

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**European Commission Working Document Consultation on the Future EU
2020 Strategy**

Contribution from the United Nations Team in Belgium¹

The United Nations has a rich and varied partnership with the European Union. Its member states and its institutions play an active role in the UN system. Within the context of this partnership, the UN welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the future “EU 2020” strategy. The UN remains committed to continued strengthening of its partnership with the EU.

The global context

The crisis has thrown millions of people into poverty and jeopardizes the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Developing countries are hit by the same factors as European citizens, but with significantly less capacity and resources to respond. The economic and institutional fragility of these countries also negatively affect future recovery of the EU as economies and societies are interconnected. Without economic security, notably for women, progress on all MDGs will be hampered. Continued global leadership is required from the EU.

Governance of the international system

The EU is well-placed to invest in and foster the reform of the international institutional architecture towards one focused on delivering people-centred, socially-oriented and sustainable outcomes. Making the UN internationally agreed standards, norms and frameworks the starting point for EU internal and external action would help ensure consistency between internal and external policy making, and facilitate the EU’s outreach to third countries.

Ultimately, a world based on transparent open and fair rules, in which international standards are respected and promoted, is good for Europe and for the rest of the world. EU support to an open system that integrates developing countries in the world economy can serve to boost decent jobs in and outside the Union. Arguably, nowhere is this more apparent than in trade negotiations: the EU has a key role in helping complete a truly development-oriented trade round, as well as implementing existing multilateral trade agreements and delivering aid for trade commitments.

The UN would welcome more explicit reference in the 2020 Strategy to multilateralism, the role of the UN system and of the EU member states within that, and international agreements as the basis of EU action. This is consistent with Article 21 of the Lisbon Treaty.

¹ The UN team in Belgium comprises 21 specialised agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations covering the range of humanitarian, development and human rights UN mandates; the UN regional information centre and the UN University in Bruges.

In relation to the three specific priorities identified in the Commission consultation document, the United Nations Team in Belgium would like to make the following suggestions.

Priority 1: Innovation and knowledge

Innovation and knowledge are drivers for growth and job creation. As part of its nine joint initiatives for responding to the crisis adopted in April 2009 (see annex I), the UN Chief Executive Board (CEB) advocated developing technological infrastructure to facilitate promotion of and access to innovation. It is particularly important to address inequalities in accessing innovation. For example, in health - a fundamental backbone of a strong Europe - innovation is a recognised major cost driver that can potentially reinforce inequalities where innovations benefit only the few.

The emphasis in the consultation document on strengthening education is welcome. Eliminating barriers to education and training for all vulnerable groups and at all levels, including during early childhood, is key. The UN CEB equally highlights the importance of investing in skills and training.

Priority 2: Empowering people in inclusive societies: employment, social protection and inclusion

Regarding employment, the UN calls upon the EU to support effective implementation of the 2009 Global Jobs Pact, an agreed international framework for boosting employment, sustainable enterprises and decent work for women and men. Migrants can contribute entrepreneurship, diversity and innovation to Europe; their inclusion into labour markets and host communities however frequently requires proactive support.

Beyond employment, we encourage the EU to include within the 2020 Strategy a broader strategy for social inclusion. The EU cannot afford the existing pockets of persistently high poverty and social exclusion. And a "competitive", "innovative", "knowledge-based" and "greener" Europe cannot be achieved if vulnerable groups are not empowered to their full potential. This requires a focus on the particular needs of migrants, refugees and displaced people, as well as ethnic minorities especially Roma, and people with disabilities and in institutions. Such an approach becomes ever more important in the context of demographic changes and the ageing of societies. The UN would welcome an EU 2020 vision that puts human development at the centre, combating poverty, social exclusion and discrimination emphasizing the vulnerable and marginalized, and prioritizing gender considerations. Children's needs require particular attention (see annex II).

The EU has always considered its experience of building its social model as a European "value added" to be shared with partners. Now more than ever, Europe's neighbours and partners in developing countries need support in building viable social protection systems fit for purpose in their own contexts. The 2020 Strategy could usefully articulate the EU's contribution to the external dimension of Europe's social development strategy, expressing a commitment to working with neighbourhood and developing country partners to improve social infrastructure such as social protection, health care and access to decent housing, in line with the UN CEB initiatives.

Respect for the human person and human dignity and for the other rights set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and international human rights conventions are core values of the EU and

fundamental to building societies fit for purpose in the 21st century. These values should guide the work of the EU, inside and outside Europe, and be an integral part of the EU 2020 policy.

Priority 3: Greening the Economy

A green economy seeks to make investments in new growth poles that contribute to economic recovery and respond to environmental threats, thus favoring human development in an ecologically and socially sustainable environment. The UN CEB initiatives stress the need for long-term green investments. These should be scaled up significantly, also at community level, and be supported by national and international policy instruments and incentives that influence private sector behaviour. Revenues generated through fiscal reforms, carbon pricing and the phasing out of perverse subsidies could be reallocated to the development of green skills, the provision of clean, affordable energy, and support to green economic sectors. Greening the economy requires training in new job skills to ensure that workers benefit from the transition. Every effort should be made to maximize the benefits of a green transformation for groups within the labour force, including women, who have been particularly disadvantaged by today's crisis. It is vital to fully involve the civil society in adaptation and mitigation efforts and in restructuring plans.

Annex I: Secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination

EXTRACT FROM THE CEB COMMUNIQUÉ 5 April 2009. Paris, France

We, the United Nations System Chief Executives, are determined to take decisive and urgent action. In view of the multiple facets of the crisis and our collective mandates and responsibilities, we have agreed on nine joint initiatives. This common commitment is designed to assist countries and the global community to confront the crisis, accelerate recovery and build a fair and inclusive globalization allowing for sustainable economic, social and environmental development for all, while facing the future in a spirit of conviction of the need for transformational change:

- 1. Additional financing for the most vulnerable:** advocating and devising a joint World Bank - UN system mechanism for the common articulation and implementation of additional financing, including through the World Bank proposed Vulnerability Fund.
- 2. Food Security:** strengthening programmes to feed the hungry and expanding support to farmers in developing countries.
- 3. Trade:** fighting protectionism, including through the conclusion of the Doha round and strengthening aid for trade initiatives and finance for trade.
- 4. A Green Economy Initiative:** promoting investment in long-term environmental sustainability and putting the world on a climate-friendly path.
- 5. A Global Jobs Pact:** boosting employment, production, investment and aggregate demand, and promoting decent work for all.
- 6. A Social Protection Floor:** ensuring access to basic social services, shelter, and empowerment and protection of the poor and vulnerable.
- 7. Humanitarian, Security and Social Stability:** Emergency action to protect lives and livelihoods, meeting hunger and humanitarian needs, protecting displaced people and shoring up security and social stability.
- 8. Technology and Innovation:** developing technological infrastructure to facilitate the promotion and access to innovation.
- 9. Monitoring and Analysis:**
 - strengthening macroeconomic and financial surveillance and implementing an effective economic early warning system;
 - Urgently establish a UN system-wide vulnerability monitoring and alert mechanism to track developments, and report on the political, economic, social and environmental dimensions of the crisis.

Policy coherence and coordination are essential. Promoting coordination of strengthened financial oversight and of economic stimulus packages will enhance their overall effectiveness; and providing relevant policy advice on countercyclical policies will contribute to protecting people, accelerating the way out of this crisis and preventing its recurrence.

Annex II: A focus on children

Priority 1: Innovation and knowledge

In addition to the points raised above, particular focus should be on investments in quality early childhood care and education, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to develop to their full potential while also providing families with the chance to reconcile work and family life.

Priority 2: Empowering people in inclusive societies: employment, social protection and inclusion

Almost a fifth of all children in Europe remain in poverty. The EU cannot afford such persistently high levels of poverty and social exclusion among its youngest members.

One of the strongest achievements of the social inclusion strategy in recent years has been to put child poverty firmly on the agenda and to provide the evidence and analysis to support Member States in developing comprehensive child poverty reduction strategies. However, actual progress in terms of child poverty reduction has been limited and the impacts of the economic crisis and possible cuts in social spending in the recovery period may increase the poverty risks of children - poverty levels among children in Europe are already higher than among the general population (19% compared with 16%).

Article 3.3 of the Lisbon Treaty refers to the following three objectives relevant to addressing child poverty, with a shift in focus to emphasising child well being: (i) combating social exclusion and discrimination, (ii) promoting solidarity between generations, and (iii) protecting the rights of the child. Combined, these three Treaty objectives provide a solid legal basis for specific action on child well being under the Europe 2020 Strategy that is built on a child-rights based approach. A focus principally on employment will not address the issue as the majority of children in poverty already have at least one working parent. A social investment strategy to reduce child poverty and foster social inclusion is needed that recognises the mix of policies required, combining activating labour market policies, adequate and accessible cash transfers (where universal child benefits are proving to be one of the most important child poverty reduction measures across many EU Member States), accessible and affordable quality childcare, education, health care and social services as well as access to decent housing. Consideration should be given to establishing an absolute poverty line within Europe, particularly in these times of crisis when a relative poverty measure may provide deceptively optimistic results about the real state of those falling into, or falling deeper into poverty, across Europe.

A social inclusion strategy for the future would also address reform of child care systems as part of the response to the economic crisis as the cost-benefit argument of community based services vis-à-vis institutional services for children is much stronger in the case of children, than for example, the elderly. Community based services would be working towards an outcome for children that makes them prepared for the rest of their lives as contributors to society, rather than dependent on welfare services. It is crucial that even with declining fiscal space such future-oriented investments are maintained and strengthened as part of the EU 2020 Strategy.

The EU 2020 Strategy should leverage other EU initiatives with an inclusion agenda, such as the Integration Fund that supports Member

State actions on integrating and including migrants into European society. Attention should be paid to the education, social inclusion and integration of children of migrants coming from low and middle-income countries who are often the most disadvantaged; the circumstances and future prospects of children in migrant families are important to the children themselves, but also to the countries in which the families have settled. When these children become adults, they will constitute substantial portions of the EU work force that will provide for retirement for the elderly, the voters who will contribute to political discourse of their nations and the EU, and the parents of the next generation of EU citizens.
