



COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION



Council conclusions on Social Protection in European Union Development Cooperation

*3191st FOREIGN AFFAIRS - Development - Council meeting
Luxembourg, 15 October 2012*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. "Many partner countries face significant challenges in establishing and developing their social protection systems because of low budget allocations, weak institutional capacity, low tax bases or high levels of informality in their economies. Despite progress on the MDGs, a large number of people remain trapped in chronic poverty and vulnerability, which is increasingly associated with exclusion and marginalisation. This requires greater emphasis to be put on the sectors that relieve poverty, support investments in human development and, in the longer term, inclusive and sustainable growth, characterised by an equitable distribution of welfare and people's ability to participate in wealth and job creation and to benefit from universal access to basic social services, such as health and education. Social protection policies can play a transformative role in society by fostering equity, promoting social inclusion and dialogue with social partners.
2. As highlighted in the Council Conclusions on an Agenda for Change¹, support for social inclusion and human development will continue through at least 20% of EU aid. Such efforts should help enhance the capacity of the poor and vulnerable groups to escape from poverty, to better cope with risks and shocks. They should be pursued with partner countries on a demand-driven basis, through a rights-based approach. The EU will encourage partner countries to include in their national policies the provision of higher levels of social security through, *inter alia*, income security and universal and non-discriminatory access to essential services throughout their life cycle.

¹ Doc. 9369/12.

P R E S S

3. In this context, the Council welcomes the Commission's communication, which aims at developing a policy framework for future EU support for Social Protection in EU Development cooperation, on the basis of a differentiated approach, taking into account partner countries' needs, priorities and capacity.² It reiterates³ its support for the "Recommendation Concerning National Floors of Social Protection," adopted at the 2012 International Labour Conference, and underlines its continued support for the Decent Work Agenda, one of whose pillars is social protection. The Council urges the Commission to elaborate its activities in accordance with the World Health Assembly decisions on Universal Health Coverage guaranteeing access to basic health services.
4. The Council endorses the guiding principles for future EU development cooperation in the field of social protection, as set out in the Commission's Communication. The main objectives are: supporting the development of inclusive, nationally-owned social protection policies and programmes, including social protection floors; protecting against protracted crises and building resilience; addressing gender-related concerns; focussing on measures for capacity building and integrating civil society, social partners and private sector initiatives; and ensuring that those beneficiaries who can are enabled to participate in productive economic activity and employment. The EU will support the active involvement of CSOs in strengthening social protection policies in partner countries.
5. The cost of social protection benefits should in the long term be met from national budgets to ensure both ownership of social policy and sustainability. In fragile, post-conflict and very low-income situations, temporary funding of social protection transfers by development partners may be justified. Support for the development of inclusive, nationally-owned social protection systems should go hand-in-hand with support for taxation reform in order to help develop effective, efficient, fair and sustainable tax systems in partner countries. In this context, the transition experience of EU Member States should be drawn upon and shared whenever relevant.
6. The Council invites the Commission to examine how best to integrate social protection, which is an important element of EU development policy, in the post-2015 development agenda and ensure that social protection is included in policy dialogues with partner countries including with partner countries graduating from EU bilateral development cooperation and is underpinned by principles of universality and inclusiveness, with particular attention to the most vulnerable, excluded and disadvantaged people, for example women, children, persons with disabilities and victims of HIV-AIDS.
7. Social protection can be supported through various aid modalities, including budget support, sector approaches and technical assistance. The EU will make greater use of technical assistance tools, such as TAIEX, to enable the deployment of expert practitioners. In the case of EU-financed budget support programmes, the Council calls on the Commission to ensure that social protection is considered an important element in assessing the relevance of policies and reforms to the overall objectives of poverty reduction, as well as sustainable and inclusive development, which is an eligibility criterion for budget support.⁴

² Doc. 13220/12.

³ EU Statement on "Social protection floors for social justice and a fair globalisation" at the Committee on the Elaboration of an autonomous Recommendation on the Social Protection Floor Opening on 30 May 2012, at the 101st Session of the International Labour Conference (Geneva, 30 May-14 June 2012).

⁴ Doc. 9323/12.

8. In developing countries, the Ministries in charge of caring for the most vulnerable are often the Ministries with the smallest budgets and weakest capacity. Capacity building and empowerment of social workers, community development officers and other professionals of care is therefore essential. In this respect, the EU can also facilitate relevant South-South as well as triangular cooperation in the field of social protection.
 9. Particular attention should be given to policy design and implementation in fragile states and post-conflict situations, as well as in situations of recurrent natural disasters. In this regard, social protection mechanisms such as cash, vouchers and food safety nets can play a central role in protecting assets and building disaster resilience. To promote coherence, these initiatives should also draw on and complement actions linked to other EU policies such as on resilience, linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD), security and development as well as food security and nutrition.
 10. The Council calls for additional efforts to address the challenges of providing social protection in the informal economy and encourages measures which support productive employment and decent work for all, in particular women and young people, and also address the social protection rights of foreign workers and residents.
 11. The Council sees the need for improved coordination of EU, Member States and third parties' support at the country level including, when relevant, on the basis of the concept of Social Protection Floors. It invites the Commission and the EEAS to provide a report to the Council on progress made by end 2014, in the context of the programming process and the use of key implementing methods and approaches, such as provision of technical assistance in support of capacity building, professional exchanges, evidence-based programming, maximisation of impact and the integration of social protection into other sector policies and programmes.
 12. The Council calls on the Commission to ensure that policy dialogue and development objectives on social protection are in line with, and contribute to, EU commitments to Policy Coherence for Development."
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