

EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY:

A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth – COM (2010) 2020

Introduction

The European Commission (EC) has published its proposals for the successor to the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs. The new strategy, *Europe 2020: A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* sets out the proposed economic, social and environmental development for the EU over the next ten years.

The strategy highlights three mutually reinforcing priorities – “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.” The EC believes that these components are essential if the EU is to become a ‘*smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion.*’ In order to achieve this, the EC has proposed **five key targets** on which to measure and evaluate the strategy:

- 75 % of the population aged 20-64 should be employed;
- 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in Research and Development;
- The "20/20/20" climate/energy targets should be met;
- Reduce the dropout rate of early school leavers from 15% to 10% whilst increasing the share of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary education from 31% to at least 40%;
- 20 million fewer people should be at risk of poverty.

The delivery of the strategy will be through a mix of mechanisms including seven thematic flagship initiatives led by the EC and own country reporting by Member States.

A proactive approach to Europe by 2020

The social objectives within the Europe 2020 strategy have been strengthened in comparison with the original consultation paper. The commitment to reducing the number of people in poverty; reducing emissions; reducing the number of school early school leavers; increasing the number in active employment – with a particular focus on the ageing population and social excluded groups; serves as a basis on which to further build and strengthen the social components of the EU. This proactive approach by the EC acknowledges the significant role civil society groups constitute while also identifying the need to improve the effectiveness of the Open Method of Coordination (the process of reporting and exchanges between Member States which has so far been the main EU tool for achieving these social goals).

However, these positive aspects play only a secondary role to the strategy's primary objective – to foster an economic environment conducive to facilitating economic growth. The prevailing theme of the strategy remains heavily focused on growth and jobs and therefore, does not sufficiently put in place a strategy that will contribute to improving citizen's well-being. It is essential to ensure these economic, competitive and growth orientations do not become objectives in themselves but contribute to achieving the Union's overall aim “to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its people.”(1)

The Equity Channel, in our response to the consultation on Europe 2020, highlighted that economic policies will not thrive without strong social policies – indeed, they should be synonymous with each other. This was based on the report ‘*Economic arguments for addressing social determinants of health inequalities*’ by the DG SANCO co-funded and EuroHealthNet coordinated **DETERMINE project**. The report concluded that:

EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY:

A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth – COM (2010) 2020

1. Targeted investment to address health inequalities by action on the social determinants of health is more **cost effective** than paying later for the consequences of these inequalities.
2. It follows then that addressing health inequalities is not only a matter of social justice but also contributes to **economic sustainability**.

Thus, we argued that by tackling health inequalities and health inequities through a social determinant approach, it will contribute to achieving a sustainable, competitive and innovative European economy with a healthy, socially inclusive population. While the EU 2020 strategy does acknowledge that reducing health inequalities is important, as yet it is short of details on how to achieve this.(2)

A lot done but more to do

- The proposed strategy aims to ‘empower people through high levels of employment’ but it focuses on increasing the number of people in employment as opposed to creating sustainable and quality jobs. In addition, central to this objective is the need to promote social inclusion strategies that target the most vulnerable groups in society – the ageing population and poorest groups.
- The EC proposed target for reducing poverty is a long overdue but welcome step. The EC must follow up on this commitment by ensuring that it adopts appropriate instruments and indicators to achieve the proposed targets. In addition, as the link between poverty and ill health is well established, the EC should, as part of its follow up to this strategy and the Health Inequalities communication, incorporate a health inequality indicator within the framework target for reducing poverty. Improvements in socio-economic status coupled with better health will contribute to a healthier and more productive workforce, therefore contributing to the strategies objective of ensuring a sustainable EU economy.
- The EC must follow up this commitment by encouraging Member States to draw up national action plans that will make this actually happen. This may require more time and therefore, the proposed June deadline should be extended to give additional time for Member States to produce detailed target plans. Furthermore, medium term targets should be included to assess the progress towards the achieving the final goals.
- Central to protecting the well-being of citizens, the EC should support the extension and consolidation of European social security and protection systems, particularly in the current climate of public expenditure cuts across Member States.
- The proposed governance of the structure must be improved, particularly the Social OMC aspects. More binding measures apart from exchange of best practices and benchmarking are needed if the final targets are to be met.
- Finally, the overall delivery mechanisms proposed in the strategy are still too weak to ensure their effective implementation at the national, regional and local level. The EC should learn from the mistakes from the Lisbon strategy and the EC, in conjunction with Member States, should promote ownership of the strategy at the different levels of governance.

EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY:

A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth – COM (2010) 2020

Next steps

The next step in the process is the expected endorsement of the strategy by the Member States in the Spring Council 25th/26th March 2010. Following this, Member States will further discuss the parameters of the strategy – the headlines targets and integrated national targets – at the Summer Council in 17th/18th June.

Follow up

The **Equity Channel** will provide further analysis of the Europe 2020 Strategy and its potential impact on health equity and well-being throughout 2010 as the debate develops, and will contribute to discussions in the EU Health Policy Forum and elsewhere. For more information please visit equitychannel.net for more information and don't forget to join our interactive community.

Additional Information

- EuroHealthNet's response to the Europe 2020 consultation – www.equitychannel.net/publications
- Europe 2020 Strategy: A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth – www.ec.europa.eu/eu2020/
- DETERMINE – www.health-inequalities.eu
- European Anti-Poverty Network – www.eapn.org
- Spring Alliance - www.springalliance.eu

Notes

1. Treaty of Lisbon – Article 3
2. In October 2009, the EC published its communication '**Solidarity in Health: Reducing Health Inequalities in the EU**' in which it acknowledged the serious threat of health inequalities both within and between Member States. Follow up to this communication is still forthcoming.

The **Equity Channel** is developed by **EuroHealthNet** in collaboration with the Department of Health in England as a way to support international partners to communicate with interested people and bodies on the social determinants for health, and has a specific focus to improve EU policies in this field (www.equitychannel.net)

Visit equitychannel.net for more information