent graduates had also forgotten," he says. He also learnt more about recent developments, especially the use of computers in engineering, which was hardly covered in his original studies.

In addition to academic learning, the course covered practical skills for getting jobs, such as personal presentation, body language and communication, applying for work, and preparing for interviews. Peter noticed a big improvement in his personal skills. "I was able to go to an interview and answer the questions. I am now much more self-confident."

Peter was able to use his newly improved skills when he did a three-month placement at the firm where he now works. The company specialises in quality assurance processes for the car-making sector. At the end of his stint in October 2008, he was offered a permanent job. He now works as a software programmer for engineering machinery, a position that combines his engineering and computer skills. "Before I had lots of knowledge and skills, but I didn't know how to tell people about it," says Peter. "It's fair to say the course changed my life. I feel much more secure now and look forward to the future."

Economic crisis: counting the social costs



Social policies are essential to cushion the impact of the crisis while paving the way to economic recovery

Welfare systems and specific short-term policies have been vitally important in mitigating the social and economic impact of the crisis, according to the 2010 'Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion' adopted last March. However, the human cost of the crisis is difficult to fully evaluate as yet, as the impact on labour markets and on the population, notably the most vulnerable is still unfolding.

The Joint Report's snapshot shows an average EU unemployment rate over 9%, and set to surpass 10% in 2010. The rate is more than double for young workers and migrants. With some 5 million more unemployed people than at the outset of the crisis, income

has dropped for many households, exposing them to poverty and over-indebtedness, and some have lost their homes. Migrants, younger and older workers, and those on temporary contracts, especially women, were affected earlier but unemployment increasingly touched other groups, hitherto fairly safe. Unemployment may stay high for some time, with the attendant risks of long-term unemployment and exclusion. This underlines the need for strategies based on active inclusion principles to support and help into the mainstream people furthest from work.

The nature, size and effects of the crisis vary. National unemployment increased by as little as 1% in some

countries; but by almost 15% in the worst affected. Also, EU countries started with different social situations. In 2008, the measure of those at risk of poverty ranged from 9 to 26%. Support provided by social protection systems also varied. Perceptions echoed these disparities: in June 2009 a majority felt that the crisis had increased poverty, but those who saw a profound impact ranged from 10% to 69%.

Policy responses also varied in scale and emphasis. Commission estimates show that extra spending varied from less than 1% of GDP in some countries to more than 3.5% in others; and between 2007 and 2010 social spending will have risen by

less than 1 percentage point in three countries, but by 6 per cent or more in another four. Member States used the European Social Fund to enhance support to the unemployed, to keep workers in employment and to help the most vulnerable facing structural barriers to work, taking advantage of the flexibility in the ESF and simplifications proposed by the Commission.

The effectiveness of unemployment benefits varies greatly depending on the scope, duration, conditionality and level of benefit. Young workers with short contributory records and some of the self-employed may not be entitled to unemployment benefits at all, while workers on part-time or temporary contracts often received lower benefits than other workers. Reforms to strengthen work incentives have tightened eligibility criteria, or reduced the level or duration of benefits. These reforms have helped to contain long-term unemployment, especially coupled with an emphasis on activation measures, but they have not always reduced long-term welfare dependency. In addition, even though several Member States prolonged benefit duration and relaxed eligibility rules to meet the crisis, the pressure on last-resort schemes has started to increase as many people's unemployment benefits run out.

The coverage and level of minimum income benefits vary greatly. In most countries, social assistance alone is not enough to lift people out of poverty, but in general it reduces its intensity. Recent reforms have centred on financial incentives to work; but, the lack of clear mechanisms to up-rate minimum incomes has in some instances led to erosion of the adequacy of benefits. Paradoxically, failure to claim entitlements significantly affects the effectiveness of some Member States' schemes, due in large part to poor design, obscure rules or weak administration. Adequate income support is essential

for people in time of need, but policies must also help them to participate in the labour market. Both spending and participation in active labour market measures, including life long learning, have improved overall. Still more is needed to be sure that all are reached, including those furthest from the labour market. Experience shows that long-term unemployment and inactivity tend to persist long after recovery.

Shortage of adequate housing is a long-standing problem in most Member States. Nearly 40% of people at-risk of poverty spend more than 40% of their disposable income on housing; more than twice the average overall. They also face worse housing conditions, and are twice as likely to face overcrowding or a housing deprivation problem. The crisis has seen more loan defaults, repossessions and evictions. Governments reacted variously, some giving protection for mortgagees, support for incomes or more social/public housing, although the supply or quality of such housing is often low given policy shifts towards private housing or a shortage of public money. National data on homelessness show a mixed picture, but things have clearly worsened in some countries.

Healthcare expenditure averages some 9% of GDP, varying broadly in line with GDP per capita, but also influenced by things like new technology, rising expectations, population age and unhealthy behaviour. Information on health impacts of the crisis is awaited, but the past confirms that the stresses and dislocations of economic downturns affect health. Effects can emerge over time, and vary with the extent and duration of economic and social deterioration. Indirect impacts come as pressure on public budgets limits responses to rising needs, or lower incomes deter or delay individuals from seeking care. Some of the Member States most affected

by the crisis are also among those whose relative health situation is worst, social and health policies less developed, and spending restraint harshest. Large and widening health inequalities within Member States show that people have not gained equally from the benefits to health of economic progress. This issue moves up the political agenda.

Current pensioners have been comparatively little affected by the crisis, thanks to steady incomes, low inflation and improvements to minimum pensions; although in a few Member States cuts in already moderate benefits are a concern as poverty among older people was already high. People retiring now or soon in public pay-as-you-go schemes are likely to be little affected as these schemes are quite resilient, but there will be problems if low employment reduces schemes' contribution income. Those receiving defined benefit pensions from funded schemes are also relatively safe. However, as economic conditions change, the future could be worrying for future pensioners under funded schemes. The crisis has highlighted both the susceptibility of these schemes to volatile markets, and the importance of good scheme design and prudent management.

In summary, we see that swift strong policy interventions helped to mitigate the social consequences of the crisis. Overall, most Europeans have been able to rely on effective safety nets, although there are gaps here and there. Decent living standards for all let people live in dignity and help sustain their employability and learning capacity. The crisis has emphasised this need to support citizens at a time of major budget constraint. In the face of unavoidable fiscal restraint, social protection schemes will need to be more efficient if they are to continue to give effective support.

EU offers support to budding entrepreneurs

The newly operational European Progress Microfinance Facility provides loans for starting or expanding small businesses



Ever dreamt of setting up your own business, but found it impossible to raise the starting capital? Since June the European Union's European Progress Microfinance Facility provides micro-credits of up to 25 000 € to small businesses and to people who have lost their jobs and want to start their own small businesses. The initiative is tailored to micro-enterprises, employing fewer than 10 people (91% of all European businesses), and unemployed or inactive people who want to go into self-employment but do not have access to traditional banking services. 99% of start-ups in Europe are micro or small enterprises and one third of these are launched by people who are unemployed.

The initial 100 million € budget will be spread over four years (2010-2013) and is expected to leverage more than 500 million € of credit in co-operation with international financial institutions such as the European Investment Bank (EIB). The beneficiaries may apply for a loan to a micro-loan provider supported by the facility. It is estimated that this could result in around 45 000 loans over a period of up to eight years.

But access to financing alone is not enough to ensure business success. Would-be micro-entrepreneurs need guidance and coaching, while the

micro-finance providers require capacity-building. This is where the European Social Fund (ESF) comes in. Those who seek funding under the Micro-finance facility can also benefit from the support traditionally offered by the ESF for entrepreneurship promotion, which includes training on setting up a business, guidance and mentoring in running a business, as well as support to the micro-borrowers in applying for a loan and managing a micro-enterprise. The ESF is also the only structural fund which can grant interest rate rebates for the individual, which can greatly

improve access to funds for micro-entrepreneurs.

According to László Andor, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, "The Microfinance Facility offers a lifeline to those suffering from the effects of the crisis and will help create new jobs." Welcoming the initiative, he said: "It will increase the supply and accessibility of microloans so vulnerable groups can find a way out of unemployment. It will also boost entrepreneurship and the social economy in Europe."

The European Progress Microfinance Facility in practice

The first step is to locate the nearest micro-loan providers working under the facility.

The information can be obtained by contacting:

- the local employment service:
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=585&langId=en>, or
- the managing authority of the European Social Fund:
<http://ec.europa.eu/esf>

They will provide applicants with more detailed information about the scheme, and put them in contact with a micro loan provider: a bank or another financial provider, whichever seems the most appropriate.

They can also explain how to get help in preparing the application (filling in forms, setting up a business plan, training, mentoring) through the Entrepreneurship operational programmes funded by the European Social Fund.

Successful applicants then sign a contract with the microfinance provider. This contract specifies the amount of the loan, its duration, and the interest rate.

Zdravá Jídlna Spirála

ESF in Czech Republic – A healthy venture

It's lunchtime and Zdravá Jídlna Spirála – 'the Healthy Spiral' – in eské Budovice in the Czech Republic is busy. There is a diverse crowd in the small café – from workers and students popping in for a quick bite, to pensioners and parents with children who are settled in for longer, sharing tables, chatting and playing. They come for freshly cooked, daily specials – plates of curried vegetables and rice; bowls of thick soup; falafels; and a range of homemade cakes.

Radmila Petroušková, who opened the café with a friend in early 2008, explains their philosophy. "We specialise in vegetarian and health foods," she says. "We try to use organic and bio-foods as much as possible and avoid preservatives, too much salt or spices. There are also gluten-free options and dishes for people with allergies."

The café sometimes sells fish, but not meat. "And we try to use fair trade products where possible. It's important for us to be as ethical as possible," she adds. The approach appears popular and they have already built up a regular clientele.

Radmila is new to both running her own business and the catering industry. She worked as a model from the age of 16, travelling around

the world to appear in fashion shows and photoshoots. "It was a great experience," she says. "I saw the world and got paid for it." However, at the age of 23, she felt her catwalk days were done and she wanted a more settled life. She took a job as a hotel receptionist back in her hometown, but after three years in that role she became dissatisfied. "It was the same everyday. I wanted a new challenge," she says.

She began to think about opening a café specialising in health foods, together with a friend with experience working as a chef. "We both like to lead healthy lifestyles and thought the idea had big potential," she says. "We thought there would be a demand for it in this town. There isn't anywhere else like this here."

A programme of support for young entrepreneurs, co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, helped them get their idea off the ground. Experts advised them on how to set up the café and develop a viable business plan to present to the bank.

"Neither of us had any experience in setting up a business," she says. "So the consultants helped us a lot with the finances and administration. They sent us to the right people."

With a bank loan secured and, after a year of planning, the café opened for business in early 2008. "At the start I didn't realise how much work running the business would be. There's a big difference between being an employee and being self-employed."

While Radmila organises the administration of the business, the paper work and accounts, her partner is in charge of the food. "Though I'm learning more about cooking all the time," she says.

So far the venture is proving successful and the young entrepreneurs are enjoying the experience. And they have plans to expand the business in the future. "We want to enlarge the premises so we can fit more people in," she continues. "We want to hire more staff. We are trying to find another cook." They also have plans to expand the other services that they offer, such as meals for local primary schools, and to create a 'healthy fast food' window attached to the café. "Ultimately we'd like to expand to other cities too," she says. "But that's a way off at the moment. We'll take it one step at a time."

"I'm really glad I made the decision," concludes Radmila. "Now I'm my own boss and I enjoy it a lot."



Promoting Roma inclusion: the way forward

Roma are one of the biggest ethnic minorities in the European Union. An estimated 10 to 12 million Roma live in different EU countries, often in difficult conditions. The European Union aims at promoting their full inclusion into society and their participation in the economy, in the labour market, in cultural life and in decision-making. Roma inclusion is not dealt with as a separate policy, but instead special attention is paid to the particular situation of the Roma within all EU policies that aim at improving the economic situation, health, living conditions, employment opportunities, cultural understanding and education of all Europeans.

Issues surrounding Roma have gained increasing political recognition in recent years. The first-ever Roma summit was organised in 2008. One of its most significant conclusions was the recognition of the EU's role in terms of providing political leadership and support for the Member States in implementing their policies through policy coordination and financial support under the Structural Funds. In the intervening two years, the Commission has continued working to fulfill its political leadership role: a second Roma summit took place in April in Còrdoba, and the Commission contributed with a new policy paper setting out a strategic approach to Roma integration. In

the meantime, EU governments have been increasingly using European Social Fund money for projects which benefit directly or indirectly the Roma population.

The articles that follow take a closer look at recent developments in the area of Roma inclusion, both at the political level - by reporting on the second Roma summit and on the Commission's latest policy proposals, and from the more concrete standpoint of the European social fund and its role in helping finance activities aimed at improving Roma's prospects in areas such as health services, education, training and employment.



© European Union

Promoting policies in favour of Roma population

The second European Roma Summit looked at ways to foster the economic and social integration of the Roma in the EU

The second European Summit on Roma inclusion took place in Córdoba, in Spain, on 8 and 9 April, on the occasion of the International Roma Day, as a key event of the Spanish EU Presidency. The aim of the Summit was to take stock of the achievements undertaken at EU level for Roma inclusion, to renew commitments from stakeholders and to discuss the challenges ahead for Roma inclusion.

Following the enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007, the Roma – an umbrella term commonly used in EU documents to refer to a variety of groups of people who describe

themselves as Roma, Gypsies, Travelers, Manouches, Ashkali, Sinti, etc. – represent one of the largest ethnic minorities in the EU, variously estimated at around ten to 12 million people in Europe. The situation of Roma is far more difficult than the situation of other ethnic minorities. They are highly vulnerable to far-reaching social exclusion and widespread economic, social and political discrimination. The first European Roma Summit, which took place in Brussels in September 2008, was the first time that EU institutions, national governments from EU and candidate countries as well as civil society organisations from around Europe came together at the

highest level to discuss the situation of Roma communities in the EU. The main outcome of the first European Roma summit was the recognition that although there are some useful tools at EU level to promote the inclusion of Roma, implementation of these instruments should be enhanced, as Roma are still highly vulnerable from being discriminated.

The acknowledgement that significant progress has been made since 2008 and the need to move further from commitments to actions in order to foster Roma inclusion in Europe figured prominently in the speeches and discussions of this year's Summit. The title of the Summit was "Promoting policies in favour of the Roma population".

Approximately 400 representatives of EU institutions, national governments, regional and local public authorities and civil society (including Roma organisations), took part in

this event. Commission Vice-President Reding (Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship) and Commissioner Andor (Employment, social affairs and inclusion), were among the speakers, hosted by the Spanish Ministers for health and social policy, Trinidad Jiménez García-Herrera, and for equality, Bibiana Aído Almagro. They were joined by several Ministers and Secretary of states (from Belgium, France, Finland, Hungary, Macedonia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbia amongst others). Members of the European Parliament as well as high-ranking representatives from international organisations and from civil society also took part. The direct involvement of Roma organisations and representatives was a key feature of the event.

As main inputs from the Commission to the Summit, at the EU level, two important policy documents were released on 7 April: the Communication on the social and economic integration of Roma in Europe, and the Commission Staff Working Document on the implementation of the EU instruments and policies for Roma inclusion 2008-2010.

The first day of the Summit, 8 April coincided with International Roma day (celebrated since 1971). This symbolic timing, chosen by the Spanish presidency, acknowledged that Roma are an integral part of the history and civilisation of Europe. An award-giving ceremony dedicated to Roma culture and traditional Roma celebrations also took place on the afternoon of the first day of the Summit.

In her opening speech, Vice-President Reding highlighted that Roma inclusion remains a priority at EU level. She explained that “for the Commission, this means looking specifically at the relevant EU legislation and funds and at our role as coordinator of national policy and facilitator of policy dialogue.” She also insisted that “we should not waste energy in developing special laws or funds for Roma. Existing legislation and available funds are there to deal with the challenges: we just need to use them more effectively. What we do need is a strategic approach based on the cooperation between all departments concerned in the European Commission, in national authorities as well as in international organisations.”

This Summit highlighted that the problem of Roma inclusion is complex and requires a holistic approach that takes into account jointly the various areas where Roma inclusion is at stake: these are mainly the protection of fundamental rights, education, employment, housing and health. Particular attention was paid to this latter issue of Roma health, one of the priorities of the Spanish Presidency of the Council. The need to pay a specific attention to Roma children was also mentioned.

Within the recent developments at EU level, the Summit focused on four of the ten Common Basic Principles for Roma inclusion. On 8 June 2009, the Council of Ministers in charge of Social affairs in the EU Member States annexed the Principles to their conclusions and invited Member States and the Commission to take them into account when they design, implement and evaluate policies.

In his closing speech, Commissioner Andor insisted that “the European Union will not shy away from the problems faced by the Roma people. (...) We will make sure that Roma issues stay on the political agenda and we will provide political leadership.” He stressed the fact that the newly adopted Commission Communication on the economic and social integration of the Roma sets an ambitious programme for the way ahead. Finally, as an important output from the Summit, the Trio of the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian EU presidencies adopted a joint statement which highlighted their commitment to the pursuit of mainstreaming of Roma issues into all relevant policies, the design of a roadmap for the activities of the European Platform for Roma inclusion – a dialogue mechanism that gathers, under each EU Presidency, all stakeholders concerned with Roma issues around one table – and their focus on the implementation of EU Structural Funds in this context.

The 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma inclusion

The 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma inclusion aim at guiding the EU institutions and EU, candidate and potential candidate countries when they design and implement new policies or activities. The 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion are:

1. Constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory policies.
2. Explicit but not exclusive targeting.
3. Inter-cultural approach.
4. Aiming for the mainstream.
5. Awareness of the gender dimension.
6. Transfer of evidence-based policies.
7. Use of Community instruments.
8. Involvement of regional and local authorities.
9. Involvement of civil society.
10. Active participation of the Roma.

Commission unveils programme for Roma inclusion

New policy paper singles out key challenges and proposes measures to address them

In its first-ever policy Communication specifically devoted to the Roma, the European Commission outlines an ambitious mid-term programme to meet the main challenges for Roma inclusion. The communication, called “The social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe” is one of two documents adopted by the Commission ahead of the second EU Roma Summit, the other being a report on the implementation of the EU instruments and policies for Roma inclusion 2008-2010. In these papers the Commission calls for further efforts to make effective use of EU legislation, funding and political mechanisms to promote Roma inclusion.

The report on the implementation of the EU instruments and policies for Roma inclusion 2008-2010 provides an overview of the progress achieved since 2008 by Commission instruments and processes to support the inclusion of the Roma. The report also looks at the situation in a number of EU countries. It highlights progress achieved at the EU and national level over the past two years in terms of strategic planning and implementation of EU instruments and policies as well as with regard to the involvement of Roma communities. It concludes that many powerful legislative, financial and political tools and mechanisms are available to support the inclusion of Roma, but that their implementation

at national and local level needs to be made more effective.

Whereas the report analyses past achievements, the Communication on the economic and social integration of Roma in Europe sets the way forward. It defines the main challenges ahead and sets out a programme to help make both policy measures and processes for Roma inclusion more effective. The Communication also outlines the complexity and interdependence of the problems faced by Roma in terms of discrimination, poverty, low educational attainment, poor health outcomes, labour market barriers and segregation in housing and other areas.

The Communication highlights the need for a more positive impact at local level and more focus on the most disadvantaged micro-regions, as well as the need for more communication on the benefits of Roma inclusion at local, national, economic and social levels. It proposes measures to ensure existing policies and instruments become more efficient. The Commission foresees to address the inclusion of Roma people when developing and implementing the “European Platform against Poverty” initiative, which is part of the European 2020 strategy to return Europe to growth and prosperity. Moreover, the Commission commits itself to applying the Common

Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion when designing, implementing and evaluating policies relevant to Roma inclusion. In the Communication, the Commission also pledges to support successive EU Presidencies in making the European Platform for Roma inclusion more effective.

The Social and economic integration of the Roma: priorities for action

- Mobilising the Structural Funds– which together represent almost half the EU’s budget – and overcome obstacles in using them to support Roma inclusion;
- Taking Roma issues into account in all relevant policy areas at national and EU level, from employment to urban development and from public health to EU expansion;
- Supporting a stronger and more effective coordination and concentration of forces among and within stakeholders;
- Developing model policy approaches to support Roma inclusion, based on best practices, as a tool for policy-makers in the Member States



From commitment to action: the European Social Fund and the Roma

© Beiga Pictures

The ESF helps Roma integration through an array of projects ranging from health services to training and guidance for job-seekers

One of the most significant conclusions of the first European Roma Summit was the recognition of the EU's role in terms of providing support for the Member States in implementing their policies through policy coordination and financial support under the Structural Funds. So, within the framework of the new regulations of Structural Funds, many countries, especially those with a larger Roma population, have launched a number of programmes and projects aiming to improve Roma living conditions, to facilitate their social inclusion and to reduce the gap with the majority population.

The overall objective of projects and programmes supported by Community funding are the inclusion

of Roma into mainstream education, the mainstream labour market, mainstream housing and society in general, and the European Social Fund contributes to the integration of Roma through various projects that help the Roma community in areas such as health services, counselling, education, training and guidance for self-employed.

It is hard to quantify the amount of ESF support devoted to helping the Roma. Many EU countries do not identify Roma as an ethnic minority and as a result do not report on them systematically. In such cases, Roma may indeed benefit from ESF interventions due to their social or economic disadvantage, but not on the grounds of ethnicity as such. In this respect, it is worth noting that the

Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion adopted by the Council of the EU in 2009 underscore the need for explicit but not exclusive targeting.

Although data remains scant, there are clear indications that a significantly higher proportion of activities target Roma, directly or as part of vulnerable groups, in the current programming period compared to the 2000-2006 period. It is estimated that some countries, notably Hungary and Romania, potentially benefited Roma in more than 50% of their co-funded activities. Some Member States have dedicated budget lines for activities aimed exclusively at Roma. This is the case of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Spain, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

The Roma are discriminated in all spheres of life and need to gain access to social services on equal terms and to enjoy the same opportunities as other groups in society. Social exclusion is a complex and multidimensional process that implies the lack or denial of certain resources, rights, goods or services,

as well as the incapacity to take part into the normal relations and activities at hand to most people within the society, no matter if these belong to the economic, social, cultural or political sphere. In order to be effective, policies and projects therefore need to tackle not only one problem at a time, but to adopt an integrated approach to the integration of Roma: in the labour market, in the educational system and in general in the society providing help for health and living conditions and fighting discrimination through community development and promoting the acceptance of Roma culture.

In almost all EU countries, the ESF-supported approach to social inclusion of vulnerable groups focuses mainly on employment. This also applies to the interventions related to Roma. The ESF pays particular attention to the insertion into the labour market of the most disadvantaged among the Roma: women and young people. So for instance in Spain the ACCEDER programme, co-funded by the ESF and the European Regional Development Fund focuses on the development of grassroots interventions and actions regarding the employment of Roma. Between 1999 and 2009, almost 50 000 people received help from the programme, 72 % of them of Roma origin, and over 30 000 of them got a job thanks to ACCEDER; 70 % of them Roma and 51.4 % women. The success of the Spanish programme led the Romanian authorities to launch a project built on the experience of ACCEDER in the 2007-2013 programming period.

In Eastern Europe, about 50 % of the Roma population is under 20, and the proportion is growing. Low school attendance and overrepresentation in "special schools" intended for children with physical or mental disabilities lead to a very

high-drop-out rate. Across countries, it is estimated that up to 80% of the Roma population has not completed primary school. Member States have made progress as regards enrolling Roma children in schools and dismantling segregated schooling and the ESF contributed in several ways to achieve these outcomes.

Another critical success factor for social inclusion is the link between schools and Roma communities. Various ESF interventions deploy mentors and counsellors to enhance the participation of Roma children to education. Moreover, a large part of the ESF support is dedicated to second chance education, adult education and to preventing early school leaving. In Ireland, for instance, adult education is an essential part of the Irish measure for Travellers, under which a Traveller Education Strategy was developed.

A number of ESF and EQUAL programmes include health care

initiatives for Roma, as improving sanitary standards in Roma communities and ensuring their access to public health services are critical for the integration of Roma.

ESF co-funded activities also improve the functioning of organisations, NGOs and other institutions dealing with the integration of Roma. Such interventions represent 18 % of all Roma-related activities co-funded by ESF. In addition, seven Member States implemented Development Partnerships under EQUAL aimed at strengthening capacities of Roma organisations and NGOs. Overall, these amounted to 10 % of the EQUAL activities co-financed by ESF. Finally, as fighting against discrimination is part of the daily life of many Roma, several initiatives co-funded by the ESF put a strong accent on anti-discrimination and focus on different ways to promote the Roma culture and reconcile Roma with the mainstream society.

ESF Support to Roma in the Current Programming Period 2007-2013

Activities co-funded by the ESF and the EQUAL initiative in the current programming period are aimed at contributing with innovative ways to solving the problems of Roma communities, by creating new and effective opportunities for their social inclusion. Several Member States identified the Roma as a target of their ESF 2007-2013 programmes. According to an analysis of the ESF 2007-2013 Operational Programmes, 12 Member States target Roma (among other vulnerable groups). Activities for Roma are funded under 59 Priority Axes in 38 Operational Programmes, which have a total budget of € 17.5 billion (including € 13.3 billion of ESF funds). Roma are targeted as possible participants under initiatives that represent 27 % of their total ESF budget. In Hungary and Romania, Roma are potential beneficiaries in more than 50 % of the planned interventions, while in Ireland Travellers are a potential target of 99.5 % of the planned ESF supported activities for 2007-2013. The Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain have dedicated € 172 million for activities aimed solely at Roma. Projects started in several Member States in 2007 and 2008 with an overall budget of € 141 million. Almost 110 000 Roma already benefited from these interventions.

Gender equality: is enough being done?

© Van Parys Media

Violence against women and the gender pay gap are prominent amongst citizens' concerns about equality between sexes

European citizens believe that gender inequality is still common in their lives today. A new Eurobarometre survey on citizen's perceptions of gender equality shows that while there is widespread agreement that the situation has improved in the last ten years, discrimination based on gender still exists in several areas of society in the European Union, affecting all sectors of society. What's more, sexist stereotypes, especially present in working life and advertising, act to reinforce the situation.

When asked whether enough effort is being made in the European Union to combat gender inequality today, respondents' answers were almost equally divided; nevertheless, a slight majority was unsatisfied with the situation. This dissatisfaction was mainly recorded among women, the over-55's and those who position themselves low on the social scale. Still, a certain optimism prevails: a

majority of Europeans consider that the situation will have improved in twenty years' time in most of the areas examined in the survey. But there is one important exception: although a very slim majority of respondents expect violence against women to diminish, an almost equal proportion takes the opposite view. This concern is reflected in Europeans' almost unanimous view of the urgent need for action to combat the violence suffered by women.

Broadly speaking Europeans find that gender inequality is still a common phenomenon in our societies, but perceptions vary from country to country. So while the French and the Spanish are the most likely to say that gender inequality is widespread, a majority of Bulgarians and Latvians think it is rare. However, the trend appears to be positive, as two-thirds of Europeans consider gender inequality "less widespread" than ten years ago. Here again there are some significant variations between

countries: in Hungary, for instance, a majority of those interviewed find that gender inequality is more widespread now than ten years ago. Respondents record the greatest change in Greece and Cyprus, where 31% consider that gender inequality is "far less widespread" today.

There is also considerable variation in the incidence of reported gender-based discrimination by sector: the area in which the least gender-based discrimination is cited is "in access to health care". However, the most gender-based discrimination is reported "in society in general", where around one in seven respondents claim to have witnessed gender-based discrimination and a further 4% to have been personally affected. In Sweden, 32% of those interviewed state that they have witnessed gender-based discrimination "in society in general".

When asked what should be considered the top priorities for action, the vast majority of those interviewed picked combating violence against women and closing the gender pay gap. Most significantly, more than four-fifths of respondents said that these issues should be addressed as a matter of urgency. In Sweden and Portugal, respondents prioritise closing

the pay gap over combating violence against women.

In general, women are more likely than men to agree that it is important for women to work and have their own money. They are less likely to agree that it is “normal for women to work less than men”, would like to see more women represented in the workforce and want women to receive equal pay for equal work. Most Europeans think that the best measures to increase the number of working women are an increase in women’s pay so they earn the same as men, and more care facilities for children and other dependents. More than eight out of ten Europeans recognise the need to close the gender pay gap, though women acknowledge this more readily than men. Europeans believe that companies guilty of gender-based discrimination should be penalised in order to reduce the pay gap between women and men.

When it comes to family life, there is a willingness on the part of better-educated men to take responsibility within the home for sharing work and childcare. Although many Europeans say flexible working patterns are a desirable benefit, the better educated men in managerial roles are most in favour of more flexible working and teleworking arrangements in order to allow them to find a better work-life balance.

But is enough being done to improve things? Opinions on the issue are rather divided: just over four in ten Europeans think that sufficient efforts are being deployed to counter inequality, while a roughly similar proportion disagrees, with women more inclined to disagree than men. However, almost two-thirds of Europeans feel that significant progress has been made in the past ten years.

They also believe that the trend towards more and more equality is set

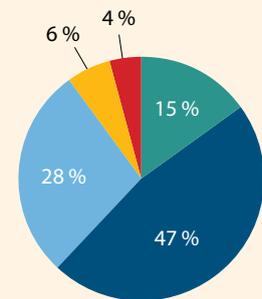
to continue: most of those interviewed are confident that by 2030 there will be less stereotyping, greater pay equality, more sharing of household tasks, more political representation, more women in traditionally masculine professions and improved rights for women in developing countries.

On a more sombre note, the outlook on violence against women remains rather pessimistic: while almost half of those interviewed believe violence will decline in the future, an almost equal number disagree. Interestingly, women are less optimistic that violence against women will diminish. The majority of women do not believe the situation will improve. The majority of men, however, think violence against women will decline.

Overall, Europeans perceive improvement, but women see a greater need for action than men. Unsurprisingly, while most Europeans generally agree that there should be more equality in the future, it is women who wish for greater change and do

not consider there has been sufficient progress to date.

In your opinion, at the current time, is gender inequality very widespread, fairly rare or very rare in (our country)?



- Very widespread
- Fairly widespread
- Fairly rare
- Very rare
- Don't know

Source: Special Eurobarometer 326 - "Gender Equality in the EU in 2009"

A Strengthened Commitment to Equality between Women and Men: a Women’s Charter

In March, to mark the 15th anniversary of the Beijing UN World Conference on Women, the European Commission strengthened and deepened its commitment to equality between women and men with a Women’s Charter aimed at promoting equality in the following areas:

- equality in the labour market and equal economic independence for women and men, namely through the Europe 2020 strategy;
- equal pay for equal work and work of equal value, by working with Member States to significantly reduce the gender pay gap (which in 2008 stood at 18% on average in the EU) over the next five years;
- equality in decision-making, through EU incentive measures;
- dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence, through a comprehensive policy framework;
- gender equality beyond the EU, by pursuing the issue in external relations and with international organisations.

The Charter will be followed by a five-year strategy on equality between women and men.



© European Union

ESF in the Netherlands – A better work-life balance

Water is a big issue in the Friesland region of the Netherlands, where much of the land is reclaimed and sits below sea level. This means that Gerard Jansen's job as a lawyer for the regional water board is a busy one.

"There are always conflicts of interests," says the 53-year-old. "Farmers for instance may want higher water levels, but the general public doesn't. We have to find the balance."

"Sometimes the companies don't want to spend the money [to comply with legal regulations] and it ends in court," he adds. When conflicts like this come up, Gerard is the man who deals with it. He has worked for the board since 1993 and acts as a legal adviser to the enforcement and licensing department.

His department has a number of roles – checking surface water meets legal standards, ensuring that sea defences are maintained and sea levels are correct, that companies and landowners comply with regulations and, finally, taking action when they do not. This means that he deals with "all phases of the legal process".

Although Gerard likes his job, a few years ago he began to want greater flexibility in his schedule. With two

young sons, Rik and Nico, and a daily car journey from his home in Drachten to Leeuwarden taking up to an hour, the rigid working hours were taking a toll. He also began to have difficulties concentrating in his office. "We moved a few years ago to a new open plan office. It's very noisy."

In 2006 he started to take part in 'e-papa' – a project co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund to help male employees work from home. The scheme helps to enable more flexible hours and cuts down on travelling.

He is now based at home for part of the week, enabling him to take the boys to school, have lunch with them, help with their schoolwork and even fit in some housework.

"Teleworking has helped me find a better balance between my work and family life," he says, adding that it takes the pressure off his wife who works part time as a geriatric nurse in a nearby hospital. "Before, I only saw the boys in the evening. Now I get to do different things with them."

And the more flexible arrangement has also improved his work and productivity. "If you're working at home you don't have to stop and leave

at 5 o'clock – you can finish what you started at your own pace. You can come back to it later on."

The scheme makes it easier for organisations to put flexible working arrangements in place. It increases awareness of the benefits of teleworking for employers and regularly assesses how employees are adapting to teleworking, flagging up potential issues early on. Gerard took part in the project for two years, during which time he responded to questionnaires about how it was working out.

Through the scheme, the water board has realised the benefits of teleworking and now actively promotes it among employees. "As a modern employer you need to provide opportunities for more flexible working," explains Gijl de Jong, who is Gerard's line manager.

She teleworks herself, and estimates that about a quarter of the employees in her department now have similar arrangements. "It definitely helps improve the balance between work and family life," she says.

Gerard, for one, is a sound advocate of the more flexible arrangements. "It's a big help," he says. "Next year, I'm going to increase the number of days I work from home."



From strength to strength – the European social dialogue

Dialogue between EU workers and employers delivers improvements in working conditions for millions of citizens

Since its formal inception in 1985, social dialogue has delivered significant results and contributed to improving working conditions for millions of people throughout Europe. Through its mechanisms, social dialogue enables workers and employers to discuss, develop joint actions and also negotiate binding agreements – some of which are implemented through EU law.

European social dialogue takes place at two levels: cross-industry and sectoral.

Cross-industry dialogue covers issues relevant to the whole economy and

labour market and is undertaken by European-level employers and workers' organisations representing hundreds of business associations and trade unions, along with millions of staff across Europe. Through the process of social dialogue they have negotiated a range of European autonomous joint agreements on worker-related issues including teleworking, work-related stress, and harassment and violence. What's more, social dialogue offers a range of representative workers' and employers' organisations a key role in the development of EU social policy. As a mark of its effectiveness, it is worth remembering that the Directives on part-time work, fixed-term contracts

and parental leave were based on the European cross-industry framework agreements reached by the social partners.

In 1998 the Commission decided to establish several sectoral dialogue committees to promote talks between employer and union representatives that deal with the specific needs of different economic sectors. These committees are set up by the Commission on the joint request of the social partners in a given sector. Since 1988, the Commission has created 40 sectoral social dialogue committees, which cover 145 millions workers in Europe, i.e. more than three quarters of the workforce, including in sectors of crucial importance such as transport, energy, agriculture, fisheries, maritime policy, education, public services, commerce, the metal, steel and chemical industries, and others. A new sectoral social dialogue committee in the education sector was launched on 11 June 2010 and is

expected to make a major contribution to the EU policy agendas for new skills and jobs and for youth employment – both of which are flagship initiatives under the Europe 2020 Strategy. Through their work in these committees, the European sectoral social partners have produced more than 500 texts of varying legal status, which contribute to setting employment and social standards in the EU. These texts range from joint opinions or declarations, responses to consultations and practical tools (e.g. a common website on posting of workers in the construction industry, guidelines on socially responsible restructuring, handbooks on integrating social considerations into public procurement, etc.) to agreements that have been implemented through EU Directives.

Last year, for example, employers and trades unions in the healthcare sector signed a EU-wide agreement to prevent workers from being injured by needles and other sharp objects. Social dialogue covering the maritime sector has generated a Europe-wide agreement and a new EU law which will improve the working conditions of around 300 000 seafarers. The agreement and subsequent EU Directive set new standards in relation to working hours, training, accommodation, medical care, and health and safety.

The EU Treaties indeed confer upon the recognised European social partners the role of “co-legislators” in European social matters, and European sectoral social dialogue has matured over recent years by adopting an increasing number of binding agreements which are implemented either by EU Directives or through internal procedures. Examples include Directives implementing Framework Agreements on prevention from sharp injuries in the hospital and healthcare sector; the ILO Maritime Labour Convention; and workers’ health protection through the good handling

and use of crystalline silica and products containing it.

Despite these positive developments and the overall success of European sectoral social dialogue committees, however, there is still room for improvement:

To respond effectively to increasing calls for their active participation in the European policy-making processes and consultations, European sectoral social partners must further strengthen their capacity to coordinate the consultation of their members and to deliver timely and relevant outcomes. Furthermore, active involvement of all national social partners is essential to ensure the legitimacy of the European social dialogue and to achieve effective outcomes and follow-up at national level, and while European social partners have made important progress in ensuring the participation of representatives from the new member states in their delegations, more remains to be done.

Committees should also be prepared to involve new players in their delegations so that their composition better reflects changing economic and employment realities in their sectors. And finally, the potential offered by the committees for sectoral negotiations has not yet been fully exploited by the European sectoral social partners.

Through their achievements, European sectoral social dialogue committees have, so far, usefully contributed to improving European employment and social policies as well as working conditions in Europe. Their experience and expertise of economic and social change at sectoral level are further instrumental in designing appropriate, modern industrial policies for the globalisation era. In response to the calls by the Commission and the Council, they will also further develop their contributions within the “Europe 2020” strategy framework and thereby strengthen ownership and implementation of the strategy.

Article 154 of the EC Treaty provides for the consultation of social partner organisations at European level on a range of issues concerning employment and social affairs. The consultation takes place in two phases: in the first stage the Commission consults the social partners on the possible direction of an initiative, whilst in the second stage, the focus is on the content of an initiative. This process enables the European social partners to directly influence the drafting of social proposals. What’s more, during this phase, social partners may suspend the Commission initiative whilst deciding to enter into negotiations. If neither stage of the consultation results in a decision by the social partners to start negotiating among themselves while the Commission still considers that Community action is desirable, the Commission will undertake the preparation of a legislative proposal.

Consultations in accordance with article 154 are limited to representative social partner organisations. Currently they are the following:

- the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC);
- the Confederation of European Businesses (BUSINESSEUROPE);
- the European Centre for Employers and Enterprises providing Public Services (CEEP);
- the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (UEAPME).

Roma integration, a long-lasting process

Real acceptance of Roma as equal participants in society is still a long way off

Roma have been living in Europe for more than 700 years and yet need integration. If this has not happened until today, this means that there must be something wrong with the general approach. A number of reports and researches show that this group is the most disadvantaged and most discriminated against. ERIO has consistently stressed the unequal treatment and social exclusion that Roma face.

In the last five years, the EU institutions did a lot to promote Roma inclusion, but their real acceptance as equal participants in the society remains a mirage. Roma still have tremendous barriers to access quality education, employment, housing and proper healthcare services. Anti-Roma sentiments are widespread across Europe. With recent migration flows from new to old EU member states, Roma are often subjected to racist attacks and discrimination.

Despite EU efforts, there is to date no successful policy specifically aimed at the social inclusion of Roma. Effective policies should use the right mixture of general and targeted integration policies. These policies should

be balanced, complementary and reinforcing. General policies are necessary to create an institutional and social environment inhibiting discrimination and facilitating targeted action. The social inclusion of Roma requires a higher degree of integration into the general education, health and employment system, so that the risk of marginalization diminishes. However, in some cases, equal treatment is not enough. Specific inclusion policies and positive action should be applied if institutional conditions, including discrimination, exclude Roma from the society.

Roma issues have been placed high on the agenda of the Spanish EU Presidency, which pushed further Roma related processes at European level. Hopefully, this will be as high in the agenda of the Belgian and Hungarian EU Presidencies for the following year. Nevertheless, the European Commission should have the flagship on promoting Roma's social inclusion and equal treatment. Through the European Platform for Roma inclusion, the European Commission will analyze and select successful practices and encourage member states to take

action for Roma's inclusion. What is imperative through such actions is a concerted effort, whereby governmental and civil society initiatives work together in harmony. Regarding integration policies, one particular and important area needs specific action: overcoming deficit in access to education ranging from early childhood education to higher levels of education and professional training. Such policies should ensure successful transition to employment. Part of such approach should be also the activities aiming at eliminating racist prejudices and discriminatory behavior. It has to be achieved in coordination with other changes in a comprehensive plan that approaches all critical aspects.

And finally, a strong and holistic co-operation between all actors - from EU institutions and member states to local communities - is the key to ensure the success of Roma-related policies. Here is the role of ERIO: to build bridges between Roma communities and EU institutions by providing an intensive exchange of information, initiating advocacy actions, raise awareness on EU and Roma related policy making processes, provoke public debate on questions such as Roma's human rights, social inclusion and anti-discrimination.

Contribution by Ivan Ivanov,
Executive Director of the European
Roma Information Office

INTERVIEW


 A portrait of Viviane Reding, European Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship. She is a woman with short blonde hair, wearing glasses, a dark blue jacket, and a gold necklace. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the right.

Viviane Reding European Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship speaks to Social Agenda

Promoting gender equality is a priority for this Commission. What are, in your view, the most pressing issues that need to be addressed?

One of the key priorities during my mandate is to close the gender pay gap. This goal is also essential for the future strategy on gender equality between 2010 and 2015. I am deeply concerned that the gap has remained practically unchanged in the last 15 years. It currently stands at 18% across the EU, and in some countries it is widening. This is unacceptable. The Commission will work closely with all EU countries to tackle the gender pay gap in the European Union and to significantly reduce it before the end of its mandate. We need to make full use of all the tools available to us.

My second priority is to fight violence against women. If we Europeans don't stand up for women and children, then we don't stand for much. I feel very strongly about violence against women. I will use both our powerful anti-discrimination legislation and the EU's Daphne programme. I'm also considering the possibilities available under criminal law, especially on sexual exploitation, to fight female genital mutilation.

The situation of Roma people is also high on the agenda. What can be done to improve their conditions?

The EU is built on fundamental rights and values. These rights, including

the protection of minorities, the principle of free movement, and the prohibition of discrimination, fully apply to people belonging to the Roma community. In March the Commission adopted the first ever policy Communication on Roma. It is an ambitious programme for promoting the social and economic integration of Roma by enhancing the effectiveness of instruments and policies as well as of processes. We put this issue centre stage at the second European Roma Summit in Cordoba in April. We will make sure Roma stay on the political agenda and we will provide political leadership.

Do you envisage taking specific action?

We do not need separate specific laws, policies or funds for Roma. This would only exacerbate segregation. Roma people do not need a separate labour market, they do not need schools that prolong the segregation of Roma children, and they do not want renovated Roma ghettos. What we need is for the specific Roma issues to be taken into account when the general laws are applied, when public funds and general policies are implemented. In one word, we need to include the "Roma perspectives", their rights and interests in everything that we do, in all EU policies. Our objective is to get Roma people accepted on equal terms. And, as many Roma representatives have pointed out, this has to be done

with the Roma communities, not for them. Roma communities must co-own the projects that are there to help them, along with the local and regional authorities.

Discrimination is still widespread in Europe, especially based on sexual orientation. How can the situation be improved?

The European Commission works hard to protect the rights of lesbians, gays, bisexual and transsexual people (LGBT). Back in 2000, the EU adopted legislation banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment. I am very proud to say that this has raised the level of protection for LGBT people in all EU countries. A homosexual person who faces discrimination at work or in applying for jobs can now seek redress. But to fight homophobia, we also need to challenge stereotypes and change attitudes. I can give you a concrete example: in May, thanks to intervention from the European Commission, the Baltic Gay pride could take place in Lithuania. Responding to initial attempts to cancel the event at last minute, the European Commission wrote to the Lithuanian Government reminding it of the importance of respecting the freedom of assembly and the right to non-discrimination. I think this is a good example of how you can change attitudes without necessarily having to pass legislation.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

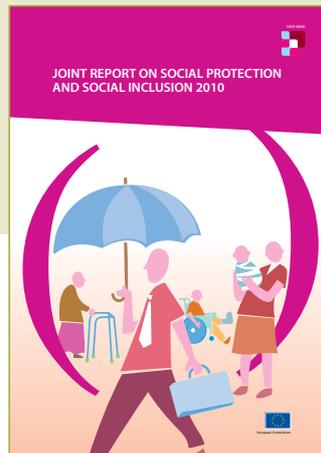


Microfinance: a new Facility for you

The European Progress Microfinance Facility is operational as of June 2010. It aims to ease access to credit for people wishing to start or develop their own micro-enterprise (including self-employment) by providing loans of up to €25 000. The European Investment Fund will manage the Facility on behalf of the European Commission.

Individual entrepreneurs wanting to apply for a loan can do so via micro-loan providers selected by the European Investment Fund. Those seeking funding can also benefit from guidance and coaching, often with the support of the European Social Fund. This leaflet is available in printed format in all EU official languages.

Catalogue No.: KE-32-10-254-EN-D

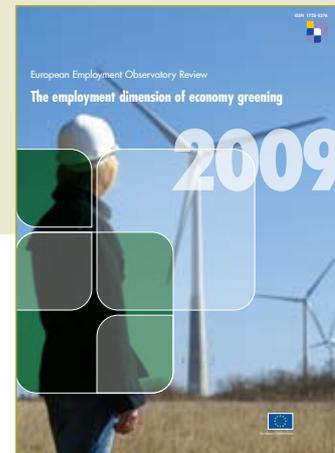


Joint report on social protection and social inclusion 2010

The Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2010 covers a range of areas including social inclusion policy, housing, healthcare, the impact of the economic crisis on pension systems and governance. It examines the social situation in EU27 before and in the economic and financial crisis and looks at Member States initial responses and preparations made for recovery. The report also includes country profiles on homelessness and housing exclusion for each EU Member State.

This publication is available in printed format in English only.

Catalogue No.: KE-AK-10-001-EN-C



European Employment Observatory Review - The employment dimension of economic greening (2009)

The concept of 'going green' is spreading in the EU and is having a significant impact on the economy. This greening of the economy is expected to have wide-spread effects on EU industries and the labour market. This European Employment Observatory Review looks at the influence of the greening of the economy on European employment. The report analyses both the risks and benefits of the green economy and identifies measures that can be taken to limit such risks. It is available in English, French and German.

Catalogue No.: KE-AN-09-002-EN-C

Useful websites

The website of Commissioner Andor: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/andor/index_en.htm

The website of Commissioner Reding: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/reding/index_en.htm

The home page of the Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/>

The website of the European Social Fund: <http://ec.europa.eu/esf>



Publications Office

To order these publications, please contact:

European Commission
Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG
InfoCentre
B-1049 Brussels
Fax: (32-2) 296 23 93
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/contact>

To subscribe to the 'Social Agenda' magazine or to other publications of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, please fill in the registration form available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=740&langId=en>