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Minimum income: EU Member States consider the future of European social protection

Brussels, 18/01/2024: As part of the Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union, PPS Social Integration organised the 'Minimum Income, towards a safety net for all' conference on 18 January 2024, in Brussels. An opportunity for Member States to take stock of their progress and commit to strong social protection within the EU.

At the conference, participating Member States presented the progress made on minimum income systems^[1] in their countries, one year after the adoption of the recommendation^[2] by the Council of the EU encouraging them to introduce adequate minimum income systems.



A review of national progress

"As a Member State, Belgium can be proud of the great strides it has made in recent years to guarantee an adequate minimum income for its most vulnerable citizens. Over the course of this legislature, the integration income has been progressively increased by 8%, not counting indexations and the distribution of the welfare envelope. The launch of the REDI online tool in 2023 at 424 PCSWs also reinforces this drive to guarantee a decent income, as it enables households' real needs to be assessed and objectified based

on reference budgets. The additional financial support provided thanks to REDI is aimed at everyone, not just those receiving the integration income. In addition, a study has recently been launched to identify useful tools to reduce instances of people not exercising their social rights. For the future, we hope that the European Commission will adopt clear measures to support the development of an adequate minimum incomes in all Member States, thus ensuring a fair and dignified life for all European citizens," emphasises Karine Lalieux, Belgian Minister of Pensions and Social Integration, in charge of Persons with Disabilities, Combating Poverty and Beliris.

Over the course of the morning, Member States were able to discuss topics such as support for minimum income recipients and initiatives taken to encourage the participation of those entitled. The evolution of minimum income schemes was also at the heart of the discussions, with some countries having recently undertaken significant reforms in this regard (such as Bulgaria, Romania, Malta and France).

While progress has been made, the importance of further improving certain aspects was stressed in order to guarantee inclusive and effective minimum income schemes.

Combating non-take-up to ensure strong social protection

Member States explored actions to be taken, at national and European level, to improve take-up of minimum income systems (especially through online application forms), foster access to inclusive labour markets, improve access to support services, and promote individualised support for all those in need.

Particular attention was paid to the problem of 'non-take-up' (NTU) of minimum income benefits. Discussions focused on the potential measures to overcome this phenomenon - many states highlighted communication efforts they have undertaken to raise awareness of available assistance.

Among the expectations, there is a desire for monitoring progress and reforms implemented in the EU, sharing experiences among Member States, and the digital modernization of tools. By 2024, Belgium will implement the "CPAS online" tool, which will allow individuals seeking assistance to submit their requests online (confidentially), thereby facilitating their access to minimum income and combating NTU.

All these measures should be on the agenda of the High-Level Conference on the European Pillar of Social Rights, which will take place on April 15 and 16, 2024.

[1] Integration income is a minimum income for people who do not have sufficient resources. This is just one of the forms that the right to social integration can take in Belgium.

[2] Council Recommendation 2023/C 41/01 of 30 January 2023 on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion

The social component - one of the priorities of the Belgian presidency

One of the priorities of the Belgian presidency of the Council of the EU is to continue the work on the social component of the European Union by introducing the principles of the European pillar of social rights. This pillar contains 20 principles aimed at making the European Union more equitable and inclusive.

More information:

- Website of the Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union: <https://belgian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu>
- PPS Social Integration website: <https://www.mi-is.be>

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