

THE SOCIAL POLICY IN THE EU – THE NATIONAL ACTION PLANS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION IN SPAIN

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ABSTRACT:

IN RECENT YEARS, THE EUROPEAN UNION AND MEMBER STATES HAVE INCREASINGLY BECOME AWARE OF THE CENTRAL ROLE PLAYED BY EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY AS DISTINCTIVE ELEMENTS OF A DEVELOPED SOCIETY. MERE ECONOMIC GROWTH IS NOT CAPABLE OF REDUCING INEQUALITIES OR ELIMINATES POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION. IN THESE CONDITIONS, IT IS NECESSARY TO HAVE AN INTERDEPENDENCE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL INCLUSION POLICIES AND SOCIAL COHESION WITHIN THE HOST STATE. THIS CONTEXT INCLUDES THE EU'S EFFORTS, IN GENERAL, AT A LEGAL LEVEL, AND IN PARTICULAR, AT THE LEVEL OF THE MEMBER STATES, TO REDUCE GENDER INEQUALITIES BETWEEN THE MAJORITY POPULATION AND IMMIGRANTS IN TERMS OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION, SERVICES AND LABOUR MARKET.

KEY WORDS: SOCIAL POLICY, SOCIAL INCLUSION, EUROPEAN UNION, NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

INTRODUCTION

“The welfare policies”³ or social policies are an expression of organized power to deliberately respond (both politically and administratively) to the effects of its own market economy, in order to ensure people and families an indispensable minimum, to reduce the insecurity generating certain unpredictable situations (illness, unemployment, old age) and to ensure universal access to those social services that are essential within any society. The multitude of policies and action programs are designed in such a manner as to prioritize and solve collective needs. Social policies are, according to Joan Subirats, areas of collective management of various inequality⁴ aspects which cross different fields of the public and private life.

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³Joan Subirats, “Políticas públicas e Cohesion Social. Factores territoriales y gobiernos locales” (texto para Programa URB-AL III, Sitges, Octubre 2010), Instituto de Gobierno y Políticas Públicas/UAB, 12.

⁴Subirats, Políticas públicas e Cohesion Social. Factores territoriales y gobiernos locales, 12-14.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION/INCLUSION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

According to Daniel Olesker⁵, in a capitalist economy, or even more in a dependent country, social policies are designed to fulfil two objectives: social inclusion and reduction of income disparities. In the first set of objectives we find the access to public health, education, housing, social security, utility services, etc. The second category comprises those policies that tend to offset the effects of exclusion, such as labour market integration policies, reduction of unemployment, subsidies, child protection, etc.

Daniel Olesker also considered that social policies should have a centralized design, in coordination, and not be subordinated to economic policies⁶.

One of the issues that has been causing great concern both for the Member States and the European Union for over two decades, refers to the creation of a “European social model” (a European social policy following the model of the common agricultural policy), which is a sign of European identity that best responds to the needs and necessities of the individuals, but which can also simultaneously strengthen the social policies’ ability to efficiently support the EU economy. To meet this challenge, we find Anna Diamantopoulou’s⁷ statement, according to whom “[the interaction between] *economy, employment and social policy* [must] *be dynamic and positive*”⁸.

The European Union has named 2010, “the European year for combating poverty and social exclusion”⁹. *Social exclusion* is the consequence of a series of issues (unemployment, discrimination, low income, etc.) affecting both individuals and groups.

Social exclusion is the main focus of the EU since 1989, when the Council and Social Affairs Ministers’ Resolution¹⁰ regarding Social Exclusion was adopted. This resolution emphasized the fact that the fight against social exclusion is an essential part of the internal market’s social dimension and that the Member States are invited to promote measures providing access to education, training, employment, housing and quality services to everyone. This was followed by the 1992 Council Recommendations (June 24th, 92/44/EEC¹¹, July 27th, 44/EEC¹²) which highlighted the role of the social protection system, respectively the convergence of social protection objectives and policies.

The Treaty of Maastricht (1993) and the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999) have consolidated the grounds for the development of policies against poverty and social exclusion, perceived as a guarantee of fundamental civil and social rights, in order to build a true European citizenship. The Treaty of Amsterdam provided a new legal basis for combating social exclusion. Based on this new framework, through the Commission’s

⁵ Daniel Olesker is an Uruguayan economist and politician and also currently the Minister of Social Development (since July 19th 2011)

⁶ Daniel Olesker, “Qué son las políticas sociales?”, *La Onda digital, Primerarevistaelectrónica de reflexión y análisis* 50 (2001), accessed September 25, 2013, <http://www.laondadigital.com/laonda/LaOnda/001-100/50/que%20son%20las%20politicassociales.htm>.

⁷ Between 1999 and 2004 she was member of the Prodi Commission as European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs.

⁸ *Comunicación de la Comisión al Consejo, al Parlamento Europeo, al Comité Económico y Social y al Comité de las Regiones. Agenda de Política Social*, Luxemburgo: Oficina de Publicaciones oficiales de las Comunidades Europeas, 2000, 3.

⁹ “The policy background”, in *Foundation Findings: Opening the door—the role of social partners in fostering social inclusion*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2010, 3.

¹⁰ *Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers for Social Affairs Meeting within the Council of 29 september 1989 on combating social exclusion* (89/C277/01).

¹¹ *Council Recommendation of 24 June 1992 on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems* (92/441/EEC).

¹² *COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 27 July 1992 on the convergence of social protection objectives and policies* (92/442/EEC).

Communication of *A concerted strategy for modernizing social protection*¹³, the Member States are required to achieve the following objectives: to create better paying jobs, providing a secure income, a sustainable pension system, to promote social inclusion, to ensure access to quality and durable social services, to promote efficient cooperation, all these while carefully monitoring the implementation of the strategy.

Nowadays, the European Union defines social inclusion as a process that guarantees people in danger of poverty and social exclusion non-discriminatory access to the economic, social and cultural life¹⁴. A first step to reach this definition was represented by the *Lisbon European Council* of March 23rd and 24th 2000, which included, as part of the Union's global strategy (*the Lisbon Strategy*) the promotion of social integration to achieve the strategic objective for the following decade, namely to transform the EU into an economy based on competitive and dynamic knowledge, capable of achieving a sustainable economic growth with (more and better) jobs, concurrently with an improved social cohesion. The need for such a socio-economic intervention is determined by the large number of people living within the Union in imminent poverty and social exclusion. This situation makes it necessary to adopt measures that would have a decisive impact upon the eradication of poverty, by setting appropriate socio-economic objectives¹⁵.

To support the achievement of this objective and improve cooperation between the Member States in the field of social inclusion, the Lisbon Council considered that these policies should be based on the *Open Method of Coordination (OMC)*¹⁶. Under the Open Method of Coordination in the social field, the Member States draw up the *National Action Plans* which highlight the planned priorities and actions at a national level. The European Commission supports and monitors the progress, based on the common objectives, indicators and rules¹⁷. This method of cooperation made possible great progress in the field of employment, starting with the European Council on employment in Luxemburg in November 1997¹⁸.

Following the socio-economic efforts of the EU, the *Nice Summit of December 2000* also contributes through the approval of the *Social Policy Agenda of 2000-2005*¹⁹. The objective of the Agenda aims at achieving an adequate framework for positive and dynamic interaction between the economic and social policies, and those regarding employment and a political agreement to mobilize all key actors in order to achieve the targeted strategic objective.

The same Summit also adopted two highly important measures in defining and improving the European strategy to combat social exclusion: common objectives in the fight

¹³ *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A concerted strategy for modernizing social protection* [COM(1999)347 final - Not published in the Official Journal].

¹⁴ "Los 10 años de los Planes Nacionales de Accion para la Inclusion Social en el Reino de España" (Informe elaborado por el Centro de Estudios Economicos Tornillo), *Informes, Estudios e Investigacion*, Madrid, 2010, 9.

¹⁵ Maria Teresa Mogin Barquin, "El Plan Nacional de Accion para la Inclusion 2001-2003-en el marco de la Estrategia europea de lucha contra la exclusion social", *Acciones e Investigaciones Sociales 16 (dcbre.2002)*, 171-172.

¹⁶ OMC is a mechanism for the coordination of the Member States' social policies. Its objective aims at developing common European objectives through an exchange process of good practices and mutual learning, while allowing the Member States to define their own policies and achieve these objectives.

¹⁷ *La dimension social de la Estrategia Europe 2020. Un informe del Comité de Proteccion Social (2011)*, Luxemburgo, 2011, 4.

¹⁸ Maria Teresa Mogin Barquin, "El Plan Nacional de Accion", 172.

¹⁹ *Comunicación de la Comisión al Consejo, al Parlamento Europeo, al Comité Económico y Social y al Comité de las Regiones - Agenda de política social* [COM (2000) 379 final - no publicada en el Diario Oficial].

against poverty and social exclusion²⁰, respectively the creation of the Social Protection Committee²¹.

The Nice Council of December 2000 approved that each Member State would develop until June 2001 a National Action Plan against poverty and social exclusion over a period of 2 years²². Thus, in 2001, all the 15 Member States of the time presented the Commission their National Plans for Social Inclusion for 2001-2003.

In parallel with the formulation of the third set of action plans for 2005-2006, the Commission considered it necessary to revise the Lisbon Strategy, given the limited progress in the socio-economic field. The action was based on President José Manuel Barroso speech, entitled: ‘Working together for economic growth and employment – A new beginning of the Lisbon Strategy’²³.

Besides the creation of a new European Social Agenda (2006-2010)²⁴, the Renewed Lisbon Strategy provided the setting of new objectives and indicators, determining thus the extension of the agenda to other previously ignored fields.

As a consequence, the new national action plans increased the number of priority objectives from four to five. The five common objectives, also effective today, in the fight against poverty and social exclusion are: strengthening of access to the labour market, ensuring minimal economic resources, ensuring equitable education, achieving immigrant integration, access to social services for people in dependence situations²⁵, as a result of social and demographic trends.

THE NATIONAL ACTION PLANS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION IN SPAIN

Before proceeding to present the main characteristics of the Spanish action plans, we will make a brief analysis of the social exclusion concept, as well as the regional strategies for social inclusion in Spain.

In order to support the inclusion process of vulnerable groups, the Spanish State General Administration, in cooperation with the autonomous communities (CCAA) develop social programs that primarily materialize in the development, monitoring and evaluation of the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion, based on the common objectives set in the European Strategy on social inclusion. The Spanish National Plans enable the various social actors involved to develop a shared commitment both in terms of its objectives and in terms of its implementation period.

Between 2001 and 2010, five national action plans for social inclusion had been implemented: I NAP in 2001-2003, II NAP in 2003-2005, III NAP in 2005-2006, IV NAP in 2006-2008 and V NAP in 2008-2010.

Social inclusion is regarded as a response of the public authorities to social exclusion, a process that guarantees increased resources necessary to provide those endangered by poverty

²⁰“Objetivos en la lucha contra la pobreza y la exclusión social”, *Diario oficial de las Comunidades Europeas* 13.3.2001, (2001/C82/02).

²¹“2000/436/CE: Decisión del Consejo, de 29 de junio de 2000, por la que se crea un Comité de protección social”, *Diario Oficial de las Comunidades Europeas* 12.7.2000, L 172/26. This committee is a high-level forum that allows the Member States and the Commission to work together and share ideas as part of a social OMC. As of 2011, the Committee also drafts an annual report that assesses the social aspects of the European Strategy of 2020.

²²Maria Teresa Mogin Barquin, “El Plan Nacional de Accion”, 174.

²³*Comunicación al Consejo Europeo de primavera de 2 de febrero de 2005 «Trabajando juntos por el crecimiento y el empleo - Relanzamiento de la estrategia de Lisboa. Comunicación del Presidente Barroso de común acuerdo con el Vicepresidente Verheugen* [COM(2005) 24 final – no publicado en el Diario Oficial].

²⁴*Comunicación de la Comisión. Agenda de política social* [COM (2005) 33 final - no publicada en el Diario Oficial].

²⁵“Los 10 años de los Planes Nacionales de Accion para la Inclusion Social en el Reino de España”13.

and social exclusion, full participation to the economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy living conditions considered normal within the society they live in. Thus, social inclusion can be seen as a challenge that brings together representatives of the public authorities (national, regional and local), organizations and entities (Associations and Foundations), social agents and also private actors.

With the first four action plans, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was the one that led the development process and acted for the participation of all -public and private-actors to promote social inclusion. With the fifth plan, the responsible authority was the Ministry of Education, Social Policy and Sport. The actors involved in these plans were: the General State Administration (through the involved ministries), the Regional Administration (through communities and autonomous cities), the Local Administration (through the State Federation of Municipalities and Provinces), NGOs, social partners (unions and employers), the Economic and Social Council, as well as other experts in social policies. Taking into account the need for positive interaction between the economic sector, employment and social policies, the role of social partners-unions and employers' organizations-becomes increasingly important in the implementation of functional practices, both nationally and at a European level. They are becoming more involved in the social policy issues, together with an increasingly visible role of the private actors. Thus, if in the past social partners have adopted a largely reactive position towards the European Commission's initiatives, now they act as genuine partners in setting the European social standards²⁶.

Ever since 2001, starting with the first action plan, the Spanish state developed a form of work between institutional, territorial and social agents regarding their involvement in configuring and managing the social inclusion policies, following the guidelines of the European Strategy for Social Inclusion²⁷. This is highly important if we consider the fact that Spain is a decentralized state in which many of the problems regarding social inclusion fall under the responsibility of the autonomous communities (CCAA), councils, city halls and/or local corporations (CCLL). The increasing role of the CCAA and CCLL was highlighted by drafting and implementing certain Regional Plans for Social Inclusion, and to a lesser extent some Local Plans, which proposed social inclusion and the fight against poverty, tailored to the features of each territory. Hence, we can state that the territorial inclusion plans represent a certain tendency of individualism that adjusts to the field conditions. The integrating role of the CCAA and CCLL's inclusion plans must also be emphasized, with impact on social inclusion which shows the quantity of resources and efforts allotted to this field, as well as the inter-institutional, interdepartmental and inter-territorial coordination efforts that this process involves.

The 1st National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in Spain 2001-2003 was approved by the Council of Ministers on May 25th 2001 and presented to the European Commission on June 1st 2001²⁸. For the first time, this plan gathered, in a single, unitary document, the various courses of action in the field of social exclusion at the level of the entire state²⁹. The main objectives included in the NAP were: *reinforcing active employment and access to resources* in a double direction: strengthening the access to the labour market for people threatened by exclusion, paying special attention to the access to resources, rights and training services, counselling and insertion on the labour market, *preventing exclusion risks for people belonging to vulnerable groups*. These objectives aim at improving the situation of

²⁶“The policy background”, , 4-5.

²⁷“Los 10 años de los Planes Nacionales de Accion”, 17.

²⁸Maria Teresa Mogin Barquin , “El Plan Nacional de Accion”, , 175-176

²⁹*Plan Nacional de Accion para la Inclusión Social del Reino de España Junio-2001-Junio-2003*, 3.

people with a high risk of social exclusion, namely: the elderly, people with disabilities, women, the youth with an institutionalized background or the Roma³⁰.

The main challenge addressed by the plan is an efficient management of the actors' diversity, responsible in the fight against social exclusion.

The IInd National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in Spain 2003-2005 was approved by the Council of Ministers on July 25th 2003³¹. It is a continuation of the previous one of 2001-2003 and was drafted in the European Strategy, in accordance with the common guidelines formulated by the Social Protection Committee and based on the agreements adopted during the Lisbon, Nice, Barcelona and Copenhagen Summits. It must be stated that Spain was one of the few Member States that followed the EU recommendations and adopted the proposed model accordingly, since the beginning.

This plan proved to be even more ambitious than the first, both through the adopted measures and also through its goal of eradicating poverty. The effort of involving the civil society and all the social agents has also increased in its development, the priority being the participation of all agents, the establishment of discussions with the NGOs and the encouragement of exchanging good practices in administration³².

A Commission report that is based on the analysis of implementation reports on national plans regarding poverty and social exclusion for 2003-2005 stresses the fact that Spain continued to show an economic growth and an employment growth that exceeded the EU average during 2003 and 2004. Despite this economic growth, 20% of the population was still affected by poverty in 2003³³. 2004 brings along a government change that also implied changes in the strategy approach, meaning that the national action plan aimed at combining the economic growth with social welfare, correcting territorial imbalances, reducing socio-economic differences and preventing social exclusion³⁴.

The IIIrd National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in Spain 2005-2006, approved by the Council of Ministers on September 8th 2005³⁵, had a biennial nature. The plan refers to a real progress both in terms of involving the vulnerable people and in mobilizing all the actors³⁶. Unlike the first two plans, this one sought to quantify the progress of measures, despite the difficulties of achieving detailed information on the financial benefits and efforts corresponding to the competitive levels of the Spanish administration. A novelty is the manner of estimating the budget from previously set indicators, at all levels of action³⁷.

The IVth National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in Spain 2006-2008 (March 2006) took an important step in improving mutual cooperation, monitoring and assessing plans and strategies, respectively in facilitating the interaction with National Reform Programs³⁸.

The IVth NAP modified the structure of the priority objectives, increasing their number from four to five. These objectives are mutually reinforcing and try to adapt the economic growth to social welfare, ensuring thus the reduction of inequalities and prevention of social exclusion³⁹.

³⁰*Plan Nacional de Accion para la Inclusión Social del Reino de España Junio-2001-Junio-2003*, 9-38.

³¹“Los 10 años de los Planes Nacionales de Accion”, 19.

³²*Plan Nacional de Accion para la Inclusion Social del Reino de España 2003-2005*, 34-38.

³³*Social Inclusion in Europe 2006. Implementation and update reports on 2003-2005. National Action Plans on Social Inclusion and update reports on 2004-2006 Nation Action Plans on Social Inclusion*, Luxembourg, 2006, 55.

³⁴*Social Inclusion in Europe 2006.....55*

³⁵“Los 10 años de los Planes Nacionales de Accion”, 19.

³⁶*III Plan Nacional de Accion para la Inclusion Social del Reino de España 2005-2006*, 3.

³⁷*III Plan Nacional de Accion para la Inclusion Social del Reino de España 2005-2006*, 30-33.

³⁸*IV Plan Nacional de Accion para la Inclusion Social del Reino de España 2006-2008*, 3.

³⁹*IV Plan Nacional de Accionpara la Inclusion Social del Reino de España 2006-2008*, 9-24.

The Vth National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in Spain 2008-2010 was led by the Ministry of education, Social Policy and Sport, favoring a more active and direct involvement and coordination of all the actors involved.

In this respect, the Spanish government has already taken a very important measure to include in the 2011 National Reform Program the objective through which Spain wants to help 1.4-1.5 million people rid themselves of poverty before 2020, using the indicator developed by the European Commission, according to which the entire European Union must take out of poverty 20 million people by 2020⁴⁰.

Spain's economy suffered a deep economic and financial crisis in recent years, with a negative impact upon social conditions and employment. The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion has increased to 12.37 million in 2011⁴¹. As a reaction to this, the Spanish government stressed in the 2012 National Reform Program, two main socio-economic priorities: on the one hand, the reduction of unemployment by creating jobs and new labour market reforms, and on the other, the reduction of fiscal imbalances in public administration through structural reforms and budget austerity measures, combined with a higher taxation⁴².

CONCLUSIONS

One of the most developed fields in the last 15 years has definitely been that of the fight against poverty and social exclusion. This development has allowed a rise of the social and private actors, giving a civic sense to the voluntary action and new development perspectives for the social policy. Due to the social actors, the fight against social exclusion has nowadays the social visibility and importance in the social policy that it didn't have before. Undoubtedly, this fight can further progress if there is full coordination between employment, social policies and social cohesion.

The steps taken by the Member States in cooperation with the European Union confirm the importance of the integrated solutions. Modernizing the social protection system, ensuring financial stability and the effort to cope with poverty and social exclusion are the fundamental elements for a sustainable development in Europe, Spain being in this case a successful example.

⁴⁰“Programa Nacional de Reformas (PNR). Gobierno de España (2011)” in *Revista Española del Tercer Sector*, No. 19/sep-dic. 2011, <http://www.fundacionluisvives.org/rets/19/articulos/80785/index>.

⁴¹*Social Europe. Current challenges and the way forward. Annual Report of the Social Protection Committee (2012)*, Luxembourg, 2013, 220.

⁴² *Social Europe. Current challenges and the way forward. Annual Report of the Social Protection Committee*, 220.

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