

Introductory note for the ILO/SS Seminar:

“Social justice for fair globalisation”

(Turin, 11-14 October 2011)

Since the outbreak of the crisis, the European social systems – when present and/or developed – have been the target of **spending cuts** by governments that justify their measures with the claim that budgetary deficits must be reduced and the financial markets reassured at all costs.

Those systems still under construction have seen their budgetary resources frozen before being seen through to fruition.

As pointed out by the International Labour Organisation in its evaluation report on the application of the European Code of Social Security¹, the urgent desire “to consolidate the budget was not counterbalanced with due attention to the wage and human costs” of the hasty austerity measures.

This meant that governments did not shy away from making **drastic cuts to social budgets** that have led to

- A tangible reduction in the resources available to the social protection systems to take action and respond to the needs ;
- Stricter conditions of access to benefits ;
- Even a sometimes significant reduction in the amount of these benefits, such as old age pensions, for example ...
- ...

And yet these approaches are paradoxical

- On the one hand, given the fact that women and men who lived in countries with highly-developed social protection systems fared better during the financial crisis ;
- On the other hand, the eligibility restrictions applied or the amount of the benefits, combined with wage freezes or cuts imposed on the working population, had the effect of slowing down growth rather than kick-starting it, despite the fact that growth is one of the keys to recovery.

Similarly, again with the aim of reducing public deficits, several Governments took measures to “**privatise**” or to **step up the privatisation process of certain “branches”**

¹ (81st session of the Committee of Experts, November-December 2010)

of Social Security, which is particularly sensitive when it comes to old age pensions or health systems. This meant running the risk of:

- Setting up “two-track” social protection systems: first class systems for “the rich” (those with the financial means to pay for them) and others - closer to a benefits system – for “the poor”.
- But also of putting into question the mechanisms of solidarity that are the foundation and lynchpin of the public systems defended and promoted by the trade union organisations and the ILO.

In a way, this will be the theme that will emerge throughout this “workshop”, this training course jointly organised by the ILO/ ACTRAV Turin and the ETUC/ETUI.

The aim will be to try to find an answer to the question: to what type of social protection systems do we aspire?

- Systems based on solidarity both between and within generations?
- Selective and discriminatory systems, depending on how much we have in the bank?

To help us do so, on the basis of national experiences contributed by the participants, collated through a questionnaire completed by them in advance, we will study the developments that have taken place over the past few years in two more specific “branches” of Social Security, namely the **health and pension systems**.

By exchanging personal experiences and coming together to analyse certain damaging effects of the reforms undertaken, the participants will be asked to define the lines of action and avenues of reflection open to us to safeguard this precious resource for the women and men of the European continent, a resource that is the very glue that holds together a society based on social cohesion, i.e. a society in which everyone can live in dignity, from each according to his or her means, to each according to his or her needs.

This approach will lead the participants to consider the situation of migrant workers and their social rights.

While there will naturally be technical contributions, on the workings and nature of the systems for example, this course, earmarked for trade union officers, will, however, focus first and foremost on a trade union “policy” approach, in that the social protection systems that we are building reflect the type of society that we want to see develop. As the saying goes, at least if it applied to us:

“Tell me what type of Social Security system you want to build, and I will tell you what kind of society you want to live in”

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