

Taking the Book on the Road: Feedback and Takeaways

On January 28, 2014, IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde presented excerpts of the book “Jobs and Growth: Supporting the European Recovery” at a high-level panel discussion in Brussels featuring Minister of Finance Schäuble (Germany) and Minister of Economy and Competitiveness De Guindos (Spain). The discussion attracted an audience of over 200, including stakeholders from civil society, trade unions, academia, and international media. There was strong agreement that removing the obstacles to growth today would pay off tomorrow.

Following this event, the book authors—a staff team from the IMF’s European Department—presented the main findings at workshops and conferences in 7 major cities across Europe: Brussels, Madrid, Rome, Warsaw, Berlin, Frankfurt, and Vienna. At these meetings, the authors engaged with a range of policy makers, academics, trade union representatives, and journalists.

The hot topic of how to boost growth and create jobs in Europe drew large audiences and resulted in a series of lively and open discussions. There was broad agreement that sustained growth requires not only macro support, but also further steps to deal with high debt levels and implement structural reforms.

The focus in most of the discussions was less on whether these are the “right ideas”—most agreed they are—and more on how to make the various proposals work for individual countries. For example, participants asked what an individual country could do to take advantage of increasingly important cross-border supply-chain linkages. One answer provided by the book is that measures to help supply-chain integration are to a large extent the same as those needed to improve competitiveness, including in particular product market and labor market reforms.

Labor market issues featured prominently in the discussions, with the book shedding light on the highly dual labor markets in many countries, where workers on temporary contracts have borne the brunt of employment losses during the crisis, and more generally the high rates of unemployment, especially among the young. Broadly, most recognize that there is no “silver bullet” and that actions need to be country specific.

There was also broad agreement on the need to bring debt levels down, both private and public. Many worried about the headwinds to the deleveraging process posed by low levels of inflation in the euro area. The implications of “lowflation” (explored in this [blog post](#)) are the subject of ongoing work in EUR and across the Fund, as are many of the other topics covered in the book.

Overall, the discussions confirmed that, while the roadmaps to reform share many common elements across countries and provide useful insights to guide policy makers, implementation will have to be country-specific and take local circumstances into account.