



Towards a society of wellbeing - Our proposal for a post-Covid 19 agenda. Adopted by the PES Presidency on 18 February 2021

All across Europe, our societies face multiple, complex and often global challenges: climate and demographic change, the digital transitions, growing inequalities are just some of the many processes that are impacting our lives. Confronted with these challenges, we, socialists and democrats, are convinced that **the EU must develop new narrative and new policies for a sustainable and fair growth and social progress in Europe**, one that puts sustainability and people at the centre of its policies. This is a process that our political family has already started, and that must continue.

When it hit us at the beginning of last year, the Covid-19 pandemic cruelly revealed major gaps in how some of our societies are organised, in how they care and provide for both their vulnerable and ordinary citizens, and how conservative forces are exploiting a global crisis to backtrack on gender equality and fundamental rights. It showed the importance of strong safety nets and well-functioning public health systems, which have been undermined by too many years of austerity policies in some member states. It called on strong state intervention to overcome the weaknesses of privatised economic systems. The pandemic also raised important questions on the essence of our society, its sustainability, the place it leaves to solidarity and the objectives it seeks. Our political family acted swiftly to tackle the different effect of the crisis, with regard to the public health dimension, but also to its economic and social consequences. We commend our governments and leaders at all level for the crucial role they played. The crisis is far from over and we have to deal with its consequences. Nevertheless, the world after COVID 19 crisis will not be the same and should not be the same. With the Recovery and Resilience Facility shortly unfolding, Member States will receive unprecedented support from the EU on their way out of the crisis. We must use it to lay the groundwork now to shape a better future, responding to the new challenges and realities. This must be reflected in the COVID 19 national recovery plans. We cannot simply get back to business as usual. It is therefore time for the Union to reconnect with its aims *of promoting peace, its values and the wellbeing of its people*, as stated in Article 3 of the Treaty of the European Union. In simple terms, it is urgent for the EU and member states to introduce policies and initiatives that increase people's wellbeing and that make quality life possible for all in Europe.

In June 2020, PES put forward our proposals for a health union, to make sure public health systems across Europe are ready to cope with the unforeseen, now and in the future. We also put forward a fully-fledged plan to help workers and companies recover from the crisis, and start working for all. And now we put forward a vision for our collective future, a vision for a society rather than that of merely a market. **This is our proposal for a post-Covid 19 agenda.** In this period of crisis, it is time to question some old dogmas and to be innovative. Social and sustainable progress must be the top priority of the recovery.



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Party of European Socialists

10-12 Rue Guimard

B-1040 Brussels

Belgium

The wellbeing of all, as the ultimate objective of our society, will help us address individual needs and rights and inscribe them into a broader, collective endeavour. It will help us provide immediate answers to current challenges and take steps towards long-term societal progress.

In this perspective, GDP cannot remain the only metrics for progress. Public policies were all too often driven mechanically by economic and financial considerations without much regard to how they impact citizens' lives. We must go beyond this narrow way of thinking that considers the means as ends. We will instead look at what matters the most to people: their quality of life, their health and that of their relatives, gender equality and non-discrimination, the environment, good material conditions, and a good job, security and safety in private and public spheres, quality housing, being part of a broader community, solidarity, happiness... These elements are all constitutive of citizens' wellbeing, and they must be available to all citizens today and in the future.

There is no magic trick to get there. As socialists we have always been advocates of strong welfare states that provide strong public services; of collective answers to the challenges our societies face. Inequalities, climate change, globalisation, demographic changes, territorial cohesion and rural depopulation, digitalisation and now the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be answered by individuals only, they require our societies to collectively change and adapt and be innovative. In our view, it is the *raison d'être* of public policies (may they be social, environmental, of security, economic or financial...) to work for the wellbeing of all.

At the European level, we do not start from a blank page either. **The European Pillar of Social Rights, the Green new Deal, the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the EU Gender Equality Strategy, are our tools already available to nurture wellbeing for all citizens.** After too many years of EU policies focussed on fiscal and macroeconomic considerations, we stand ready to reform the European Semester and refocus the debate towards making life better for all.

In its discussion paper *Changing the Focus: For a Society of Wellbeing* PES Social Europe Network has illustrated some of the steps to be taken towards a society of wellbeing:

- We want good working conditions and work-life balance for work to serve a good life, and not the other way around.
- We want strong public education and a flourishing culture sector to work towards the emancipation and active citizenship of all women and men.
- We want a healthy environment and new business models that look beyond-profit, in the interest of all and for the sustainability of our societies.
- Beyond safety nets, we want strong welfare and health systems to support people throughout their life, because we choose solidarity.
- We want a feminist Europe and a feminist economy that puts gender equality at its centre and creates the conditions for men and women, in all their diversity, to live and work on equal terms.
- We want a proactive redistribution of wealth instead of mere trickle-down policies, because equality is central.
- We want states governed by the rule of law, that closely involve citizens in decisions and guarantee justice, equality and security to all.

The wellbeing of each citizen and social cohesion must become the new indicators for the success of policies. This is the path we want to take to reconnect citizens with public action and build back confidence in institutions and the democratic debate. Placing wellbeing at the heart of our political project, we want to renew the EU's promises of social progress and shared prosperity. We will ensure that all generations are left with positive prospects and trust in the future, both as individuals and as members of a broader community.