

Brussels, 24 April 2002

OPINION
of the
Economic and Social Committee
on the
**Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning
Community statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC)**
(COM(2001) 754 final – 2001/0293 COD)

On 18 February 2002 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning Community statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC)
(COM(2001) 754 final – 2001/0293 COD).

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 10 April 2002. The rapporteur was **Ms Florio** and the co-rapporteurs were **Mr Bento Gonçalves** and **Mr Burani**.

At its 390th plenary session (meeting of 24 April 2002) the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion with 98 votes in favour, no dissenting votes and one abstention.

1. Introduction

1.1 A regulation concerning Community statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) is necessary in view of the high priority which the Council and Commission accord to the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Reliable, comparable and timely statistics are vital in order to obtain a realistic picture of the situation and monitor the progress of the relevant policies.

1.2 The legal basis for the regulation is found in Articles 136, 137 and 258 of the Amsterdam Treaty. These articles stress the need for, and possibility of, providing statistics on income, living conditions and social exclusion.

1.3 The conclusions of the European Councils of Lisbon (23-24 March 2000) and Nice (7-9 December 2000) also confirmed the Community's goal of eradicating poverty by means of continued dialogue and the pooling of information and best practice on the basis of commonly agreed indicators.

1.4 In 2000 the Commission drew up a *programme of Community action to encourage cooperation between Member States to combat social exclusion*. One of the aims of this programme was to promote the "collection and dissemination of comparable statistics in Member States and at Community level". The programme also laid down conditions for the funding of measures to obtain reliable, comparable statistics for analysing poverty and social exclusion.

1.5 The Commission communication on structural indicators¹ includes in this category indicators of inequalities in income distribution and poverty rates.

1.6 The idea of an EU-SILC regulation originated in the second report on economic and social cohesion.

¹ COM(2000) 594 final.

2. The proposed regulation

2.1 The aim of the regulation is to establish a common framework for the systematic production of Community statistics on income and living conditions in all Member States, with a view to gaining a better understanding of poverty and social exclusion at national and EU level. The regulation intrinsically provides a useful tool for achieving these objectives and monitoring developments.

2.2 The statistics are to cover households comprising one or more people, using harmonised methods and definitions which will be common to all Member States.

2.3 Statistical surveys will collect both cross-sectional and longitudinal data. Cross-sectional data provide a snapshot of a given moment of time.

2.4 Longitudinal data relate to changes within a given sample observed over a period of at least four years, and involve a smaller sample than cross-sectional data.

2.5 In terms of sources, the regulation favours a flexible approach based on the use of existing national data (registers, surveys, national samples, etc.) plus some new sources. Hence it makes provision for direct interviews but also allows the use of data from registers where these exist.

2.6 Data are to be collected annually.

2.7 The regulation identifies target areas, determined on the basis of primary and secondary variables. Various modules can then be submitted annually for the observation of new phenomena.

2.8 During the first four years of the programme, ad hoc financial contributions will be made to the Member States. After this period, two thirds of the costs of data collection will be met by the Commission.

3. The Committee's recommendations²

3.1 As pointed out in earlier opinions, there are nevertheless still considerable differences in the collection of data for the individual national systems. This makes data comparison and analysis difficult.

3.2 It is disappointing that the data to be collected under the regulation only cover the national dimension of poverty and social exclusion, with no provision for local or regional data. This

² See also - EESC opinion on the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No. 577/98 on the organisation of a labour force sample survey in the Community – OJ C 48 of 21.2.2002
- EESC opinion currently being drafted on social indicators.

seems in direct contradiction with EU guidelines, especially as regards economic and social cohesion policy which since 1992 has formed one of the three pillars of the Union.

3.3 The link with regional policies should be brought out more clearly, particularly as regards the less developed regions (objective 1) where unemployment, poverty and exclusion reach worrying levels.

3.4 More detailed analysis is also needed of the big cities, as these problems are particularly acute on their outskirts. Careful attention must also be paid to rural areas with higher levels of poverty.

3.5 The regulation contains no explicit provision for the breakdown of data by gender, although many surveys conducted by international bodies and by the Commission have shown that women are the main victims of exclusion and poverty.

3.6 As regards the need for harmonised definitions and methodology to ensure that data are truly comparable, deadlines should be set and Member States called upon to make a specific economic commitment.

3.7 Cooperation between Eurostat, the European Commission, the socio-occupational bodies and the associations most closely involved in social exclusion issues represented on the EESC, is vital if analysis and monitoring instruments such as EU-SILC are to be exploited to the full.

Brussels, 24 April 2002.

The President
of the
Economic and Social Committee

The Secretary-General
of the
Economic and Social Committee

Göke Frerichs

Patrick Venturini