

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1381/09
by Iles Braghetto (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Stability Pact and social policies in Italian regions

Worst affected by the current economic crisis are those families whose income is at risk from loss of employment or where the birth of additional children or the presence of persons with disabilities or special needs poses increasingly difficult economic problems.

At this critical juncture, states and regions are seeking, quite rightly, to make more extensive use of the European Social Fund to sustain the welfare safety net and help the unemployed.

Equal priority during this time of crisis should be given to families needing support to help achieve a life/work balance when children are born or when coping with disabled or elderly people with special needs.

With regard to mothers and small children, the regions are striving to comply with the Lisbon 2000 guidelines and achieve the target of ensuring that early childhood socio-educational facilities are available for 33% of children under the age of three.

This is being done with financial assistance either via capital investment to develop new services or current expenditure to help cover administrative expenses. Only a few regions have exceeded the 20% ceiling. However, efforts to make further progress may be thwarted by the impossibility of planning further expenditure for new services. In order to do so while remaining within the limits imposed by the pact, resources for other sectors under regional government control would have to be cut.

The solution would be to exclude social policies from the Stability Pact, even if account must be taken at the same time of the need to restore balance to public finances, which is a priority objective for both the Community and Italy.

Investing more heavily in social policies would have real benefits in terms of savings, not least for healthcare policies, which are excluded from the Stability Pact.

1. Will the Commission open up a debate on the possibility of excluding social policies from the Social Pact?
2. Are there any reasons why the Stability Pact cannot be maintained, while allowing social policies to be exempted from its scope?
3. Does the Commission consider investment in social policy to be a priority or not?