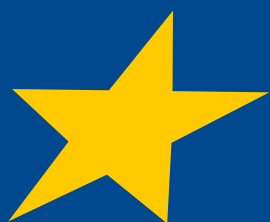


From the November 2006 issue of the magazine ACTES and produced in connection with the national congress of social action community centres (CCAS) taking place on 24, 25 and 26 October 2006 at the Arsenal cultural centre in Metz.



Social Europe: current state of play?



With the contribution
of the minister delegate
of European Affairs.



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This magazine offers a general, non-exhaustive, overview of community social services in Europe, which would clearly warrant further study. It was produced by Régis Verley and Paulic Soléne with the help of the Committee of the Regions, the network of directors of social services in Europe (ESN) and the European Transregional Network for Social Inclusion (RETIS).

→ SOCIAL NEWS

Social news has been created in 2003 to promote and reactivate exchanges between European social action players, but also to keep UNCCAS' members informed on European news. Our free monthly newsletter is available in English. You can subscribe by contacting us : europe@unccas.org.

You can also find the previous editions of Social News (bilingual issues) on our website www.unccas.org

→ UNCCAS in English

The UNCCAS website is also available in English. You'll currently find information on our goals and main activities. Its special section on Europe will be soon existing. As well as access to our information sheets, you will also find a link to the databank of local welfare experiences (banque d'expériences - rubrique Europe), and Social Services of General Interest. Other sub-sections are already in the pipeline.

Access to the English website part is : www.unccas.org/en



→ Europe has become an important topic for the French National Union of Social Action Community Centres (UNCCAS), whose objectives according to its 2004-2007 development strategy decided by its General Assembly include pooling experiences, swapping ideas and lobbying the European institutions. The importance of Europe also explains why UNCCAS decided after the European Colloquy held in Lille in 2000 to set up a special “Europe mission” to put its strategic plan into action.

However, questions abound. What is the European Union doing at the moment in the social sphere? What follow-up has been given to the Lisbon Strategy? What are the local and regional authorities in Europe doing in respect of social action? How are responsibilities carved up between the private profit sector, NGOs or associations, and the public sector? What is the role of the local authorities in this context, at a time when the whole of Europe is talking about decentralisation and the importance of a neighbourhood approach to services?

What financial and fiscal instruments are available to ensure the financial viability of the services required to meet the growing needs of those who find themselves at the very bottom of the social ladder? What are the changes taking place in society, prompting a greater need for high quality community services? How can we exploit these needs to create employment for people who are completely cut off from the labour market, and who sometimes have been for a very long time?

These are only some of the questions this special file sets out to answer. The aim of the October 2006 congress organised by UNCCAS is to give participants an opportunity to compare their experiences and to suggest possible ways of developing a better spirit of solidarity in Europe.

UNCCAS’ European Local Inclusion and Social Action Network, known as ELISAn*, has been set up with this in mind.

The intention is that it should provide a channel for locally elected social action representatives to air their views on the various European texts currently in preparation. In respect of Social Services of General Interest (SSGIs), for example, we would like to see a special sector-based directive for health and social services. And, lastly, is it not about time regional social inclusion strategies were drawn up alongside the national strategies put forward by EU member states? A more consistent approach to policies, objectives, funding arrangements, and local welfare projects would undoubtedly go a long way towards helping to meet the social needs of all European citizens.

PLACE... AUX ACTEURS

* *European Local Inclusion and Social Action network*
(réseau européen pour l’inclusion et l’action sociale locale)

■ EUROPE

→ **Leading role of towns and municipi**

Anyone comparing the budget of a German town with that of a French town would understandably conclude that German elected representatives attach more importance to small children than their French counterparts when in actual fact the reverse is true. There are no nursery schools in Germany, whereas in France the cost of running such schools is not included in the local budget, although we all know how strongly French local elected representatives will defend the need for more nursery classes and oppose the closure of existing classes.

Another example: in Portugal, the first place local representatives will take visitors when showing them round their town is the new medical centre funded out of the very small municipal budget. This is hardly surprising when you know that the Portuguese social protection system still only guarantees partial cover. The opening of a new medical centre offering free treatment is therefore essential for the well-being of the local population. In France, on the other hand, with the system of universal medical cover (CMU), local elected representatives and social workers are more likely to steer their citizens towards the more traditional medical channels.

These two examples illustrate just how difficult it is to paint an accurate picture of local social services in Europe. While it may be easy to describe good practices and outstanding achievements in a particular country or town, it is much harder to explain the financial and other mechanisms that made them possible. Towns and their social services form a triangle with the State and its social protection system. They can be seen as the top of the triangle, to some extent the variable that serves to adjust and adapt the systems, the main lines of which are prescribed by law.

Towns, private bodies, and associations, which in some countries wield considerable influence, sometimes with extensive resources, are in the front line when it comes to promoting innovative ways of tackling problems identified on the ground.

At the same time, however, they are often forced to step in to make up for other players' shortcomings without necessarily having the proper resources to do so. Municipalities frequently have to do with a limited budget, and their own fund-raising

possibilities are poor, if not inexistent. Apart from Scandinavian municipalities, whose self-governing powers in the fiscal sphere are considerable, municipalities in France have more freedom than anywhere else in Europe to decide how to spend their tax revenue. In the Netherlands, for instance, 90 per cent of municipal funds come

directly from the State.
David Kirk, advisor at the Hampshire

County Council, sums up the "transfer of expenditure" system in operation in his country: *"the government in Great Britain has been trying to make its healthcare systems more cost-effective and consequently to shorten the length of hospital stays. This is perhaps a good thing, but it also means that we, the district, have to shoulder a much bigger share of home care services. As a result, we have had to open 10 new medical centres so that people discharged from hospital after only a few days in intensive care can be cared for in their homes."*

Coordination of services

From a survey of municipal social services in Europe, we find that towns and cities play a key role in coordinating all the different services and measures available. Examples include the "one-stop shops" in Madrid or Turin where it is the local authority that acts as a gateway to the many measures available and performs a coordination role.

Throughout Europe, there are a great many different players. Social protection involves a number of different structures, and coordination between them is rare. Europe's regions, as the primary funding source and the authorities that promote the various services, are often a central contact point for social questions. But minimum standards and sometimes also objectives are still set at national level.

The State is often responsible for evening out any financial imbalances between the regions.

Where social action is highly de-centralised, however, social protection remains centralised. According to Antonietta Gaeta from Turin social services, *"there is an enormous discrepancy in Italy between the decentralisation of social services, where responsibility has been transferred to the municipalities, and the centralisation of health responsibilities, which complicates interventions at local level."*



David Kirk, advisor at the Hampshire County Council

Local social services

All local players agree that the boundary between "social" and "medical" is increasingly artificial. As a social services director attending the colloquy organised by the European Social Network (ESN - network of Social Action's directors) acknowledged, "as regards caring for the elderly in their homes, it is becoming more and more difficult to distinguish between their "well-being" as opposed to their "health".

Services in the community

The third function performed by municipalities in the social sphere is of course the ever-important function of providing services to the local community. Here too, Germany is a good example. Like everywhere else in Europe, the country is experiencing a dangerous drop in its birth rate. The extent of the decline is more acute in Germany than in France, creating dramatic



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imbalances in a population pyramid that is now almost completely upside down.

To encourage an upturn in the birth rate, Germany improved the system of allowances paid to families, but is now having to face up to the fact that these efforts have not had the desired effect, owing to the lack of childcare facilities. With no day nursery or other childcare facilities in German towns and neighbourhoods, and in a difficult financial context, couples think twice before star-

ting a family. The federal government has therefore decided to give German towns 1.5 billion euros per annum to develop new local facilities.

The importance of services is growing, particularly that of services for the elderly and the unemployed. All European countries are faced with a dual dilemma: high unemployment, and a changing economy that makes it harder to find work for the most vulnerable members of society, the unskilled, those suffering from social, mental or physical disabilities. Unemployment benefits have to be "activated" by special structures offering support and assistance. In nearly all European countries such structures are run by the local authorities. The aging population presents us with another challenge. Longer life expectancy, which is universally hailed as progress, also upsets the balance of our social protection systems, placing more strain on pension schemes and also health insurance. But the burden of housing and back-up care provided in the home falls mainly, if not exclusively, on the local authorities. ■



■ EUROPEAN MODEL:

→ general trend towards more municipal

Comparisons in a Europe where social systems differ are always difficult. As far as local systems are concerned, comparison is impossible. How can France and its 36 000 municipalities (“communes”) be compared with the Netherlands, which has only 500 municipalities, and where the smallest of them still has a population of more than 5 000? Or with Denmark, where the government has decided to reduce the total number of municipalities from 300 to only 100? And what about Madrid, whose 23 municipalities combine the powers of a city with those of a self-governing region, how can a city like that be compared with Paris, the 2000 municipalities on the outskirts of the French capital, and its four départements? How can we untangle the chain of national, regional and local responsibilities?

We can at least try to pinpoint a few common features so that we have some idea whether there are any systems similar in any way to the French CCAS system, which is the only one of its kind, its only real equivalent being the CPAS system in Belgium.

Municipalities are undoubtedly the smallest common denominator. They are to be found throughout Europe, although their size, powers, and resources vary enormously from one country to the next.

Municipal resources differ from North to South, from very high in Scandinavian countries to much less in southern Europe and the former eastern block countries. In Anglo-Saxon countries,

municipalities are more symbolic. Not much power is assigned to the mayor. Instead, it is concentrated in the counties, a level which groups together several municipalities.

The French “département” is another exception. Certainly divisions such as districts or provinces exist but in terms of social policy they perform a coordination, rather than decision-making function. The real change in

Europe recently, especially in the social field, is the trend towards regionalization.

Decentralised policies

The big nations of Europe are either federations already or in the process of becoming federations. In Germany the “Länder” have almost sole responsibility for social policy, and the same is true of the autonomous communities in Spain. Not content with an administrative role, they make the laws and decide on rights and policies.

In Spain, the regions make their own decisions regarding the level of the minimum wage and certain benefits. The State only steps in as and when required, to define legal standards and minimum obligations. It also apportions funding, balancing and sharing out tax revenue according to needs.



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responsibility

Along with Austria, Italy has recently joined the group of federal states where the regional authorities have virtually full powers in respect of social policy.

Management of regional policies is generally entrusted to separate operators, sometimes private but usually municipal. In Tuscany, for example, the region assigns management of all of its social budgets to the relevant municipalities. Rural areas where facilities are poor are still managed by the region, however, in conjunction with its services.

Scandinavian countries operate differently. Owing to their small size, regionalization is not an option, so municipalities deal directly with the State in respect of not only the budgets allocated to them but also the taxes they are allowed to levy. In many cases they also have sole responsibility for managing social services.



Lastly, there are the Anglo-Saxon countries, where decentralisation takes on a number of different forms. Full powers have been devolved to

Scotland, which

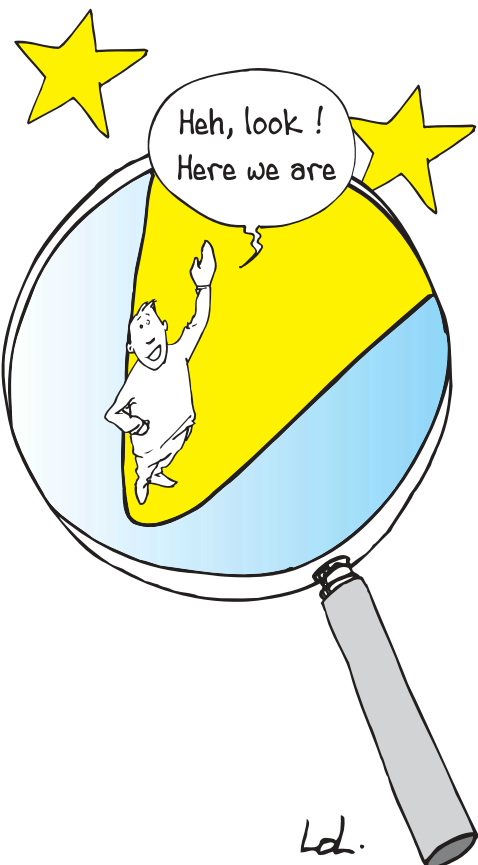
is therefore now completely self-governing. Elsewhere, the State is still powerful but management of the centrally funded schemes and measures is entrusted to the counties and sometimes also to private agencies or charities.

The municipality, primary social player

In the Netherlands, following a government proposal, the Dutch parliament has passed a new law on social action which establishes a series of rights for citizens and obligations for the public authorities. In accordance with this basic principle, local authorities are entrusted with full responsibility for implementing social action.

Each individual municipal authority is required to draw up a municipal social action plan, to submit it for

public debate, and to assess its impact at regular intervals. It must also secure the funds necessary for implementing the action plan. Dutch towns receive central government grants based on population criteria (number of inhabitants, age structure, income levels). Only social protection continues to be administered from the centre. According to one Dutch official, *"It's highly unlikely that a municipality would use its new-found independence to cut back on social policies; voters simply wouldn't allow it. Without funds of their own, however, municipalities will have to opt for rationalisation. They will also have to reduce spending elsewhere if they are to maintain an ambitious social policy."* Needless to say, the reform was not adopted without considerable opposition. This concentration of powers at the local level is not unusual. In Scandinavian countries, the local authorities are citizens' sole point of contact. It is the towns that manage social services, as well as paying pensions and non-contributory allowances. In Finland, municipalities are even responsible for managing hospitals.



→ **Employment, a local responsibility**

Nowadays local social policies are all about “activation”. According to Birgit Ekstroem, mayor for social affairs of the Danish city of Aalborg, *“The principle we apply is that people should be helped as much as possible so that the period when they need our help is as short as possible and so that they start taking responsibility for their own lives as soon as possible.”* The meaning of “activation” becomes clearer when we see the full scale of the resources assigned by Aalborg to assisting and advising job-seekers.



Angelo Passaleva, former vice-president of the region of Tuscany

A whole chapter could be devoted to the Danish “model”. Suffice to say, the role of local authorities and municipal social services continues to grow. Municipal responsibility for employment and helping the long-term unemployed is becoming the norm everywhere. In Belgium, for example, the CPAS are now able to employ those who are proving hard to place on special contracts, whereas Italy has developed a system of cooperatives offering work to the unemployed. Placement measures often go hand in hand with the development of community services.

Emergence of local plans and debating platforms

The French system of CCAS is still the only one of its kind. What we are seeing, however, is the development of joint structures specialising in the management of social affairs. The new system of local plans in the Netherlands, the organisation of social action in Denmark, and the development of urban plans in the United Kingdom are all accompanied by discussions between political, social and economic players grouped together as members of a “board” that is responsible for drawing up, debating and monitoring the plans.

In future, local authorities will be duty bound to organise action plans, and hold public debates on budget issues.

Development of delegated responsibilities and direct payment

The relationship between local authorities and associations varies from one country to the next. In Germany, civil society is very influential and associations enjoy extensive financial and human resources. In many ways, they are sometimes the key players when it comes to devising and developing a social life at the level of the community.

In Great Britain, charities are often swifter to act than the public authorities in developing new services for certain categories of the population (eg. people suffering from mental illness, young people, the homeless). As needs change, more private sector involvement is required. Public-private partnerships are becoming commonplace. As private profit organisations exploit a valuable niche, the non-profit sector is universally recognised as a service provider. In many countries, social action can be summed up as services contracted out to associations and other bodies. The city of Turin, for example, has

focused its efforts on drawing up specifications and using them to compile lists of approved service providers which can then be made available to members of the public. “Direct payment” is a new development for many authorities, but in the Netherlands it has become the norm: rather than requesting a particular service, private individuals can ask to receive payment equivalent to the cost of the service instead. In Great Britain recourse to the private sector is standard practice. Direct payment is an approach many local authorities are keen to develop. For David Kirk, *“giving people money so that they can pay for services themselves, including in some cases voluntary and family services, makes them more responsible and gives them more freedom”.*

In addition to the role played by associations, there is the question of voluntary work: *“for each pound given to charity a local authority often receives much more back thanks to voluntary work”*, notes David Kirk. Angelo Passaleva, former vice-president of the region of Tuscany, cites the example of a municipality where people on income support are helped by volunteers: *“it works because the volunteers are close to the people concerned and very committed”*. Several towns are considering granting a special status to volunteers, as well as paying them.

Lack of regional and local indicators

European policies and national plans are always based on national indicators. *“In actual fact”*, says Angelo Passaleva, *“a national indicator is never any more than the sum of many very different situations put together. In Italy, unemployment is between 5 and 30 per cent, depending on the region.”* Hence the frequent request on the part of local players in Europe for regional, or even local indicators parallel to the drawing up of local plans. *“I think we also need an Open Method of Coordination (OMC) at regional level, whereby regions and maybe towns would commit to*



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specific objectives, expressed in number terms, as regards integration, the fight against poverty, education, etc, and whereby checks would be carried out to make sure the commitments are honoured”.

Insofar as local authorities increasingly commission services from outside contractors rather than providing them themselves, assessment is seen as an essential practice which needs to be developed. In Scotland, an independent specialist agency, the Social Work Agency (SWIA) has been entrusted with assessing the different local social services, rating them, and making the results public.

Characteristic features of the French system:

Does the French model need reforming? We can all have our own opinion on that. Certainly, the French social system is not perfect: top-heavy command structure, overly centralised approach, which allows responsibilities to pile up and hampers transparency, and, no doubt, excessive recourse to the law (compared with other countries) as opposed to consultation.

There is no need, however, to throw the baby out with the bathwater! French centralisation has its merits, not least of which is the principle of equal rights for all. The spread of municipalities across the country also has its advantages. First, each municipality has its own mayor and “mairie”, and, second, municipal councillors are in close contact with social services. In big Scandinavian cities representatives elected to manage the social sphere are businessmen responsible for managing major services. In France, on the other hand, they are often present on the ground, working closely with service users, and sometimes performing voluntary work.

The French CCAS model also has its merits. Efforts and resources are concentrated on social action, within a specialised framework based on partnership. Such a system exists only in France and Belgium, although many European players would like to see the introduction of specialist structures for decision-making and consultation. Lastly, partnerships between CCAS and associations would seem to be more balanced in France than else-

where. It is no coincidence that the debate on the importance of preserving the specific functions performed by social services in the Directive on the liberalisation of services was first launched in France. Uniting associations and local authorities there is a shared vision and a balance of power that also helps to produce a more equal footing between them than is the case elsewhere.

A European presence

The idea of an Open Method of Coordination at regional level, complete with regional or local action plans, is one that is worth defending. According to the objectives set in connection with the Lisbon process, one of the functions of Europe is to take, impose and coordinate decisions which in one way or another will have to be implemented by the local authorities, whose task it will be to coordinate the different measures or put right any negative effects they may have.

We are starting to see more account being taken of local authorities’ opinions. This will become increasingly necessary and self-evident. ■

■ EUROPEAN COORDINATION OF SOCIAL POLICIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE

→ What do we mean by “Social Europe”?

Much has been said about “Social Europe”, although in the minds of many its meaning is still unclear. And yet it does exist. We describe it, every month, in UNCCAS’ magazine, “Actes”, which looks in turn at themes such as social inclusion, employment for people with disabilities, equal opportunities, childcare, care of the elderly...

The regulatory powers of the European institutions in the social sphere are very limited since individual states have retained their sovereign powers as regards social security. And although since the Maastricht Treaty the EU has been able to take decisions on employment legislation, provided there is an absolute majority of member states in favour, very few binding decisions have actually been taken. It is important not to play down the impact of certain “social” directives, such as the two most recent ones on discrimination that have forced most member states to review their legislation in order to lend more weight to the principles of non-discrimination, but regulatory procedures remain complex, slow and awkward. Although the body of European law in the area of free competition is very substantial, as regards social affairs it is very limited.

Open Method of Coordination

Social Europe exists mainly as an instrument for coordinating national policies. Since 1997 the OMC, or Open Method of Coordination, has been the principal tool of European intervention. It has developed as follows: In 1997, Europeans signed the Treaty of Amsterdam, entrusting the European Union with the task of promoting full employment. Yet the EU has virtually no authority to carry out this remit: unemployment benefit and income support come under the heading of social protection, while labour markets are managed at

national, regional or even local level. The Commission then proposed the principle of coordinated policies. Every year, representatives of the member states agree on guidelines and common objectives: higher rate of employment for women or people with disabilities, lower school drop-



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out rate, etc. Each individual country is responsible for putting in place their own national action plan (NAP), which they submit to the Commission for examination and which is then assessed and rated in a “joint report” highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of national policies in terms of the common objectives.

Common objectives for combating social exclusion

The Open Method of Coordination resulted in 2000 in the Lisbon Process, a process aimed at turning Europe into the world’s most competitive knowledge-based economy by 2010. To achieve that goal Europeans have voluntarily set themselves common objectives, such as improving employment rates, developing education, promoting entrepreneurship. Social exclusion is seen in this process as hampering competitiveness. Inclusion is one of the Lisbon objectives.

Accordingly, the European Union has extended the Open Method of Coordination principle to cover social inclusion, pensions, and long-term health care.

The objectives set in connection with the social inclusion strategy are relevant to the construction of a Social Europe. They are as follow, to:

- promote active measures capable of meeting the needs of those furthest from the labour market,
- make sure social protection systems, including income support schemes,

guarantee everyone has the resources necessary for a life in dignity and provide real employment incentives to those capable of working,

- develop ways of ensuring the most vulnerable members of society and those at greatest risk of social exclusion have access to decent housing, high quality of health services, long-term healthcare, education

and lifelong training opportunities,

- take concerted action to prevent children dropping out of school,
- give priority to eradicating child poverty and the social exclusion of children as a key step towards preventing inter-generational poverty,
- take steps to reduce poverty and social exclusion among immigrants and ethnic minorities and to improve their employment rate.

Every two years since 2000 European governments have been required to put these basic principles into practice and to incorporate them in a national inclusion plan known as “PNAI”. The European Commission then analyses the plans, using them to draw conclusions and issue recommendations that highlight the progress, or lack of progress, made by the different countries. All the documents are public and readily available.

For analysis and comparison purposes, the Commission has compiled a set of 18 indicators measuring not only poverty but also all other factors that contribute to social exclusion: difficulties with housing or education, health problems, etc.

Local authority support for the process

The OMC has now been extended to old age and other pensions. In the context of the European strategy, a series of objectives have been set for member states. They include:

- preventing the social exclusion of the elderly, enabling living standards to be maintained, and promoting solidarity,
- guaranteeing that pension schemes remain viable in the interests of sound public finances, raising employment rates and extending working lives,
- adjusting benefits and contributions so that a fair balance is maintained between the working population and old age pensioners, ensuring private pension funds are adequate and financially sound,

→ adapting to more flexible working conditions and career structures, heeding the calls for more gender equality, and increasing the transparency and adaptability of pension schemes so that citizens retain their faith in them,

The OMC still has to be developed further in relation to issues pertaining to health and long-term healthcare, two areas where the EU's powers are extremely limited but where, if its objectives are coordinated in this way, it can contribute towards a Europe that is more open. For it is important to remember that free movement of people is not meant only for tourists. It applies just as much to people wanting to retire to a sunnier climate, ill people keen to receive the best treatment in the best hospitals, students, poor people, the young unemployed, and many others besides.

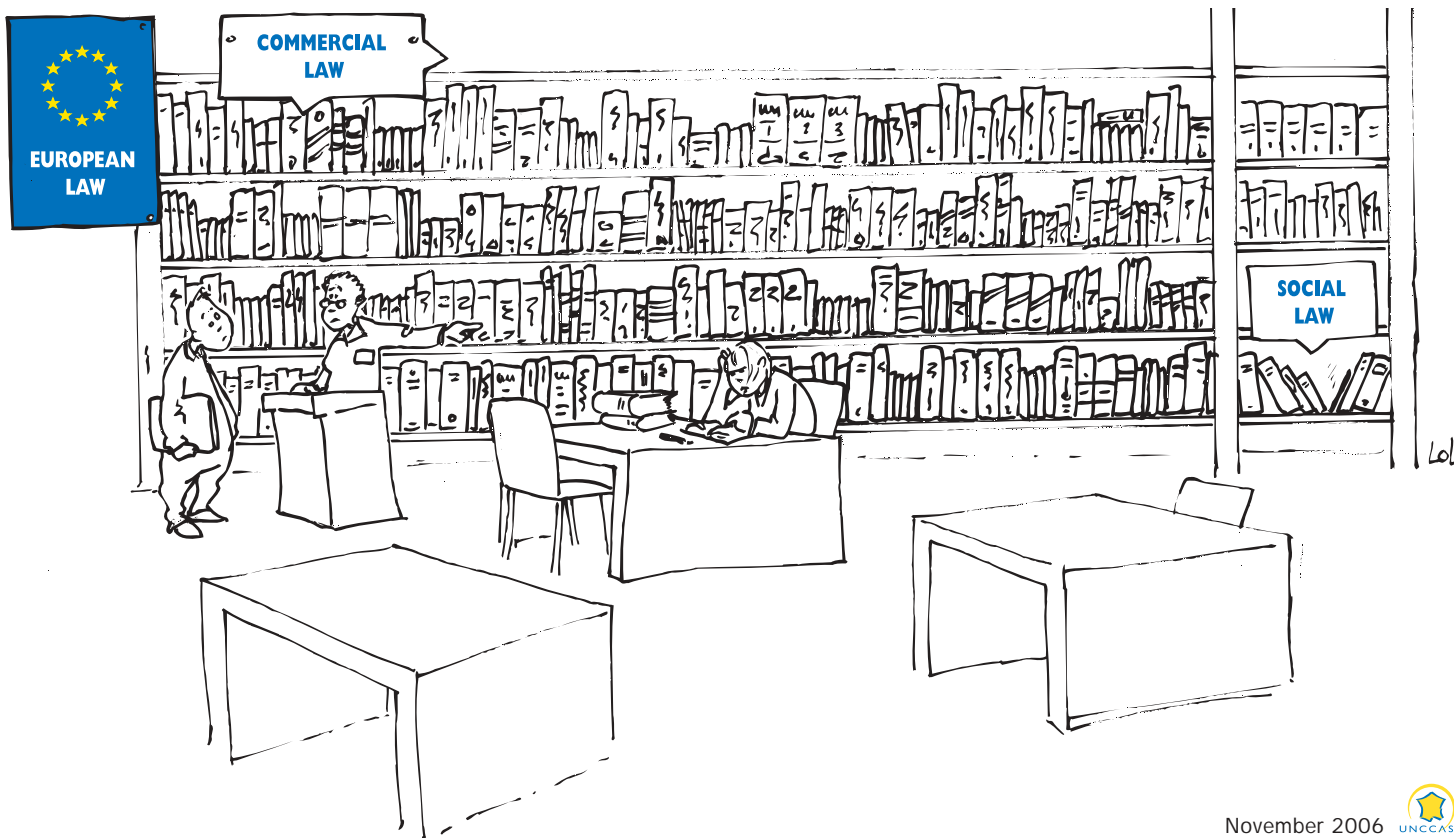
Although the OMC has been the core component of social policy in recent years, it is still largely confidential. In spite of their common objectives, national governments still prefer to inform their electorate about national policies.

The imbalance to be found in Social Europe is currently situated mainly at the level of consultation. In terms of the objectives set for the coordinated policies, we find that most of them involve local players. The success of the Lisbon process will also depend to a very large extent on the participation of local and regional authorities.

Structural funds assigned to the Lisbon strategy objectives

The structural funds are another important tool for developing a Social Europe. Social players receive funding from the European Social Fund. In France, in the context of Objective 3, the ESF has been used to co-fund a whole rack of local measures promoting, training, inclusion, counselling services, and the creation of new businesses.

In 2007 the way the structural funds are programmed is set to enter a new phase. Their objectives have been redefined so that in the future they, and in particular the ESF, will be directly in line with the objectives of the Lisbon strategy and the coordinated policies.



→ However, this ambitious goal will have to make do with the limited sums available. The ten new EU member states will all need considerable support from the structural funds in order to allow their economies to catch up. At the same time, European governments, including the French government, have decided to limit the European budget. According to Michel Delebarre, President of the Committee of the Regions, *"this will mean several tens of millions of euros less for cohesion policy projects"*. The Commission regularly sets up action programmes that are more modest in terms of their need for

funding, but which still allow local players to get involved in transnational projects. Examples include a programme consisting of more than fifty projects to tackle exclusion, an anti-discrimination programme, and an exchange programme for senior citizens. Above all it is about encouraging new initiatives and pooling experience. The Commission has decided that all smaller programmes set up in the past



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will be incorporated in future in a single programme going by the name of "Progress". The idea is that "Progress" should be used to develop new initiatives on the themes of integration, solidarity and anti-discrimination. ■

■ EASTERN EUROPE

→ Problems with setting up local social services

It is difficult to describe the situation in former Eastern bloc countries, not only because their systems and stages of development are so different but also because the municipalities, with their limited resources, are having to cope with people in situations of dire need while they themselves are still struggling to set up suitable social services. The situation in Slovenia, as described by Stefan Bojnec, from the Management University in Koper (Slovenia), is a typical example.

responsible for the general organisation of social services, as well as their funding, whereas the municipalities are responsible for individual social services and services available to the elderly and people with disabilities. Municipalities can organise their services as they see fit. They rely heavily on the private sector and NGOs.

Does the same model apply throughout Slovenia?

No, Koper is "privileged", along with 10 other "urban municipalities" (out

of a total of 200 municipalities in Slovenia) with a population of over 20 000. The problem today is that small towns are generally getting even smaller. This trend means development is spread very unevenly across the country. Another source of great concern is the fact that municipalities, regardless of size, still lack trained staff capable of making optimum use of the structural funds or providing an adequate response to the welfare needs of certain towns. Slovenia has received funding as a result of joining the European Union but is not always able to put it to good use. ■

What is the situation like regarding social action in Koper?

Koper is a small town with a population of 54 000. However, it is also the biggest port in Slovenia. The social situation in Koper is rather better than in other municipalities because of our historical ties with Italy and the geographical proximity of the two countries which help to keep our social model in good shape. Moreover, our own model is largely based on that of our neighbours. The central government in Slovenia is



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■ MICHEL DELEBARRE,
PRESIDENT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS:

→ “Local authorities must be involved in the setting of European priorities”

Michel Delebarre, deputy mayor of Dunkerque and president of the “Union départementale des CCAS du Nord”, also presides over the Committee of the Regions, the advisory body representing local authorities in Brussels.

Mr Delebarre, are there any countries where the local authorities are more efficient and where innovation is easier in the social sphere?

There is no one model for social action that applies throughout the European Union, but there is a marked and growing tendency in the new and old member states (eg Germany with its recent labour market reforms) to transfer more powers in relation to social affairs to the local and regional authorities.

In your view, how can we ensure that local authorities are able to carry out their responsibilities in this area?

In all events, there are two conditions that have to be met if local authorities are to contribute towards innovation and efficiency in the social sphere. The first of these is funding, which must be in proportion to their responsibilities. Local authorities always fare better in practice if they do not have to depend on a system of fiscal apportionment and can manage the taxes collected for social action directly. The second condition is good governance. It is difficult to dictate social action - local authorities have a lot of coaxing to do before its full effects can be felt on the ground. That is why it is so essential for local authorities to be involved when the priorities for social action are being set, at national or European level, whether in connection with the adoption of legislative measures or the definition of an action framework.

What role should the EU entrust to local authorities?

The Lisbon strategy is currently the EU's flagship policy. It is this project that defines the economic, social and environmental policy priorities of not only the EU but also the individual member states. That the local authorities should be involved seems essential to us for the success of the strategy. More specifically, for the past year the Committee of the Regions has been trying to obtain recognition for the role of the local and regional authorities in implementing the Lisbon strategy. The first step in October 2005 was to conduct a survey. The results confirmed that the situation is far from satisfactory: only 17 per cent of local and regional authorities feel they have been sufficiently involved in the process of drawing up national reform strategies.

What do you intend to do about this?

The Committee is in the process of setting up, on a voluntary basis, a network of regions and local authorities so as to monitor in detail, over the coming months, the progress made in terms of consultation and implementation of the Lisbon Strategy. Quantitative and qualitative indicators will be established



to make up a barometer of the regions, comparing regions' advances, difficulties and expectations. The participating cities and regions will be able to share their experiences via an electronic platform, which will help them to structure this network. ■

■ DENMARK

→ Municipal responsibility for employment



Birgit Ekstroem,
mayor for social affairs
of the Danish city of Aalborg

Much has been written and said about the Danish model of “flex security”: the considerable freedom given to employers to lay off workers and adjust their workforce to match their economic needs, coupled with a safety net that protects employees by guaranteeing them generous unemployment benefits and substantial help with training.

Supporters of the “Danish model” have a tendency to forget that it only works thanks to considerable investment on the part of the local authorities. In Aalborg, a city with a population of 165 000, the municipal employment department employs as many as 500 counsellors to assist the 5 000 unemployed persons who sign on there each year. Here, “sanctions” take on a

completely different meaning. *“It’s the question French people always ask me”,* says Arne Lund Kristensen, head of the municipal employment department. Sanctions certainly do exist but the department confesses to hardly ever using them. Here, all unemployed persons receive individual attention, and there seems to be no limit to the number of placements and training opportunities on offer. The city is obliged to offer an employment contract to those hardest to place: *“when people have been away from the labour market for too long, we offer them a job working for the municipality, in the environment department, for example, or delivering meals to the elderly. Such jobs are available for a limited period only, however, since ulti-*

■ SPAIN

→ Coordination between regions and municipalities

The autonomous communities, Spain’s regions, have wide-ranging powers. Spain is undoubtedly the most decentralised country in Europe. In the area of social action, it is the regions that have most of the responsibilities and most of the funds. Central government, for its part, manages social security and defines, in law, the minimum obligations of the regions. The problem encountered on the ground is one of sharing out the task of implementing local social policies between the regions, provinces (an intermediate tier without its own financial resources), and the municipalities. Mar Zabala is director of the Association of Basque Municipalities (EUEDEL) in Bilbao.

How is social action organised in Bilbao and the Basque municipalities?

The Basque government is responsible for planning social action policies, while the 3 provinces and municipalities are in charge of managing them. Our main concerns now are the problems of dependency and the aging population.

How are you dealing with this problem, and how do you fund your work?

We are currently considering a radical reform of social services in the Basque country, in connection with the Spanish government’s framework law on dependency which establishes minimum obligations: the communi-

ties must adjust, according to needs, to the different local levels. In the Basque country, all social services, and notably those specifically concerned with dependency, come under a Basque law passed in 1996. It provides that responsibility for independent senior citizens rests with the municipalities, whereas the provinces are responsible for those needing more specific and extensive assistance. It is difficult to apply this division of tasks, however, and we are working towards a new system.

How is the new system likely to differ from the old one?

The way benefits are split up will be more flexible. We are looking in particular into the possibility of sharing



Mar Zabala,
director of the Association of Basque
Municipalities (EUEDEL) in Bilbao

out the work according to specific and more general responsibilities, rather than according to the kind of benefit and the condition of the person concerned. We also want to



Drug-users have access to housing at Aalborg (Denmark)

euros); says Ms Ekstroem, mayor in charge of social affairs. "Welfare and social services account for 70 per cent of this budget. Our social services employ more than 4 000 people."

It goes without saying that help for people in need is one of the obligations of the welfare department. Drug-users and the homeless, for example, have access to housing, for which the city stands surety, but they are required to pay the rent. Denmark has a generous minimum wage of nearly 1 000 euros a month, although this sum is taxable... ■

mately the aim is for people to find regular employment".

80 social workers work closely with the employment department, offering support to those in need. The municipal welfare department provides all sorts of services to the local community: childcare, a home-help service, support for people with disabilities, etc. All these services operate accor-

ding to the same principle, namely that they are provided free of charge and are available to all: "the municipality has a budget of 11 billion Danish crowns" (approximately 1.5 billion

Municipalities

increase municipal resources, as they are totally insufficient at present and get swallowed up in the way responsibilities are shared out between the provinces and municipalities. We would also like to see more public/private partnerships. Ideally, public social services would continue to play the leading role, but in future we shall have to rely increasingly on the private sector.

What other changes do you envisage?

We have just launched a vast project that involves consulting all the different players operating in the social sphere with a view to drawing up a charter for local government listing the specific needs of all categories of the population, be it women, people with impaired mobility, children, the socially excluded, etc. Once we have the charter it should be easier for us to do a good job. Another project we have just launched will consist in producing a map of social and health needs that should enable us to target those areas with the greatest health-care needs. ■

GERMANY

Debate surrounding municipal resources

The way social action is managed is at the centre of the debates taking place in Germany where, as Matthias Schulze-Boeing, local councillor of Offenbach-am-Main explains, the municipalities play an essential role.

What are the priorities of social action in Offenbach ?

Offenbach is a relatively "small" town with a population of 117 000. We have many priorities but our main concern is schooling, particularly that of children of immigrant origin. Accordingly, we organise services for young children in the form of language classes, or special tuition for pre-school or school-age children, while other services are in place to cater for any psychological problems. Another of our actions, also a municipal responsibility, is housing support, the cost of which is borne exclusively by the municipalities. We finance housing support out of our own budget and with the help of external funding sources. For example, we are authorised to levy our own local taxes, subject to the agreement of the Land and the federal government. In Offenbach, for instance, we have introduced a tax on alcohol. Under the German Basic Law, we are delegated responsibilities in the social sphere which the municipality is then able to coordinate as it sees fit.

What form do these responsibilities in the social sphere take and who carries them out?

We work together with a great many independent associations, like Caritas or the Diakonie, which are very powerful and provide the vast majority of services. Social services does the rest, in other words work relating to education, housing, and help with employment. In the employment sphere, and together with the Federal Employment Agency, the municipality has set up a "job centre" or, to give it its full name, a "centre for integrated protection and access to employment services" which groups together all the different players involved at the level of associations and the municipality itself. Offenbach is also part of the Social City programme ("Soziale Stadt") set up by the government in 1999 and run by the German Urban Planning Institute. The programme involves employment strategies targeting individual districts where unemployment is a particular problem. →

→ What problems do you encounter?

Positive aspects in Germany are the highly decentralised policies and the recognition enjoyed by local government. Funding, however, is always a problem. Municipalities have sole responsibility for social spending. They receive some help from national or regional taxes, and from the structural funds in the context of priority objectives, but this is no longer sufficient, particularly as there are still many pockets suffering from under-investment.

Recently, there have been a series of disagreements between the local and regional authorities and the federal government in connection with the framework for the new Social Act. The rift concerns the recent transfer of responsibility for certain social and economic policies, such as the fight against poverty and unemployment, back to the federal government and away from the municipalities. The tension stems from the fact that the federal government has been trying to impose its own methods which the municipalities find hard to accept.



Matthias Schulze-Boeing, local councillor of Offenbach-am-Main

■ UNITED KINGDOM

→ Economic and social balancing act

Typically for an Anglo-Saxon country, British welfare systems are on an efficiency drive to make sure welfare funds are money well spent. Local authorities have very limited resources of their own and must fit in with national plans, such as the government's flagship policy to tackle child poverty or urban regeneration plans. Flo Clucas, deputy mayor of Liverpool told us how her city has managed to improve its economic and social situation.

Liverpool has been through a bad patch. How are things now?

The situation has been improving over the past ten years, particularly as a result of the city's pro-active approach. Unemployment has fallen from 18 per cent at the end of the 80s to 5.6 per cent today.

How do you explain this improvement in the situation?

We embarked on a programme of economic and social regeneration based on consultation involving all the different parties, because we have always believed that economic reconstruction is only possible if preceded by "social" reconstruction involving all the communities concerned.

The programme is directed by a monitoring committee made up of elected representatives, businessmen and women, associations and members of the public. It is backed up by two other committees: a project committee

and performance strategy committee. Together the three committees decide on the right action to take for Liverpool, in other words as regards employment as the first step towards social re-integration, our main concern. We receive support from the British government, but most of our work has been financed by the structural funds (Objective 1).

What have you done to help populations living on the edge of society?

There is a very high rate of exclusion and poor schooling rates on the outskirts of Liverpool. With the decline of manufacturing industry we turned our attention to training people how to set up in business and how to use new technology. We have launched a special Jobs, Education and Training (JET) service that operates mainly according to the principle of positive discrimination in favour of young people, particularly women. Through this service, young people have access to training without the financial constraints usually involved. The scheme relies on partnerships between the public and private sectors.

We employ the long-term unemployed and former prisoners to keep watch over gardens and buildings. Crime is still a major problem on the outskirts of Liverpool, and one of our prime concerns is to help former prisoners find their way back into society. We ensure that equal opportunities are guaranteed.



Flo Clucas, deputy mayor of Liverpool

→ France-Belgium: an example of exchanges

The ESF does not only funds big projects. An original scheme now allows for the funding of micro-projects and has meant the CCAS in the northern French town of Marcq en Baroeul has been able to carry out exchanges with a Belgian CPAS in the Flemish town of Kurnes. Local social players have been involved in a number of exchange sessions organised on the main topics of social action. A book has also been published [1]. It presents “six cross-border views on social policy”. For Christian Loison, deputy mayor of Marcq en Baroeul, the experience has been very positive.

What surprised you about Belgium?

What struck me was the very pragmatic approach adopted by the CPAS. My impression is that they are quicker to act and to find solutions. It may be a question of administrative structures, but mentality also comes into it. In France, for every new project, we have to organise think-thanks, studies, working parties, all of which take time. Take our EPHAD [2] project, for example. The discussions took seven months, followed by another eight months or so for the invitations to tender, but even before that there had been three years of preparatory work, meetings, documents drawn up and studies. In Belgium, someone has an idea, they give it some thought, and then they act on it. Maybe the funding situation is more straightforward there. In France, everyone is involved: central government, the département, the CRAM etc. The CPAS are more independent than our CCAS. There is less need for them to keep consulting the authorities and administrative entities. As a result, it is easier for them to take the initiative.

What have you learnt from these exchanges?

They have shown me the importance of going straight to the point and making adjustments that suit the situation as it really is on the ground rather than being content with ready-made solutions proposed by the administration. It would help if the CCAS were willing to do more together, so that objectives could be

clearer, catchments areas better defined, and needs more accurately identified. Exchanges like the ones between France and Belgium enable us to make better progress. Our approach needs to be straightforward and on a small-scale, not what I would describe as “local tsunamis”. Housing is a good example: we know that the aging population means we are going to have to work together with housing developers on ways of meeting the need for suitable, affordable housing. Other countries having already started doing this. Exchanges on the subject of local housing policies would enable us to re-think national policies that are not necessarily well-suited and to act more quickly.

What about the other players involved in the CCAS?

I have noticed that things are moving, and there is a thirst for knowledge. At a meeting we organised on the question of beneficiaries we all realised we are all in the same boat. Knowing that inspires us to keep going. There is a common bond between us now. Associations were invited to take part in the discussions and swapped addresses with a view to setting up common projects.

Have you already identified possible avenues for future work?

We have realised that CCAS are being asked to respond on employment, an area where the CPAS have positive experience, and where we have a lot of catching up to do. In Belgium,

for example, they have a computer available round-the-clock for people in search of a job. They have also designed a special file for all job-seekers and are better able to match local supply and demand. We ought to use their experience and put it to good effect. Coordination and exchanges should be possible involving the Maison de l'emploi, the employment centre due to open soon in our area.

Do you think Europe is doing enough where local issues are concerned?

It is important that Europe not be seen as adding a further layer of complexity. The primary function of Europe is to disseminate good practice and make sure experiences that work can be used at local level.



Christian Loison, deputy mayor of Marcq en Baroeul (France)

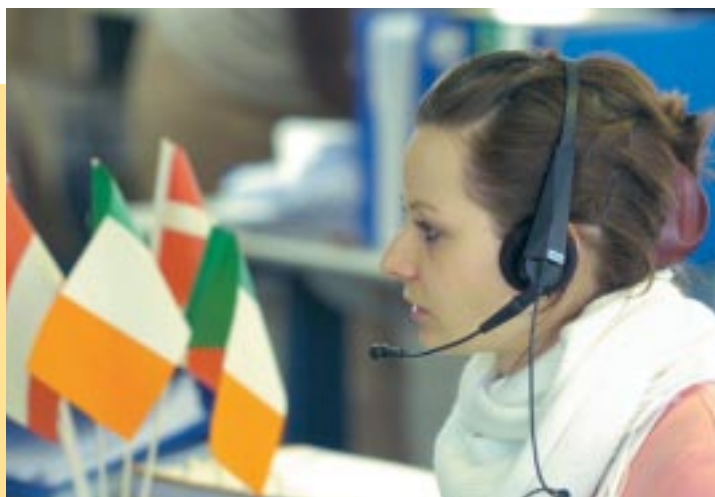
However, we also need to do more in the way of communication about Social Europe. We have seen through our exchanges that we share strong values. We come from countries that look after us when we are old, ill or disabled, and where the unemployed are not left in dire straits. All of that comes at a price, but it is also an asset. I think we should also try to get the message across that we share this belief in solidarity. That can be done by organising exchanges and actions on the ground.

[1] « Ils sont nous et nous sommes eux »- Ed. Sheherazade. Available from the CCAS in Marcq en Baroeul and the CPAS in Kurnes.

[2] EPHAD : Etablissement pour l'Hébergement des Personnes Agées Dépendantes (residential home for dependent senior citizens)

■ GLOSSARY

- Accumulation / Cumul
- Accumulation with earnings from work / Cumul avec un revenu professionnel
- Adjustment / Revalorisation
- Advance on maintenance payments / Avance sur pension alimentaire
- Allowance for single parents / Allocation de parent isolé
- Associated rights / Droits associés
- Basic earnings / Salaire de base
- Benefits for older unemployed persons / Indemnisation des chômeurs âgés
- Benefits in kind / Prestations en nature
- Birth and adoption grants / Allocations de naissance et d'adoption
- Cash benefits / Prestations en espèces
- Childcare allowances / Allocations de garde d'enfants
- Child-raising allowances / Allocation d'éducation
- Death / Décès
- Death grant / Allocation de décès
- Dependent parents or other relatives / Parents ou ascendants à charge
- Participation of the beneficiary / Participation du bénéficiaire
- Early pension / Pension anticipée
- Eligibility conditions / Conditions d'accès
- Employment injuries and occupational diseases / Accidents du travail et maladies professionnelles
- Entitled persons / Ayants droit
- Family allowances / Allocations familiales
- Family benefits / Prestations familiales
- Guarantee of sufficient resources / Garantie de ressources
- Guaranteed minimum / Minimum garanti
- Guaranteed minimum and family allowances / Minimum garanti et allocations familiales
- Healthcare / Soins de santé
- Home care / Soins à domicile
- Housing benefit / Allocation logement
- Incapacity for work / Incapacité de travail
- Income ceiling / Plafond des revenus
- Income support / Revenu minimum d'insertion
- Invalidity / Invalidité
- Legal retirement age / Age légal de la retraite
- Level of incapacity / Taux d'incapacité
- Long-term care / Dépendance
- Maternity leave / Congé de maternité
- Means-tested variation / Modulation en fonction du revenu familial
- Measures promoting social and professional integration / Mesures stimulant l'insertion socio-professionnelle
- Minimum pension / Pension minimale
- Non-contributory minimum / Minimum non-contributif
- Old-Age / Vieillesse
- Orphans / Orphelins
- Partial unemployment / Chômage partiel
- Permanent incapacity / Incapacité permanente
- Preferential employment of the disabled / Emplois prioritaires des handicapés
- Reference earnings or calculation basis / Salaire de référence ou base de calcul
- Rehabilitation, retraining / Réadaptation, rééducation
- Residential care / Soins résidentiels
- Sanctions / Sanctions
- Semi-stationary care / Soins avec hébergement partiel
- Sickness benefits / Prestation maladie
- Social help / Aide sociale
- Social protection / Protection sociale
- Social security contributions / Cotisations sociales
- Special allowances for children with disabilities / Allocations spéciales pour enfants handicapés
- Sum on death / Capital décès
- Supplements for care by another person / Majorations pour l'assistance d'une tierce personne
- Supplements for dependants (Spouse ; Children) / Majorations pour personnes à charge (Conjoint ; Enfants)
- Surviving spouse / Conjoint survivant
- Temporary incapacity / Incapacité temporaire
- Unemployed persons / Chômeurs
- Waiting period / Délai de carence
- Willingness to work / Disposition au travail



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