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Social survey: doubt on end of crisis continues, but trust in EU's ability to make positive impact remains

Brussels, 29 November 2011 – A new Eurobarometer survey shows that more than a third of European citizens currently working (35%) are concerned about losing their jobs. This proportion has increased slightly since 2009 (+2 points). At a time when Europe is experiencing grave economic challenges, certain key social indicators show a large majority of respondents feeling that the EU as a whole has taken a backward step in recent times. With 71% of Europeans pessimistic about the chances that the economic crisis will end soon and 87% saying that poverty has increased (more than in 2009).

However, the general sense of gloom about society as a whole – and about the chances of the economic crisis ending quickly – has not translated into a crisis of confidence when it comes to the way in which most respondents view their own prospects. More people in 2011 are confident that they will keep their job than in 2009, two-thirds remain confident that they will have a job in two years' time, and over 60% say that they would be likely to fund another job relatively quickly in the event of redundancy. 24% of respondents currently working would also consider starting their own business in response to redundancy. Citizens are most acutely worried about their jobs in Spain (72%), in Greece (63%) and in Lithuania (61%).

Europeans generally consider that the impact of the EU on employment and social policies in their country is beneficial: 52% say it has a positive impact on employment policy and 51% on social policy (the most positive country is Slovakia with 74% and 71%). These figures rise considerably when addressing specific issues. 70% think the EU plays a positive role in making it easier for people to work in different EU Member States, 67% in improving access to education and training, 59% in making easier for people to start their own business, and 58% in setting minimum standards for working conditions throughout the EU. In tackling social and employment challenges, people agree behind the idea of flexicurity like regular training to improve job prospects, however half of the respondents disagree that many people retire too early.

Underneath the EU-wide statistics, lie great differences between Member States. Confidence and optimism are far higher in some Member States than in others. Faith in the EU's ability to make a positive impact has waned in countries where the economic outlook is currently the least promising, notably Spain, Greece, Portugal and Cyprus. In Spain, the most extreme example, the proportion of respondents saying that the EU is having a positive impact on the creation of new job opportunities and fighting unemployment is much lower than in 2009 (44%, -40 points).

There is a general appetite for more and better information about the future job market where 58% would like to receive information on taking decisions about training courses and the kind of job to apply for in the future. In terms of EU funds, the survey results make it clear that, in the delivery of its social and employment policies, the EU must focus in part on effectively targeting its ESF (European Social Fund) and EGF (European Globalisation Adjustment Fund) to ensure that the decline of hope in countries with stubbornly high levels of unemployment is reversed. Almost half of Europeans (45%) are aware of the European Social Fund (ESF) (+5% since mid-2010). The ESF is best known in Slovakia (67%), Portugal (64%) and Latvia (60%) and least known in Denmark (19%). The recognition of EGF at EU level is somewhat lower (29%). While more Europeans are familiar with the ESF than was the case two years ago, it matters a great deal for European confidence – not to mention the EU itself – that ordinary citizens are aware of the EU's efforts to tackle the problems that are such a source of anxiety today.

For more information:

Special Eurobarometer 377: European employment and social policy

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_special_379_360_en.htm#377

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