



Declaration of PES Employment and Social Affairs Ministers: An Ambitious Social Action Plan

Adopted at the online PES meeting of Employment and Social Affairs ministers of 22 February 2021

Our story starts in Gothenburg with Stefan Löfven. The proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights in November 2017 has put forward **the vision of a better Europe**. The 20 principles enshrined in the Pillar outlined a new European social contract, and **restated every European's right to a quality job, to social protection and to equal opportunities in an inclusive society**.

Today, expectations are high. Covid 19 has reminded us all precisely of the role of social protection, of the role of the state to protect and support people. The crisis is far from over yet and we have to deal with its consequences. It is time to break with the old paradigms of previous crises, when economic considerations prevailed: **the social response to this crisis will be crucial for the future of our societies**. The Pillar of Social Rights must be used to its fullest extent now for the EU to address the crisis and improve the wellbeing of all Europeans.

The European Commission has already announced the publication of **a Social Action Plan to implement the Pillar of Social rights in the month to come**. We welcome this initiative, which is in line with our call for concrete measures to implement the Pillar's principles since its proclamation in 2017. This Action Plan comes at the right moment, it has the potential to be an accelerator for social progress across the EU.

Through initiatives by the EU, by Member States and by the social partners the Social Action plan must address a series of challenges:

- Together we defend the idea that work must pay, **we share the objective of ensuring adequate minimum wages across the EU**, either by law or collective bargaining, respecting national systems and the autonomy of social partners.
- New forms of work should not bring workers back to the 19th century, it is time to **ensure platform workers' labour and social rights** and to ban zero hours contracts and bogus self-employment.
- Covid 19 reminds the EU of the need to ensure health and safety at work. **The EU must commit to eliminating work-related deaths** and reducing work-related illnesses by 2030. EU Member States should work to integrate the right to safe and healthy working conditions in the International Labour Organisation's framework on fundamental principles and rights at work.
- Trade unions are the guardians of workers' rights, they must be supported and **collective bargaining, worker's participation, worker's rights to information and**



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consultation and social dialogue must be promoted in all Member States and at EU level.

- Against unscrupulous companies, **due diligence along the supply and sub-contracting' chains must be reinforced.**
- The gender pay and pension gap must become a thing of the past. Transparency measures are urgently needed, coupled with clear and binding targets **to eliminate the gender pay gap by 2030.**
- Youth unemployment is rising up again, we are committed to invest and make a **full use of the possibilities offered by the renewed Youth Guarantee** to help more young people on their way to a quality job.
- It is time to finally address the more than 25% of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU, **a European Child Guarantee** to ensure children's rights to healthcare, education, childcare, housing and nutrition, must be set-up, while respecting national competences.
- To combat poverty and social exclusion, it will be essential to follow-up on the Council conclusions **on strengthening minimum income protection** and to set clear objectives of poverty reduction.
- We call for **a post-2020 European Disability Strategy** containing ambitious, clear and measurable targets strategy on the rights of the people with disabilities.
- We want strong welfare systems to support people throughout their life. **Public services must be given sufficient means to allow effective access to social housing, healthcare, long-term care and essential services**, as foreseen in the European Pillar of Social Rights.
- To support workers to professionally engage in new sectors, public policy on skills must certify and validate the qualifications and competences and provide **access to life-long learning to workers of all ages.**
- Drawing the lessons of the **European instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE)** as an effective tool to safeguard jobs during an economic crisis, we invite the Commission to present a proposal to extend the coverage of the employment protection measures in each Member State and to turn SURE into a permanent instrument to fight unemployment in crisis.

Beyond these specific features for an ambitious Social action Plan, we want to use the European Pillar of Social Rights as the instrument to **rebalance the economic EU with a more social, more sustainable growth strategy.**

Public policies all too often focus mechanically on economic and financial considerations without much regard to how they impact citizens' lives. In our view the green, digital and demographic transitions can only be successful if they leave no one behind and contribute to a better quality of life for all. This must be reflected **in all EU programmes with a clear spending target associated to social objectives.** It must become a central part of a **renewed EU's economic governance**, with clear indicators and monitoring procedure informing social and employment-related Country Specific Recommendations based on the objectives of the Pillar, rather than fiscal ones. **We call for EU targets for 2030 to set the ambition for a strong social policy.** This will be key also with regard to the Porto declaration. We should aim at three headline targets on employment rate (covering for example, women and youth employment), skills, and social inclusion (including for example, poverty and child poverty).

This balancing act must also take place at the very heart of the European construction. The Viking and Laval European Court of Justice rulings have stressed the risks of privileging the construction of a market over that of a more social Union. EU action must respect different

labour market models and national systems. The strength of the social partners and the right to collective action and bargaining is crucial. Social rights and the autonomy of the social partners must be safeguarded against any future rulings of the European Court of Justice. We are convinced that **the Pillar must be the overarching framework for social policies for the next decade.**

These objectives, a strong Social Action Plan and a renewed European Semester that integrates the monitoring of the Pillar and of the National Resilience and Recovery Plans and involves social partners, are within reach. In a few months, **the Porto Social Summit and the Convention on the Future of Europe must be the forums where to advance these proposals.** With a strong social Action Plan reinforced by the Porto Summit outcomes, the EU can answer citizens' call for more protection and pave the way for a decade of tangible social progress.

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