



1 Speech of Commissioner Andor on Missing Link conference

Ladies and gentlemen,

May I start by congratulating all those who have helped to make this project a success — whether they are practitioners, participants or coordinators, or have contributed in some other way.

The Commission was happy to fund this work under the "Transfer of innovation" strand of the Leonardo da Vinci programme.

Now that the project has been completed, it will undergo a formal evaluation. But I think I am safe in saying that it has yielded very interesting and very useful outcomes and insights which can serve as a guide to others working to tackle social exclusion.

The *Missing Link* focused on issues in the educational and social fields. It sought to expand collaboration, personal development, training and employability, improve social services and bolster social inclusion.

More generally, it has illustrated and — in some respects — has exemplified broader ideas and approaches that are close to the way I believe we must all start to think and work.

But first, ladies and gentlemen, let me say a few words about the general situation and the avenues that need exploring.

We are still feeling the impact of the crisis and the economic difficulties that have come in its wake. They cast a long, dark shadow over the Union's financial, economic and political stability.

Long-term unemployment is high, and joblessness among young people is alarmingly so in a number of countries.

Too many people — around one in six across the Union — are enduring social exclusion and living in poverty.

And the living conditions of about the same number are severely affected by a lack of resources.



It means there is an urgent need for action at national, local and European level.

But we have a path to follow. This decade starts a new chapter in the history of social Europe.

The Lisbon Treaty, the place accorded the social dimension in the Europe 2020 Strategy, and the EU leaders' commitments during the European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion — all bear witness to the strengthening of Europe's social dimension.

For the first time in the history of the Union, the EU leaders agreed on a headline poverty reduction target.

Meeting that challenge will be crucial to the success of Europe 2020. And conversely, a failure to do what is needed to meet that target is likely to compound the situation, exacerbating the social situation in the wake of the economic and financial crises.

The Commission is doing all it can to encourage and support the Member States in meeting the headline and national poverty reduction targets.

The policy framework that the Commission is promoting for work to tackle exclusion is "Active Inclusion".

Active Inclusion is about getting those who can work into sustainable, quality employment, and providing resources for those who cannot that are sufficient to allow them to live in dignity, together with support for social participation.

There are three conditions for this:

- First, adequate, well-designed *income support* schemes are needed to reach out to those in need and create a bridge to employment;
- Secondly, it calls for *labour markets inclusive* and employment policies that fit the needs of those furthest from a job; and
- Thirdly, *quality social services* are needed to provide support for the active participation of excluded people.

Next year we plan to present an in-depth assessment of implementation at national



level. It will focus in particular on the effectiveness of minimum income schemes, and the way EU programmes can be used to support active inclusion.

I think the *Missing Link's* approach resonates with this — especially the requirement for services to address the special needs of people living in exclusion.

Clearly, a link may be missing between those who devise or deliver services for excluded people and those for whom such services exist — the people living in exclusion.

I can see how the concept of "trained experts by experience" in social exclusion, which featured prominently in the project, has emerged in response to that perceived "missing link".

The project sought to fill the gap by involving the client group in the process of tackling exclusion, so the benefit of this fresh approach could eventually be passed on to others. The approach is innovative in so far as it involves testing new solutions with a view to applying the results more widely.

I am using the term "innovation" in its broadest sense, rather than restricting it to technology and science. We know that innovation is vital for the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth of tomorrow.

An ability to innovate, draw up and support far-sighted, bold reforms will be crucial to maintaining the values and essentials of our social model.

Europe is already a significant location for social innovation. Successful evidence-based social policy innovation has been introduced in a number of fields, and in particular the fight against poverty and social exclusion. New modes of intervention are tested and assessed before being applied on a larger scale.

The challenges of the coming decade call for us to set out sights higher. The Commission sees innovation as providing much-needed impetus for the development of a more inclusive and sustainable European Union, and wants to see evidence-based social policy innovations taking root across the Member States.

Innovation figured prominently in the communication on European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion, which I presented last December.



The Platform aims to support the Member States in their efforts to meet the poverty reduction targets. It advocates multidisciplinary working across traditional policy boundaries where this helps to find solutions, and it fosters the engagement of the widest range of actors and stakeholders.

The "missing link" project does both, and its approach is in tune with the principles governing the Platform.

It marks a small but nonetheless important contribution towards tackling unemployment, poverty and social exclusion and meeting the Europe 2020 targets.

We must back the European Council's commitment to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty by 2020 — despite the tough choices that fiscal consolidation programmes require.

I am convinced that the EU must show the same determination in tackling unemployment and poverty as it does in pursuing economic recovery and fiscal stability.

In its own way, the *Missing Link* has helped us do that.

Thank you.