# The Lisbon Strategy is creating more exclusion and poverty: some (of the many) elements for discussion.

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* It is obvious that the European Social Inclusion Strategy after the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union in 2000 lost most of its drive and is now in real danger of losing its core. In the Revised Lisbon Strategy the focus on social inclusion, has virtually disappeared in the name of growth and employment. The so-called “Lisbon Triangle” has thereby lost one of its corners.
* The old illusion has re-emerged that a trickle-down effect would occur. According to this vision, a strong and competitive economy is by itself sufficient to end poverty and exclusion and to reach high social cohesion. Unfortunately, on several occasions it already has been illustrated that even the most competitive economy is not capable to achieve social inclusion or social cohesion without supporting specific policies. Those policies are even more needed in situations when national income is not equitably distributed or when fast economic growth and related social changes immediately exclude part of the citizens.
* If we consider matters of growing poverty and exclusion, we should take into account that
  + such an increase is not only to be termed in terms of numbers but also in terms of depth, that is the gap that separates those who are excluded from the rest of society
  + the rise of new forms of exclusion, many of them related to the present organisation of the economic system on the basis of an ultraliberal creed
  + Illustrations: activation and flexicurity
* Poverty and exclusion remain at a high level in a rich continent. The essential structural causes are the same, even if its modalities have diversified.
  + The ageing of the population
  + The rediscovery of the child poverty
  + Young people, though more qualified, have growing difficulties in finding housing and employment
  + Women who still suffer obvious discrimination 🡪 increase in number of single parent families, with even more trying living conditions
  + Ethnic minorities that continue to live in precarious conditions
  + Immigrants that continue to enter in the Member States and are subject to economic, social and cultural exploitation,
  + The working poor, a group that is increasing in number, becoming younger in age, with a growing number of women
  + Homeless.
* Increased stigmatization of poverty and of exclusion, to which the changing focus of EU-policies certainly have contributed. The symbolic importance of not mentioning poverty and social exclusion any more, the shift from a realistic paradigm to the rosy picture of an ‘optimistic’ and ‘dynamic’ one. 🡪 The concepts of poverty and exclusion are less used in the official documents of the European Institutions
* Apart from this weakening of the third corner of the triangle – social cohesion – the question never has been asked whether the strengthening of social cohesion itself does not lead to more social exclusion. Any sociologist will tell you that there are two types of factors that contribute to the social cohesion of a group: the positive one are the existence of a social network (or social capital) and of a set of common values and norms, the negative one is the existence of processes to exclude those who are perceived as ‘unworthy’ members of society. Consequently, it is not sufficient to re-introduce social cohesion a pillar of any EU-strategy; it should be complemented and perhaps even replaced by the aim of combating social exclusion. It is not only my opinion that - given the present economic, social and ecological context – this is of utmost importance.
* Last not least, let us not forget the impact of EU-policies on poverty and social exclusion outside the Union. In its external policy prevail the interests of each country, with respect to immigration, asylum policy, ecological and development matters. What with a common European position on matters such as social regulation and rights, less closed trade agreements with other regions of the world, gradual opening of the internal agriculture policy in which their impact on poverty outside the EU is seriously assessed? The increasing global dimension of poverty is unmistakeable; migration flows urge us to globalise our fight against poverty.