

First overview of responses to the consultation on EU 2020 Strategy

Did the main message from social NGOs get lost in translation?

On the 2nd of February, the EU Commission has published the "first overview of responses" to its public consultation on its EU 2020 Strategy. According to this document, the "Stakeholders with a social vocation broadly support the Commission's proposed priorities", with no reference as to whom these stakeholders might be. Did the main message from social NGOs get lost in translation? To the contrary, in its response to the consultation, COFACE (The Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union), just as many other social NGOs¹, have underlined the essential shortcomings of this 2020 strategy and have published press releases confirming their positions².

Furthermore, the Commission has published the "Lisbon Strategy evaluation document" which states that "lessons need to be drawn" from the fact that "employment increases have not sufficiently reached those furthest away from the labour market, and jobs have not always succeeded in lifting people out of poverty". Despite this encouraging statement, seemingly, the "lesson" the Commission has drawn is quite simple: the strategy did not go far enough, therefore, we need another 10 years of "the same"; in other words, growth, jobs, innovation, knowledge, with a teaspoon of "green" and a touch of "smart". Finally, the document fails to identify the responsibility that the Lisbon Strategy may have played with the rise in unemployment: the jobs created were not quality ones, but precarious ones which could not resist in the face of the crisis.

William Lay, Director of COFACE, insists that *"one of the most urgent measures is to tackle the unacceptable inequalities between the populations, and not just in terms of "education" or "qualification" levels. Indeed, there needs to be a strong commitment to social policies including the redistribution of wealth and continued funding of efficient social protection systems. Ignoring inequalities will only contribute to widening the gap between the rich and the poor and reinforcing discrimination. Families need to feel support from the EU institutions for improvement of their everyday lives."*

¹ Social Platform Members.

² [AGE press release](#) of 4 February, EAPN press release of 3 February.

COFACE wishes to convey **3 key points** without which the EU 2020 Strategy will fail to learn the lessons from its Lisbon predecessor:

- **Growth and jobs cannot be seen as aims by themselves.** Growth has to lead to more equality and therefore needs to be measured with such indicators as the GINI coefficient. Jobs have to correspond to quality criteria if they are to be successful in reducing poverty. A failure to address these issues results in the creation of more working poor. COFACE regrets that the "white" and social economies are not identified as a potential sector for growth and jobs – especially in services for families.
- **Social cohesion and inclusive societies cannot be achieved solely via education and lifelong learning.** Issues such as the distribution of wealth, poverty, discrimination, integration of migrants, inequalities in health and environment, call for horizontal and integrated policies in all fields, notably active inclusion strategies. There should be a strong focus on the fights against inequalities and discrimination faced by vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities and their families.
- **To tackle the demographic challenge and to promote solidarity between generations, it is crucial to invest into quality, accessible and affordable care services.** They should be flanked by other measures enabling reconciliation of work life with care responsibilities, such as leave and flexible working time arrangements. Gender equality, child well-being and elderly dignity must lie at the heart of these schemes. Financial support is also essential for families to cope with their needs.

COFACE calls the Head of States and Prime Ministers, meeting informally on the 11th of February, to discuss the EU 2020 vision without forgetting about these 3 key elements for a strong cohesive society.

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coface is a pluralistic organisation, at the heart of civil society, which aims at promoting family policy, solidarity between generations and the interests of children within the European Union. **coface** advocates a policy of non-discrimination and of equal opportunities between persons and between family forms, and specifically supports policies aiming at equality between women and men.

coface links together general and single-issue national family organizations. It currently has more than 51 member organizations across 20 Member States of the European Union. As such, it gives a voice to many millions of parents and children.



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