

PRESS RELEASE

Tuesday, July 8, 2014

40th Ipse Meeting in Bologna: rethinking intergenerational solidarity

The 40th Ipse Meeting, organized by the Institute for European Social Protection – Ipse, was hosted by the Region of Emilia-Romagna in Bologna on July 3 and 4. Taking advantage of the opportunity to look back on 25 years of Ipse Meetings exploring the challenges of social protection in Europe, this 40th Meeting focused on the issue of renewing intergenerational solidarity.

The Ipse Meeting in Bologna opened with an observation: although our intergenerational solidarity systems have for the most part proven effective, they fail to meet today's needs. The crisis did not create this situation; it simply intensified certain pre-existing challenges (population aging, longer life expectancy, etc.). For more than 10 years, intergenerational solidarity has been a central issue in our European societies. The issue now is to rethink our systems of intergenerational solidarity between young people living in ever greater insecurity and seniors living in ever greater isolation, hardships that in turn have the destructive effect of undermining trust in collective systems.

As such, pushing back the retirement age may not be the proper solution in that maintaining seniors in the workforce hinders access to employment for young people. The issue is thus to support active aging, in other words to help seniors remain in control of their own lives as long as possible, thereby contributing to the economy and society as a whole. Skill transfers between seniors and young people must be promoted, and work-study programs, in great demand among young people as a means of facilitating professional integration, must be bolstered.

Renewing this intergenerational solidarity calls for stronger cooperation among a vast array of actors: national and local governments, social security systems, social protection providers, associations, social partners, etc. For mutual and paritarian organizations, investing and innovating in solidarity requires first and foremost economic performance and absolute stability.

Nonetheless, intergenerational issues must not lead us to overlook “intra-generational” imbalances: while the labor market is as open as ever to qualified young people, obstacles have never been so great for those with no qualifications. Likewise, employment prospects for women and reconciling professional and private life remain formidable challenges.

Finally, what is the European Union's role in the debate around intergenerational solidarity? These past years have brought about measures and recommendations to respond to the demographic and economic challenges we face. Europe's key priority must nonetheless be implementing an investment policy to promote socially responsible and inclusive growth supported by ambitious measures to benefit young people. Establishment of European unemployment insurance, an idea recently proposed by the European Commission, would indeed create true organic solidarity among Member States. Meanwhile, such a prominent measure would serve to strengthen the legitimacy of European construction.

In September 2014, Ipse will publish the proceedings of this 40th Ipse Meeting, including all speeches and presentations made during the event.

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