

EQUALITY SUMMIT 2012 'PROMOTING EQUALITY FOR GROWTH' KEY LEARNING AND CONCLUSIONS

I. CONTEXT

- The Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission co-organised the 6th Equality Summit that took place in Nicosia on the 22-23 November 2012 entitled "**Promoting Equality for Growth**".
- Since 2007, the Equality Summit has been co-organised annually by the Member State holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of the year together with the European Commission.
- The Equality Summit promotes equal rights and equal opportunities for all in the EU. It is an occasion for sharing knowledge and experiences with the goal of developing more effective ways of counteracting all forms of discrimination. The Summit targets particularly discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion and belief, age, disability, sexual orientation and gender.
- The Summit has brought together 250 high-level delegates this year (governments, NGOs, social partners, media, academics, businesses and independent experts) from European Union Member States and acceding countries.
- On the occasion of the Equality Summit, the European Commission officially released a new Eurobarometer on discrimination in the European Union¹. This survey looks into attitudes and perceptions of Europeans towards discrimination, based on the grounds of gender, ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation and, for the first time, gender identity.

II. KEY LEARNING

1. Growth, equality policies and accessibility for all in an ageing society

a) Age discrimination in the labour market

- The 2012 Eurobarometer on discrimination shows that in the employment area, older citizens are seen as the most discriminated group. Over a half of Europeans believe that an applicant's age is a disadvantage if they are over 55 years old, and

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/newsroom/discrimination/news/121122_en.htm

67% believe the economic crisis is contributing to more discrimination against “older” workers.

- Stereotypes and incorrect perceptions against older people lead to discrimination in both accessing and progressing in the labour market. There is a misconception that older workers jeopardise the employment opportunities of younger workers. Evidence and employment data from many European countries reflect a very different reality.
- The number of discrimination cases on the grounds of age reported to Equality bodies varies considerably between countries. Factors that might explain this include different level of awareness of potential victims of discrimination of their rights or different roles played by NGOs or Social Partners at national level.
- Good practices in combatting age discrimination in the labour market include awareness raising campaigns, financial incentives and flexibility in managing the end of working life amongst others.²
- There is a clear economic case for the prevention of discrimination of older people in the labour market, in terms of contributions to the social welfare system ensuring sustainability of public finances and saving costs for the health care and the pension systems.

b) Growth and accessibility for all

- When it comes to good and services, the lack of accessibility that persons with disabilities and older people often experience is considered by more than two-thirds of Europeans (68%) in the Eurobarometer as a form of discrimination.
- Boosting the market for goods and services that are accessible for persons with disabilities and elderly persons can contribute to growth and improve the quality of life of millions.
- As the unemployment rate for disabled people is 70% higher than for non-disabled people, increasing the employment rate of disabled people can help to tackle poverty. Underemployment and underqualification of disabled people accounts for the estimated loss of 40.3 billion euros per year³ in general revenue.
- The Employment Equality Directive⁴ has been helpful in dismantling barriers arising from discrimination against persons with disabilities and older people.

² More information on good practices in this field can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/good_practice_age_sem_report_march2011_en.pdf

³ Source: European Disability Strategy

⁴ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32000L0078:en:NOT>

- All employment measures should address and prevent the multiple-discrimination cases when they risk appearing. Elderly women and men as well as disabled women and men face different barriers throughout their lives when it comes to the labour market, education, care and responsibilities.

2) Contribution of equality and accessibility policies to the EU2020 strategy

a) Contribution of equality policies to the attainment of the employment and social inclusion targets

- Creating employment and promoting equality in the labour market at micro level remain the best way to avoid poverty and social exclusion.
- Framework agreements on inclusive labour markets between social partners or increasing the level of literacy of employees are measures that, if adapted more widely, could help to increase employment and social inclusion opportunities to vulnerable groups and consequently contribute to the EU2020 targets.
- Austerity measures taken at macro level may have a negative impact on the effectiveness of such measures and on achieving the headline targets of Europe 2020. However, the social unrest caused by greater inequalities and greater poverty can be counterproductive to growth.
- It is important to encourage players at micro level to continue promoting equality in employment in the current economic context and reassure them to the maximum possible extent that their work will not be undone by governmental measures at higher level.

b) Contribution of equality policies to the attainment of the education targets

- The Europe 2020 strategy cannot be achieved unless all children are given quality education. Quality education should begin at an early age and should address the child's specific needs.
- Measures ensuring an inclusive education of students with diverse backgrounds, disabilities or facing special difficulties are beneficial for all students.
- In the current difficult economic context, youth and employment have become the main social priorities. Education plays a key role, but some countries are experiencing cuts in this area, which raises concerns on the financial sustainability of key growth drivers such as lifelong learning in an ageing society, migration, new technologies or modernisation of higher education and schools.

- Education alone cannot solve the current problems of vulnerable groups and society at large. Policy coherence in the areas of justice, employment, housing and education are necessary. The EU Framework for National Roma strategies⁵ constitutes a good example.
- Education covers a wide range of different subsystems including general education, vocational training, adult training, higher education. In some countries, these subsystems are strongly supported, in others there are inequalities. A country specific approach is needed in this context.

c) Equality legislation as a driver for growth policies

- Equality legislation is and should be a catalyst for growth because it seeks to protect the most vulnerable and can be the driver for both economic and social inclusion. Growth policies without a mainstreamed equality policy on all grounds of discrimination risk failure on the social cohesion dimension with a greater risk of poverty, inequality and conflict.
- For equality legislation to be effective it needs to cover all areas of life, it must cover intersectional/multiple discrimination and address multiple disadvantages that some people face. The adoption of the Commission Proposal for a Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation⁶ and the setting of positive duties can help in this endeavour.
- Equality legislation should be complemented with Equality policies. It was recommended to put in place at European level a policy action/strategy for LGBTI⁷ people, in line with the current existing strategies on gender, disability or the Roma.
- Equality bodies can contribute to growth by reinforcing social cohesion and supporting the implementation of directives and national antidiscrimination legislation. For this they need independence, sufficient financial means and legal powers to pursue discrimination cases.
- Attention should be paid to specific barriers faced by certain groups at risk of discrimination including legal recognition in the case of transgender people and reasonable accommodation when it comes to religious minorities.

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/discrimination/docs/com_2011_173_en.pdf

⁶ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52008PC0426:en:NOT>

⁷ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex

3) The economic case for equality policies

- There is a wealth of evidence in different EU countries illustrating and quantifying the economic case of Equality policies, for different discrimination grounds and different sectors.
- The benefits that accessibility policies bring to the tourism sector, the Roma inclusion in the society or the key contribution that migrant entrepreneurs can make to sustainable growth and employment are some of many examples.
- This evidence needs to be widely disseminated and the current research gaps for different grounds and sectors at EU and national level need to be covered.
- When making the economic case for equality policies, it is important to highlight that discriminatory practices are not only harmful for society but they also result in real financial costs to public authorities, to businesses, to victims of discrimination and to those who discriminate.

4) The business case for diversity

- Diversity management helps private and public organisations gain clear benefits including innovation, creativity and growth. In particular, effective diversity measures help to access a wider talent base, expand the customer client base and ease access to markets.
- Thanks to diversity, companies secure efficient management throughout global business, being at the same time capable to catch opportunities in local business environment.
- There is a range of diversity measurement tools to demonstrate the positive effect of diversity: HR statistics, surveys amongst staff, suppliers and customers, indicators developed for balanced recruitment process and welfare measures.
- In terms of concrete benefits and impact, companies actively implementing diversity measures claim to minimize average pay difference between men and women by about 5%, ensure higher representation of women in companies' boards and managerial positions, and attain multicultural experience of more than 50% of the senior managers.
- Hostile attitudes to minorities cause absenteeism, underperformance and clearly diminish the performance of companies. For example, it is estimated that more than 75% of the LGBT workers are not out at the workplace, which implies an estimated loss in the productivity of the European labour force of 1,7%, with consequences on the EU GDP that can be quantified on € 200 billion per year.

- To profit from the diversity management enterprises need to clearly communicate their commitment to diversity both internally to their staff and externally to stakeholders. Diversity management also requires strong leadership and execution which need to be positioned at the highest level in companies. Diversity charters are among the most effective tools to evidence companies' commitment to diversity and showcase their good practices.
- According to the last Eurobarometer, there is an extremely high level of support by citizens, almost 80%, for measures which foster diversity in the workplace.

III. CONCLUSIONS

- The current economic crisis is putting pressure on the finances of all members of the European Union, which often results in austerity measures and cuts in social policies, including Equality.
- The latest Eurobarometer on discrimination confirms this trend, as an absolute majority of Europeans believe that, due to the economic crisis, policies promoting equality and diversity are regarded as less important and receive less funding.
- However, the Equality Summit has shown that equality policies can support growth, and growth cannot be achieved in a society where discrimination and exclusion exist.
- In times of crisis, human rights and non-discrimination principles should be taken into account when designing and implementing growth policies. Investing in Equality policies will contribute to creation of a more inclusive participatory and prosperous society by ensuring that persons with disabilities, older people, ethnic and religious minorities, women, sexual minorities and all groups at risk of discrimination can play a positive role for growth and are given the opportunity to show their talents.
- The responsibility lies on Member States, European Institutions, Equality bodies, NGOs, businesses, trade unions and employers. All have a role to play in combatting discrimination and reflecting diversity in the work force, but also in all spheres of life, making sure that growth and equality go hand in hand, as one cannot be achieved without the other.
- The European Commission is committed to keep on combating discrimination, with all means at its disposal, within the boundaries of its competences. It will continue working closely with the European Parliament and the Council for the adoption of the Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The results of the Eurobarometer should serve as an orientation for future activities.
- All stakeholders are also invited to consider the conclusions of the Equality Summit and the results of the Eurobarometer to strengthen their efforts towards a more tolerant society, free from discrimination.