



ELISAN's key principles

Minimum requirements are set as a way of helping to harmonise the Member States' social policies. The coordination tools deployed include the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (PNAI) and the Structural Funds. In spite of the tools that are available, there appears to be a lack of any political willingness to usher in a fully-fledged Community strategy that aspires to promote ambitious, consistent and lasting initiatives in the social sphere. As well as being based on objectives, the strategy has to cover a common set of requirements that transcend the lowest common denominator amongst the Member States.

Against this background, the local elected representatives in the Member States and, more specifically, those in charge of social affairs have a role to play. In view of the similar social challenges they are faced with, they will be able to amplify their influence and voice via networking, looking beyond domestic borders. This is the whole issue behind the creation of ELISAN.

The Member States have many different cultural and linguistic contexts, together with a wide variety of social protection systems and approaches towards national social policies but these differences should not be regarded as an obstacle to the need to explore fresh opportunities for harmonisation.

This approach is based in particular on the extent to which local authorities are able to apply social policies based on initiatives for preventing the risks of social exclusion, lending support to users and developing skills.

As European decisions interact with local social policies, local elected representatives in charge of social affairs, ELISAN members, highlight the need to:

- raise awareness about social action in Europe, its issues, its players;
- ensure that more account is taken of the contribution locally elected representatives make to the process for implementing an effective and consistent policy, never flagging in their determination to help guarantee, maintain and enhance the quality of life of our citizens

The members of ELISAN also want their exchanges and endeavours to form the basis for ensuring their voices are heard by the European institutions and the Member States.

Consequently, they re-emphasise **their support for the major principles now being defended by Europe:**

the subsidiarity principle

The subsidiarity principle specifies that a player's "level of powers" is determined insofar as "the objectives of the action taken cannot be sufficiently achieved via the lower level and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects of the action, be better taken at a higher level".

ELISAN stresses the need for the concept of solidarity to be combined with that of subsidiarity.

ELISAN believes that the unregulated application of the subsidiarity principle could lead to even more inequalities between the territories and individuals.

In order for each local authority to be in a position to make its own decisions:

- The higher authority has to lend support to the lower authority in completing its task ;
- all power-sharing has to take account of the fact that local authorities, even those at the same level, do not necessarily have the same ability to exercise these powers.

Consequently, if the subsidiarity principle is to be applied effectively, it also has to be backed up with the financial and human resources required to exercise the transferred powers.

the social cohesion principle

The "social cohesion" concept ELISAN cites during its proceedings and contributions is based on:

- **the Council of Europe's definition** which states that social cohesion is "*the capacity of society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation. Social cohesion must be firmly based on human rights (as codified in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Revised European Social Charter) as well as an acceptance of shared responsibility for the welfare of all members of society, especially those who are at risk of poverty or exclusion*".

- **the Lisbon Declaration** issued by the European Union's Heads of State and Government: "*The number of people living below the poverty line and in social exclusion in the Union is unacceptable. Steps must be taken to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by setting adequate targets.*"

Point 5 in the Presidency's Conclusions during the European Council in Lisbon, on 22 and 23 March 2000.

the principle of territorial cohesion

Fleshed out in the New Lisbon Treaty, and designed to amplify the European Union's principles of economic and social cohesion, the territorial cohesion principle is a key component of the European integration process. Public services operating within the field of local social action – which we represent – regard this territorial cohesion principle as offering an opportunity for European citizens to gain access to social services close at hand, irrespective of where they live. The concept of equality in public services and territorial equity therefore seems to be re-emphasised. The members of ELISAN nonetheless point out that the relevance of the territorial cohesion principle is related to the way the subsidiarity principle is applied and hence the resources provided so that local authorities may develop a fully-fledged local social action policy.

Against the background of these key principles, ELISAN's action seek to guarantee the basic rights of European Union citizens. The legislative and financial instruments that will serve to make the subsidiarity, social cohesion and territorial principles more effective should therefore safeguard or even reassert these rights whenever this is necessary.