



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Library Service Briefing Paper

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European Commission Work Programme 2010: Social Development

Introduction

1. The Committee for the Office of the First and deputy First Minister's '[Report on its Inquiry into Consideration of European Issues](#)', which was published in January 2010, contained a series of recommendations addressed to the Executive together with a number of actions which were for the Assembly itself to address. Action 8 of the report stated:

The Committee [COFMdFM] will highlight to all statutory committees the importance of their role when dealing with European issues and departments should take into consideration European policies and directives when completing business plans and strategies. Research and Library Services will screen the annual European Legislative and Work Programme and produce a prioritised menu of scrutiny topics relevant to each statutory committee. For those scrutiny topics which are of particular interest to statutory committees, the Research and Library Service should monitor the development of policy at European level and provide regulator

information updates which would, amongst other things, identify all relevant draft legislative acts. The Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will receive all information from Research and Library Services. The Brussels Officer will also have an input here.

2. **Action 8** of the Report requires **Research and Library Service** to support Committees by:
 - i. Screening the annual European and Legislative Work Programme;
 - ii. Producing a prioritised menu of scrutiny topics relevant to each statutory committee;
 - iii. Monitoring the development of policy at European level;
 - iv. Providing regular information updates; and
 - v. Identifying all draft legislative acts.
3. This briefing paper contains the results of an initial screening of the [European Commission's 2010 Work Programme](#) to identify initiatives which relate to the work of the **Committee for Social Development**.

The European Commission Work Programme 2010

4. Each year the European Commission publishes a work programme which sets out the legislative as well as non-legislative proposals which it will put forward during the forthcoming year. The work programme, which is usually published in the autumn, is particularly important, as the Commission alone is responsible for drawing up proposals for new European legislation, which it presents to Parliament and the Council. The Commission is also responsible for managing and implementing EU policies and the budget. Furthermore, together with the Court of Justice, it is responsible for making sure EU law is properly applied in all Member States.
5. On 31 March 2010, the European Commission published its 2010 Work Programme for which it provided the following overview:

The Commission Work Programme (CWP) 2010 translates the priorities of President Barroso's political guidelines into concrete actions. Overall, emphasis of the CWP is on (1) putting the Europe 2020 Strategy into practice thereby building the basis for exiting the economic crisis and creating sustainable growth and jobs (2) enhancing the rights and security of European citizens and (3) strengthening Europe's role on the world stage.¹

¹ See http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/programmes/index_en.htm

6. Notably, the format of the 2010 Work Programme differs from that of previous years' legislative and work programmes. For the first time, the Work Programme provides a four-year rather than an annual overview of the Commission's legislative and non-legislative priorities. This format is designed not only to improve predictability for all stakeholders, but also to facilitate cooperation with other EU institutions. Through annual updates of the Work Programme, the Commission will identify new annual strategic initiatives and adapt the multiannual strand as necessary.
7. While the body of the Work Programme describes the Commission's ambitions and commitments for 2010 and beyond, a number of annexes provide detail on individual initiatives which it plans to take forward.
8. Under the following headings, Annex 1 contains a list of 34 strategic initiatives on which the Commission commits to deliver in 2010:
 - Tackling the crisis;
 - Advancing the "Europe 2020" flagship initiatives;
 - Tackling Europe's bottlenecks;
 - Putting people at the Heart of European action and building a citizens' Europe;
 - Ensuring an open and secure Europe;
 - Addressing long-term societal changes;
 - Deepening Europe's trade agenda; and
 - Modernising EU instruments and the ways of working.
9. Annexe II contains a list of 280 major proposals under consideration during 2010 and beyond, which are tentative prospects for the rest of the mandate. These are broken down under the following headings, which map closely to the Departments and Services of the European Commission.²

Agriculture and Rural Development Budget Climate Action Competition Development Digital Agenda Economic and Monetary affairs Education, Culture and Youth Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Energy Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy Environment Health and Consumers Home Affairs	Humanitarian Aid & Crisis Response Industry and Entrepreneurship Internal Market and Services Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Regional Policy Research and Innovation Services of general interest Smart Regulation Taxation and Customs Union Trade Transport
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² The term 'Commission' is used within the European Union in two senses. First, it refers to the team of men and women from Member States appointed to run the institution and take its decisions. Secondly, the term 'Commission' refers to the institution itself and to its staff.

10. The remainder of this paper identifies those initiatives contained in Annexe I and II which are of most relevant to **the work of the Committee for Social Development**.

Strategic Initiatives the Commission is committed to adopt in 2010

11. It is worth noting that the vast majority of the European initiatives 'outlined in Europe 2020' are more directly relevant to the remit of other Committees (in particular the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, COFMdFM, and the Environment Committee). Nevertheless, there are a three EC initiatives which may be of interest to the Committee for Social Development as they touch upon poverty and deprivation, fuel poverty and energy efficiency, and pensions, i.e.:

- the Communication on the **platform against poverty** (Table 1);
- the **Energy Infrastructure Package** which has relevance for fuel poverty as it aims to secure competitive energy supplies for households (Table 2).
- **Green Paper on Pensions** which will explore a range of pension related issues including the interaction between pensions and social security regulation, it will also look at issues such as pensions and housing equity release (Table 3).

Table 1: Initiative relating to poverty

Nature of Initiative	Title of the Document	Likely Date of Publication
<i>Communication (Non-legislative)</i>	Communication on the platform against poverty	4 th quarter of 2010
<p>This initiative will set out how to ensure that the benefits of growth and jobs are widely shared so that people experiencing poverty can be enabled to take an active part in society. The initiative will notably build on the lessons of the 2010 European Year to combat poverty and social exclusion.</p> <p>The aim is to put forward proposals for a platform against poverty and announce changes to the Social Open Method of Co-ordination to help deliver this. The Communication will look at progress in the social domain and push forward an agenda to generate greater political commitment and visibility, and a stronger interaction with other policies. Particular focus on active inclusion and child poverty.</p>		

Table 2: Initiative relevant to fuel poverty

Nature of Initiative	Title of the Document	Likely Date of Publication
<i>Legislative and Non-legislative</i>	Energy Infrastructure Package	4 th quarter of 2010
<p>Work will be taken forward on the "Resource efficient Europe" flagship initiative. The aim is to decouple growth from resource use which will give Europe a competitive advantage. Such an approach will help the EU to prosper in a low-carbon, resource constrained world while tackling climate change, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and improved sustainable mobility. The Commission will work on a plan defining the key actions necessary to achieve the energy saving potential of 20% in the building and transport sectors and on a strategy to ensure secure, sustainable and competitive energy supplies for households and firms. The Energy Infrastructure package will look at measures aiming to diversity gas supply sources and routes and well as future infrastructural needs.</p>		

Table 3: Green Paper on Pensions

Nature of Initiative	Title of the Document	Likely Date of Publication
<i>Green Paper (non-legislative)</i>	Green Paper on Pensions	2 nd quarter of 2010
<p>The aim of the paper is to identify challenges, to discuss the responsibilities of Member States and the Union in this domain, and to collect input from a wide range of stakeholders. The Green paper will be broad in scope, and will look at a range of policy tools. These include the use of the Open Method of Co-ordination in the pensions domain and the interaction with Social Security Regulation. The Green Paper will also consider implications more widely including issues linked to insurance, investment (private savings) and housing (equity release).</p> <p>In particular, it aims to address the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring adequate incomes in retirement and making sure pension systems are sustainable in the long term • Achieving the right balance between work and retirement and facilitating a longer active life • Removing obstacles to people who work in different EU countries and to the internal market for retirement products • Making pensions safer in the wake of the recent economic crisis, both now and in the longer term • Making sure pensions are more transparent so that people can take informed decisions about their own retirement income <p>The Green Paper 'Towards Adequate, Sustainable and Safe European Pensions Systems' was published in July 2010³.</p>		

Indicative List of Possible Strategic and Priority Initiatives Under Consideration (the initiatives cover 2010 and beyond)

There are also a number of possible strategic and priority initiatives which overlap with issues under the remit of the Committee:

Nature of Initiative	Description
Initiative on Pensions (Non-legislative)	Based on the outcome of the Green Paper (2010) and further analysis of possible EU policy, the Commission might launch specific initiatives in certain areas to consider tabling a broader White Paper presenting how the EU framework for Pensions should be updated.
Communication on an EU disability strategy 2010-2020 (Non-legislative)	Elimination of discrimination on the grounds of disability, securing full enjoyment of fundamental rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities. [Primarily an OFMdFM issue but may be worth monitoring the communication for issues relating to disability and social security/social protection].
Roadmap to Resource Efficient and Low Carbon Europe in 2020 (Non-legislative)	The roadmap will set out a coherent framework of policies and actions in a variety of policy areas, required for the shift towards a resource efficient and low-carbon economy that is efficient in the way it uses material and natural resources. The aim is to enhance competitiveness and promote greater energy security and resource independence by the EU by 2020. [Energy primarily an DETI issue, however, may be worth monitoring the roadmap for issues relating to energy competitiveness (and its impact on fuel poverty) and low-carbon economy (and its impact on house construction and energy efficiency)]
Communication on a European	The main objective of this Communication is to provide an overview of the current situation of volunteering in Europe. For this purpose, different

³ See <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=839&furtherNews=yes>

Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corp (Non-legislative)	schemes (both at EU and national level) will be analysed, and possible complementarities with a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps will be presented. [May be relevant to DSD's policy role with respect to Volunteering and the new Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland].
Communication on the sustainable competitiveness of the EU construction sector (Non-legislative)	The Communication will focus on four strategic objectives aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of the sector (a) a coherent quality policy for the sector (b) an improved regulatory environment, in particular for public procurement, competition, registration and qualification systems, health and safety and payment delays (c) better provision of education and training (d) strengthening of research, innovation and knowledge deployment. This Communication will also focus on the role of the sector in the fight against climate change. [This Communication may be of relevant to DSD, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Housing Associations involved in construction and procurement activities]
Communication on public procurement with focus on how to underpin 'Europe 2020' priorities: innovation, low carbon investment, social affairs, energy efficiency. (Non-legislative)	To provide guidance on the correct application of existing instruments for the green, social and innovative aspects of public procurement. The Communication will explain to contracting authorities what they are required to do (legally binding provisions) and what they are allowed to do under the current legal framework. [This Communication may be of relevant to DSD, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Housing Associations involved in construction and procurement activities]
Green Paper on steps to promote e-procurement (Non-legislative)	The Green Paper will set out further steps to facilitate the use of e-procurement and obstacles to cross border e-procurement. [This Communication may be of relevant to DSD, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Housing Associations involved in construction and procurement activities]
Communication on best practices in Mortgages (avoiding foreclosure) (Non-legislative)	The Communication will provide examples and guidance for national public authorities on how solutions can be developed at a stage where it can still be ensured that citizens do not find themselves subject to foreclosure procedures. [May be relevant to a potential Mortgage Rescue Scheme for NI or other related repossession initiatives sponsored by DSD]
Communication on the Social and Economic Integration of the Roma in Europe (Non-legislative)	The aim is to indicate how, on the basis of the progress achieved, the EU can develop further its contribution to the full social and economic integration of Roma. It outlines a concept to embed specific and effective approaches into relevant mainstream policies.

12. It is proposed that Research and Library Service will track developments relating to those initiatives of most interest to the Committee for Social Development. At a later date, should it become necessary to prioritise initiatives for continued monitoring, the criteria listed below could be employed:

- Legislative versus non-legislative proposal (legislative higher priority);
- Stage in policy development (earlier than high priority);
- Relevance (links to other committee work for example);
- Significance (based on likely impact of initiative in NI, for example, financial); and

- Relevance to Executive's Priorities for European Engagement.⁴

13. In addition to updating the Committee directly via the Committee Clerk, the Research and Library Service's online current awareness tool 'HORIZON' will be used to disseminate information on developments more widely.

⁴ www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/priorities_for_european_engagement_2008-09.pdf