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Creation date: 25-04-2020
Collective intelligence at EU level: Social and democratic dimensions

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 31-03-2020
Author: Gianluca SGUEO | Nora MILOTAY
Policy area: Environment | EU Democracy, Institutional and Parliamentary Law | Economics and Monetary Issues | Public Health

Summary: Humans are among the many living species capable of collaborative and imaginative thinking. While it is widely agreed among scholars that this capacity has contributed to making humans the dominant species, other crucial questions remain open to debate. Is it possible to encourage large groups of people to engage in collective thinking? Is it possible to coordinate citizens to find solutions to address global challenges? Some scholars claim that large groups of independent, motivated, and well-informed people can, collectively, make better decisions than isolated individuals can – what is known as ‘collective intelligence.’ The social dimension of collective intelligence mainly relates to social aspects of the economy and of innovation. It shows that a holistic approach to innovation – one that includes not only technological but also social aspects – can greatly contribute to the EU’s goal of promoting a just transition for everyone to a sustainable and green economy in the digital age. The EU has been taking concrete action to promote social innovation by supporting the development of its theory and practice. Mainly through funding programmes, it helps to seek new types of partners and build new capacity – and thus shape the future of local and national innovations aimed at societal needs. The democratic dimension suggests that the power of the collective can be leveraged so as to improve public decision-making systems. Supported by technology, policy-makers can harness the ‘civic surplus’ of citizens – thus providing smarter solutions to regulatory challenges. This is particularly relevant at EU level in view of the planned Conference on the Future of Europe, aimed at engaging communities at large and making EU decision-making more inclusive and participatory. The current coronavirus crisis is likely to change society and our economy in ways as yet too early to predict, but recovery after the crisis will require new ways of thinking and acting to overcome common challenges, and thus making use of our collective intelligence should be more urgent than ever. In the longer term, in order to mobilise collective intelligence across the EU and to fully exploit its innovative potential, the EU needs to strengthen its education policies and promote a shared understanding of a holistic approach to innovation and of collective intelligence – and thus become a ‘global brain,’ with a solid institutional set-up at the centre of a subsidised experimentation process that meets the challenges imposed by modern-day transformations.

Report on employment and social policies in the euro area

Publication type: At a Glance
Date: 07-10-2019
Author: Nora MILOTAY
Policy area: Social Policy | Employment

Summary: At the beginning of the European Semester cycle, in November, the Council adopts euro-area recommendations and conclusions on the annual growth survey and the alert mechanism report. In advance of this the Employment and Social Affairs Committee, as of last year, prepares a report on employment and social policies in the euro area. This year’s report puts great emphasis on the urgent need to address persistent inequalities across regions, generations and genders. It calls for social priorities to be placed on a par with economic ones and for the implementation rate of the country specific recommendations to be stepped up in the euro area and beyond. Parliament is due to debate the report during the October I plenary part-session.

A new directive on work-life balance

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 02-04-2019
Author: Nora MILOTAY
Policy area: Social Policy | Employment | Adoption of Legislation by EP and Council

Summary: Despite significant progress for some social groups in the area of work-life balance, there has been a general trend of decline since 2011, and progress amongst Member States has been uneven. This proposed directive (complemented with non-legislative measures) should lead to the repeal of the existing Framework Agreement on Parental Leave, made binding by Council Directive 2010/18/EU (the Parental Leave Directive). The new directive contains proposals for paternity, parental and carers’ leave. Stakeholders have been divided over the level of ambition of the proposed measures. Trilogue negotiations started in September 2018, and a provisional agreement among the three institutions was reached after the sixth trilogue meeting, in January 2019. The provisional agreement is less ambitious than the original Commission proposal and the Parliament’s position, which had, in some ways, gone further than the Commission. The text was approved by the Parliament’s Employment and Social Affairs Committee in February 2019, and now needs to be adopted in plenary. Third edition. The ‘EU Legislation in Progress’ briefings are updated at key stages throughout the legislative procedure. Please note this document has been designed for on-line viewing.
Social protection in the EU: State of play, challenges and options

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 11-10-2018
Author: Nora MILOTAY

Policy area: Social Policy | Employment | Public Health | Education

Summary: Globalisation, technological change, an aging population and changes to the world of work have made securing social protection for all, i.e. economic and social security, a major challenge. When social protection systems work well, they can have a stabilising effect on the economy and promote socio-economic equality and stability. By contrast, inadequate or ineffective systems can exacerbate inequality. Indeed, improving the existing social protection systems is the priority of half of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights – the European Commission’s overarching social field initiative designed to serve as a compass for policies updating current labour market and welfare systems.

While implementation of the ‘social pillar’ remains primarily the responsibility of the Member States, in close cooperation with the social partners, the European Commission has put forward several legislative and non-legislative initiatives to support this process in the area of social protection. These include the proposal for a recommendation on social protection for all, including non-standard workers, responding to calls from the European Parliament and the stakeholders. This proposal had the difficult task of addressing all the disagreements that had arisen during the two-phase consultation in the preparatory phase. While all parties seem to agree on the importance of adjusting social protection to the new realities of life and work, there are differences of opinion concerning the technicalities, such as the financing of schemes. This is in part a reflection of the current evidence that raises many questions as to the optimal response to the new challenges in very diverse systems of social protection across the Member States. The main trends currently include a combination of social protection and social investment, individualisation of social protection schemes and a potential move towards universal social protection, whereby social protection would be removed from the employment relationship. However, financing these schemes poses a challenge.

Faith-based actors and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 19-06-2018
Author: Nora MILOTAY

Policy area: Social Policy | Employment | Public Health | Education

Keyword: labour market | European social policy | social dialogue (EU) | non-profit organisation | social rights | distribution of EU funding | religious institution | European Semester | social integration

Summary: The European Pillar of Social Rights was jointly proclaimed and signed by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council at the Gothenburg Social Summit in November 2017. The 20 principles and rights that make up the Social Pillar build on the existing social acquis, i.e. social mandate contained in binding provisions of EU law, and should serve as a “compass” for the renewal of current labour markets and welfare systems across the European Union (EU). Their implementation is largely the responsibility of the Member States in cooperation with the social partners, when it comes to policy development, programme implementation or funding. Faith-based organisations and contribute to the welfare state. In the EU context, there is no distinction between faith-based and secular organisations, i.e. civil society associations, third sector organisations and non-profit organisations. Some are inspired by religious values without being formally linked to religious institutions. They play an important role in addressing social problems, particularly in relation to under-served populations. They often cooperate with secular organisations and contribute to the welfare state. In the EU context, there is no distinction between faith-based and secular organisations, when it comes to policy development, programme implementation or funding. Faith-based organisations have welcomed the Social Pillar and have emphasised in particular the role they could play in its implementation at grassroots level. Not only can they provide services, they can also help to devise strategies and funding schemes by connecting local, national and European actors. There are still a lot of gaps in the evaluation of their activities, however, which makes it difficult to quantify their real contribution to the functioning of the welfare state.

EYE event - Equal opportunities: Forever poor or born to be free?

Publication type: At a Glance
Date: 16-05-2018
Author: Nora MILOTAY

Policy area: Social Policy | Gender Issues, Equality and Diversity

Keyword: poverty | European social policy | equal treatment | social inequality | European Social Fund | sustainable development | democracy | rights of the individual | welfare

Summary: The principle of equal opportunities for all is a cornerstone of democracy. It implies that, on the basis of the principle of non-discrimination, all people should have opportunities in all areas of life, such as education, employment, advancement or distribution of resources, irrespective of their age, race, gender, religion, ethnic origin or any other individual or group characteristic unrelated to ability, performance or qualifications. All kinds of inequalities affect access to opportunities and can lead to more inequalities. As long as all have equal access to high-quality education, other goods and services, finance and entrepreneurship, some level of inequality of outcomes is both economically inevitable and politically acceptable. Inequalities, including those of opportunities, are currently growing and young people are particularly hard hit. There is hardly any public debate that does not touch on this issue as it is at the core of the current global challenges. What is really at stake and how is the European Union responding?
The Future of Europe: Contours of the current debate

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 12-04-2018

Author: Magdalena SAPALA | Anja RADJENOVIC | Eleni LAZAROU | Joanna APAP | Nora MILOTAY | Silvia KOTANIDIS | Angelos DELIVORIAS

Policy area: EU Democracy, Institutional and Parliamentary Law
Keyword: European social policy | Economic and Monetary Union | EU migration policy | EU institution | multiannual financial framework | common security and defence policy

Summary: In the aftermath of the United Kingdom’s decision to leave the European Union (EU), following the referendum of June 2016, the EU launched a profound reflection on the Future of Europe, which continues in various fora and institutions. The debate has gained new momentum: the acceleration of the negotiations with the UK on its withdrawal from the EU, the electoral results in some EU Member States, and the forthcoming European Parliament elections in May 2019, have all deepened the discussion and increased the visibility of the positions of the various actors involved. In this context, since the beginning of 2018, the European Parliament has been organising plenary debates on the ‘Future of Europe’ with Heads of State or Government – so far with the Irish Prime Minister, Leo Varadkar, in January; the Croatian Prime Minister, Andrej Plenković, in February; and the Prime Minister of Portugal, António Costa, in March. The President of France, Emmanuel Macron, is due to deliver a speech during the Parliament’s April 2018 plenary session. The Belgian Prime Minister, Charles Michel, and the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Xavier Bettel, have confirmed their participation in early May, in Brussels, and at the end of May, in Strasbourg, respectively. This Briefing gives an overview of where the current debate stands in a number of key policy areas, such as the future of economic and monetary union (EMU) and the EU’s social dimension, as well as recent developments in EU migration policy, and security and defence. It also includes some preliminary analysis about the future, post-2020, Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and discussions on broader institutional matters. See also the parallel EPRS publication, From Rome to Sibiu – The European Council and the Future of Europe debate, PE 615.667.

Implementation of the Social Pillar

Publication type: At a Glance
Date: 05-12-2017

Author: Nora MILOTAY

Policy area: Social Policy | Employment | Economics and Monetary Issues | Education
Keyword: European social policy | economic governance (EU) | citizens' Europe | self-employed person | equal treatment | job access | working conditions | social dialogue | social security | social integration

Summary: The European Pillar of Social Rights ('Social Pillar') was proclaimed and signed jointly by the Commission, Council and European Parliament, on 17 November 2017 at the Gothenburg Social Summit. The main challenge remains bringing this reference framework to all citizens across the EU. Due to limited EU competence in the social field, implementation is for the Member States, in cooperation with social partners. Parliament has repeatedly promoted the importance of focusing on three elements in the implementation process: a life-cycle approach, governance and funding. The December plenary is due to hear statements from the Commission and Council, prior to the European Council meeting in December, at which there is to be further discussion on the social dimension of the EU, including education.

Social governance in the European Union: Governing complex systems

Publication type: In-Depth Analysis
Date: 17-11-2017

Author: Nora MILOTAY

Policy area: European Semester | Social Policy | Employment | Economics and Monetary Issues | Education
Keyword: European Structural and Investment Funds | European social policy | economic governance (EU) | economic and social cohesion | macroeconomics | social dialogue (EU) | open method of coordination | European Semester | European Committee of the Regions | social economy | European Economic and Social Committee

Summary: Whereas economic governance is now undertaken in the EU through a regulated, 'hard' framework, there is no equivalent framework for social governance. At present, social governance in the EU functions mainly within the 'soft', unregulated realms, although it is also marked by some 'hard' governance mechanisms. This paper aims to give an overview of the social aspects of EU governance. It looks at existing EU social governance mechanisms and tools, including their current state of play, the debates that surround them and possible avenues for their further development.
Social convergence and EU accession

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 28-09-2017
Author: Nora MILOTAY
Policy area: Social Policy
Keyword: convergence criteria | economic convergence | social indicator | EU Member State | open method of coordination | euro area | budgetary procedure | tax harmonisation

Summary: The European Pillar of Social Rights should serve as a 'compass for a renewed process of convergence towards better working and living conditions in the EU Member States'. Convergence of policies, regimes and outcomes happens either by 'growing together' or 'catching up'. There is, however, no consensus in the literature concerning the effect of European integration on welfare states. It is also difficult to discern whether European policy or the extent of its domestic implementation led to a certain result. While analysing gross domestic product and income levels alongside the social expenditure of individual Member States are the most common ways of measuring social convergence, new methods for producing synthetic measures and indexes emerge. Recently, in addition to countries' different starting points in terms of their history, institutional, political, economic and cultural contexts, the importance of micro-politics and micro-sociology are stressed as an explanation of different paths of development. For better policy design, a move beyond analyses based on traditional groupings of welfare regimes is suggested. Although both modern Spain and Portugal, and the central and eastern European countries, developed from authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, their social convergence paths differed greatly. In Spain and Portugal, the transition towards democratic stabilisation that began in the mid-1970s was further encouraged by EU accession. The countries followed distinct paths, but both experienced upward convergence. Following the 2008 crisis, however, their situation deteriorated steadily. Central and eastern European countries entered the accession process with many institutional, political and social challenges stemming from their transition to democracy since 1989. Their social convergence varied following accession, but was generally weak. After 2008, social convergence in the Baltic States declined greatly, but picked up quickly later, while the other countries showed some progress up to 2011, before deteriorating.

Reflection paper on the social dimension of the EU

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 07-06-2017
Author: Nora MILOTAY
Policy area: Social Policy
Keyword: labour market | unemployment | EU growth strategy | social security | socioeconomic conditions | free movement of persons | European social policy | Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers | economic and social cohesion | equal treatment | population ageing | education | EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

Summary: The paper on the EU's social dimension, the first of five papers within the white paper process, is the European Commission's contribution to a debate among the leaders of the 27 Member States (other than the UK), EU institutions, social partners and citizens on two major issues in the social and employment fields: the main challenges that Member States are facing and the added value of the various EU instruments available to tackle them. By the end of the process the EU should have a clear mandate from the Member States on the areas it should be tackling and on the extent of their commitment to working together. The results should feed into a document setting out practical measures for moving ahead, in time for the December 2017 European Council. The concepts 'social dimension' and 'social Europe' are interpreted in diverse ways across the EU and most of the competence developed over the past 60 years to implement policies remains with the Member States. In this context the Commission is proposing three alternative scenarios: an exclusive focus on the free movement of workers, development of a multispeed Europe, and genuine deepening of economic and monetary union across the EU-27. The successful implementation of the European pillar of social rights and related initiatives will depend a great deal on the outcome of this reflection process. The European Parliament has put forward several ideas on how to strengthen the social dimension of the European project, including by linking economic and social governance more closely, and increasing budgetary capacity so as to move towards upward convergence. This briefing is one in a series on the European Commission's reflection papers following up the March 2017 White Paper on the future of Europe.
Measuring social impact in the EU

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 16-05-2017
Author: Nora MILOTAY


Keyword: social impact | impact study | European social policy | social statistics | social indicator | drafting of EU law | statistical method | EU growth strategy | social change | socioeconomic conditions | policymaking

Summary: Austerity measures in the wake of the financial crisis, coupled with fragile economic growth, have triggered a shift in the focus of EU policy-makers towards deepening the economic and monetary union and achieving greater social convergence across Member States. In addition, due to growing inequalities and changing labour markets, discussions on investing in human capital have also come to the fore. In this context, it has become all the more important to understand and assess the social impact of policies and investments. Moreover, both public and private investors want to gain a better understanding of the social outcomes that are achieved by their investments. There is no clear consensual definition of the concept of social impact; while the social sciences look at the impact of policies and programmes, often in terms of social progress, social investors tend to look for the non-financial (that is, social and environmental) returns on their investments, which they tend to quantify and/or express in monetary terms, if possible. Metrics and methodologies to carry out the measurement of social impact are numerous but incoherent. The European Commission and European Parliament have their own mechanisms for impact assessment, in which they also assess social impact. In addition, several initiatives aim at measuring the social dimension of growth beyond GDP, arguing that GDP in itself does not hold enough information on social progress. The third sector has developed several methodologies to measure social impact as well, due to its interest in investing in social causes. Unlike outputs, it is often difficult to quantify outcomes and impacts. Moreover, it is debated whether quantification, no matter how comprehensive it is, can express the intricate nature of the issues at hand. Finally, developing a coherent framework that would help to effectively link strategic thinking with policy-making and policy implementation, including investment, remains a policy challenge.

Fostering social innovation in the European Union

Publication type: Briefing
Date: 17-01-2017
Author: Nora MILOTAY

Policy area: Social Policy | Energy | Employment | Internal Market and Customs Union | Education

Keyword: social impact | governance | EU policy | collaborative economy | fund (EU) | innovation | social economy

Summary: Strengthening the social dimensions of European Union policies, in general, and of the economic and monetary union, in particular is an increasingly important discourse across the Member States, particularly since the 2008 financial crisis. Social innovation, which is gaining increasing importance in the public, private and third (i.e. voluntary, non-profit) sectors, can greatly contribute to addressing the growing challenges, such as migration, poverty and global warming. The European Union particularly promotes social innovation through employment and social policies as well as policies on the single market. The main initiatives explicitly target the governance and funding mechanism of social innovation, including its regulatory environment, powering public-sector innovation, the social economy, as well as providing policy guidance and fostering new policy practices. Due to the complexity of the concept and ecosystem of social innovation and its very diverse contexts in the Member States, European Union policies have varied impact: regulations can have controversial effects in terms of visibility of initiatives, and many organisations still cannot access sufficient funding. To make these initiatives more effective it is important to know more about the impact of social innovation, including its social and environmental value and the importance of these for the economy. Please click here for the full publication in PDF format

European Pillar of Social Rights

Publication type: At a Glance
Date: 11-01-2017
Author: Nora MILOTAY

Policy area: Social Policy | Employment | Economics and Monetary Issues

Keyword: European social policy | stability pact | social dialogue (EU) | EU Member State | Community acquis | economic policy | social rights | EU initiative | labour flexibility | working conditions | euro area

Summary: The European Union (EU) Member States have defined common social rights and minimum standards in a wide range of labour market-related areas, and have committed to promoting employment and social progress. However, economic and social inequalities are still on the rise. The European Commission's plan for a European Pillar of Social Rights calls for two main actions: modernising existing legislation to better fit the present reality of the world of work and societal patterns, and developing employment and social benchmarks in order to foster upward convergence in the euro area and potentially beyond. Parliament is due to consider an own-initiative report on the subject at its January 2017 plenary session.

At a Glance: ES, DE, EN, FR, IT, PL
Understanding social innovation

Summary
Social innovation has become an important concept in European policy-making, cutting across sectors and disciplines. However, despite the increasingly frequent use of the term there is no consensus as regards its definition. As a result, in part of extensive research work at EU level, it is currently interpreted as a ubiquitous concept that entails new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or forms of collaboration. The concept is strongly related to notions of solutions and transformation. European policies promote social innovation in several sectors, such as the single market, employment and social affairs, health, education, energy, environment, and research. Within the EU, numerous policy and financial tools together with the (previous and current) research programme contribute to this process. However, there is still much to be done in terms of finding a comprehensive and well accepted theoretical approach to social innovation, efficient funding and regulatory environments, and also a way to measure its social (added) value. Without these social innovation runs the risk of becoming an empty buzzword in policy-making.

European Pillar of Social Rights for a more social Europe

Summary
The European Pillar of Social Rights is the European Commission's latest major initiative in the field of employment and social affairs. It is intended to serve the further 'socialisation' of the Economic and Monetary Union by strengthening its employment and social aspects, as stated in the Five Presidents' Report on 'Completing Europe's Economic and Monetary Union' from June 2015. In March 2016, the Commission published a preliminary outline of the Pillar, which is now undergoing broad consultation. In its final form, the Pillar could help not only the euro-area countries but also the other EU Member States achieve upward convergence of their social and employment performance. The outline released by the Commission for the consultation contains principles for equal opportunities and access to the labour market, for fair working conditions and for adequate and sustainable social protection that could become a European reference framework for monitoring and benchmarking. They are based on the EU's social acquis. The Pillar could become a binding instrument, but its final content and implementation are still open for discussion.

Public expectations and EU policies - Health and social security

Summary
Almost two thirds of EU citizens would like to see more EU engagement in the areas of health and social security. The EU's main role in these policies is to support and complement the activities of Member States, and it can encourage cooperation and best practice. EU health policy aims to foster good health, protect citizens from health threats and support dynamic health systems. Social policy promotes social cohesion equality as well as solidarity through adequate, accessible and financially sustainable social protection systems and social inclusion policies. The EU encourages national pension reforms to ensure they are both adequate and sustainable. In the EU budget, the Health Programme 2014-2020 is the only programme specifically created for this policy area, but other programmes contribute in part to health objectives. EU spending on social security is tied to labour market measures.
Integrated social services for more efficient service delivery

Publication type Briefing
Date 07-06-2016
Author Nora MILOTAY
Policy area Social Policy
Keyword European social policy | public service | institutional reform | EU financing | administrative reform | social services | social economy | social integration

Summary For the past four decades, and even more so since the crisis of 2008, integrated social services have been considered an efficient tool for helping all people, but particularly vulnerable ones, to participate successfully in society. What are these services, what can they really achieve and what are their limitations? Due to their complex nature, resulting from combining several services from employment, through health, social protection and education, they have only partly been mapped systematically across Europe. Several European policies provide support for social innovation and within this context also for integrated social services. The policy dilemmas surrounding the implementation of these services go to the heart of the concept shaping traditional welfare state models. Integrated social services and the policies related to them can contribute to the realisation of ‘Social Triple A’ for the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), which is a major objective of the Juncker Commission.

Early childhood education and care in family-friendly policies

Publication type Briefing
Date 04-05-2016
Author Nora MILOTAY
Policy area Social Policy | Employment | Education
Keyword early childhood | work-life balance | sustainable development | child protection | gender equality | care of mothers and infants | population dynamics | education policy | European social policy | pre-school education | integration of migrants | standard of living | quality of life | family protection

Summary Early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for children – from birth to compulsory primary school age – form an essential part of policies for work-life balance and for better social cohesion. A policy mix of flexible labour market arrangements, generous leave policies and quality ECEC services allows choices for parents, and at the same time supports the healthy development of their children. Member States are increasingly establishing well-functioning, efficient systems. Investing in early-years services brings the greatest returns, and is generally more successful than later remedial action. Until recently, ECEC was mainly considered as a vehicle for helping parents, primarily women, to (re)integrate into the labour market across the EU. Lately, there has been a growing awareness about its multiple benefits for children's personal development and social integration, including mitigating inequalities and preparing for later employability. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged children. The quality of life of young children is an important element in building smart, inclusive and productive societies. Quality accessible ECEC is an indispensable part of ensuring a quality childhood and building a resilient society.