

Chapter 32

Is the EU Moving Towards Sustainable Development?

Changes in the Social Exclusion Area in Some European Countries

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ABSTRACT

In accordance with its agenda, the EU wants to include actively every European citizen in society taking into consideration some challenges like poverty, gender inequalities, social exclusion or long-term unemployment. The economic crisis has influenced the indicators of social exclusion such as monetary poverty and living conditions, education and the access to labour market. The index “risk of poverty or social exclusion” is influenced by certain characteristics of the population (education level of parents, country of birth, degree of urbanization, activity, household type, age, tenure status, citizenship, sex etc.) being able to identify the most disadvantaged subgroups of it. This paper analyzes the evolution of this index in the European Union, taken in consideration its determinants.

INTRODUCTION

The term of “social exclusion” is used in the literature in various forms: it is often associated with poverty and social capital (Stone, 2001), with the lack of social integration or inadequate social participation (Winter, 2000).

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The origin of the concept of “social exclusion” is found in the early twentieth century in German economists and sociologists thinking which have explained it by providing a privileged socially position by a group or by an individual at the expense of others (Hills, Le Grand & Piachaud, 2002).

Social exclusion has always been a constant concern in terms of culture and politics in France. Its origins can be found in the eighteenth century when the idea of the state as the embodiment of the nation has emerged.

Sociologist Emile Durkheim (1895) has focused on this concept and on fragile relationships between society members and between them and the nation state.

Estivill (2003) focuses on the use of political discourse in addressing the concept of social exclusion. In this regard, he said that there is a greater degree of skepticism from politicians regarding remedial measures of poverty. He also argues that social exclusion is more acceptable to public opinion instead of poverty. An exclusive society is much more acceptable for different political views.

The transition from the poverty speech to that linked to social exclusion has occurred with increasing individual culture and neo-liberal thinking.

Byrne (1999) and Levitas (2005) argue that the concept of poverty has been replaced with social exclusion, the latter being understood as a detachment from social life and the labor market.

Amartya (2000) believes that social exclusion provides new explanations on the causes and consequences of poverty and discrimination.

Beall (2002) addresses in her works more conceptual views on social exclusion. Thus, according to neo-liberal thinking, social exclusion is a consequence of global trade liberalization and a unique global market. Another approach considered that social exclusion is a concept which detracts from the inequality created by the malfunction of the economy. The transformationalist approach focuses on social relationships that arise in various formal and informal organizations. The concept is used to analyze international processes in combination with economic and social changes in the global system.

In the modern view, this concept has appeared in France and refers to those who are excluded from the social insurance system (Lenoir, 1974) or are excluded from certain economic or social activities because of lack of opportunities (Saunders, Naidoo & Griffiths, 2007).

Also, at the institutional level it began to be used and adopted this concept where there is a mainstream policy framework within the European Union. The Eurostat Taskforce on Social Exclusion and Poverty Statistics defines the term as follows (Hayes, Gray & Edwards, 2008):

A dynamic process, best described as descending levels: some disadvantages lead to exclusion, which in turn leads to more disadvantage and more social exclusion and ends up with persistent multiple (deprivation) disadvantages. Individuals, households and spatial units can be excluded from access to resources like employment, health, education, social or political life.

The concept of social exclusion has appeared in EU policy discourse during Delors presidency following the recommendations given by the Commission as Directives. Most of them were related to social protection systems and acknowledged that social exclusion has a multidimensional nature becoming more and more diversified. In addition, it emphasized that many individuals can play an appropriate role in economic and social life because of insufficient and uncertain resources.

According to these recommendations Member States are invited to recognize the basic rights of every citizen to live in a decent manner, which means that you must achieve a minimum level of income. In

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