

# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

## THE SOCIAL EMPLOYERS' PROPOSALS TO STRENGTHEN SOCIAL EUROPE

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## Consultation on the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights:

### The Social Employers' proposals to strengthen social Europe

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) is the social strategy adopted by the European institutions to ensure that the transitions to climate neutrality, digitalisation and demographic change, as well as the exit from the COVID-19 crisis, are socially just and equitable. It is based on 20 key principles.

A lot has happened since the European Commission launched its public consultation on the EPSR in January 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted and increased social care and support needs across Europe.

The Social Employers, representing the voice of social service employers in Europe with 29 members in 17 countries, contributes to the consultation on the implementation of the EPSR, to strengthen social Europe, by covering three main angles:

- 1. Strengthen the effectiveness of social rights;**
- 2. Give political impetus to develop social services;**
- 3. Investing in social services.**

## Preamble: the Covid-19 health crisis

It is clear that while social care and support settings, particularly for older persons (but not only) have been the main hotbed of infections, public policies have taken too long to recognise and equip social service providers with the means to protect the users they support and the employees who work there.

The social services workforce was particularly vulnerable due to their exposure to the virus while working on the frontline, providing services in close contact with persons, in many cases with no possibility of social distancing. In the beginning of the crisis, no - or not enough - personal protective equipment (masks, hydroalcoholic solution, gloves etc.) were assigned to them by the public authorities.

**This situation highlights the necessary and overdue recognition of the crucial role social services, and their employers and employees play**, whether in residential care or home-care settings. This call for recognition led us, together with our European counterparts on the trade union side and 10 EU-level organisations representing all forms of social services, to participate in a campaign, calling on EU leaders to better support social service in COVID-19. In a Social Summit on June 25, accompanied by a social media campaign with the hashtags #IAmAnEssentialWorker and #WeAreEssentialServices, we called for recognition to be translated into action: a much needed step to support European populations, who are facing considerable social challenges, whether to deal with the social crisis that will be the consequence of the health crisis or with issues already known such as the demographic challenge or the changing support needs of people in more inclusive societies.

### 1. Strengthening the effectiveness of social rights

The European Pillar of Social Rights is an important basis for European social rights. While the EPSR is one of the most important tools in the European Union's social policy arena, we must not lose sight of the fact that such principles are also laid down in other non-EU texts, such as the European Social Charter, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ILO Conventions.

The implementation of these principles calls for changes in the way people in need of care and support are assessed and individualised services are further developed, that meet service users' needs and enable them to fully be part of society.

The proclamation of the twenty principles of the EPSR and the accompanying social scoreboard as an integral part of the European Semester Cycle are a step in the right direction, but it is clear that these principles need to be more concretely implemented in a strong action plan.

The scoreboard indicators do show this implementation, but only partially, and we see that in all countries, even those with the most developed economies, progress can still be made towards a more inclusive society.

*How can the effectiveness of the EPSR principles be strengthened?*

The effectiveness of the 20 principles requires the implementation of a wide range of schemes and among them, allowance schemes enabling a decent standard of living.

**The Social Employers want to focus on its members services scope, namely social services for older persons, persons with disabilities, children and other vulnerable people. Such services are key in contributing to inclusive societies.**

The organisation of services must now be steered towards meeting the needs of people, in all their diversity. It is through social services that vulnerable people are able to fully participate in society and fully benefit from their human rights.

Social services are an investment for the future, also because they contribute to getting people excluded from the labour market back into jobs, thus they allow higher labour market participation of people who without social services would have to leave it and for many other reasons.

## 2. Giving political impetus to develop social services

Political impetus at European level can take place through various means ranging from declarations, to normative texts such as directives, but also through a process often unknown to the general public, the European Semester process, allowing for a formalised political dialogue.

The political impetus was clearly given by the President of the Commission and by the Commission's work programme with messages such as '*A Europe that leaves no one behind*'. The political stakes are therefore understood and communicated. However, this must be translated into action.

The EU institutions have already proposed two directives under the EPSR, which have been adopted. The [Work-Life Balance Directive](#) calls on member states to implement its principles, but only indirectly mentions the concrete measures that would make life easier for Europeans, who in addition to work, have to take on tasks of helping and accompanying relatives, such as their children, relatives with disabilities or elderly parents.

It is clear that the development of accessible, affordable and quality social services is an essential element in achieving this objective, which would enable a better quality of life for the persons covered by the directive and also for all those in need of care and support in their daily lives.

**It is important that the European institutions give a strong impetus for the development of social services throughout Europe. The basis for such services already exists, often in the form of non-profit enterprises of the social economy, which should be more supported by the EU as well as by the Member States. Their role in social cohesion should be further emphasized, as should their role in job creation.**

The Social Employers supports the Commission's initiative included in its 2021 work programme, entailing an action plan for the social economy.

Provided that the impetus is given at the highest level, the tool for the concrete implementation of principles through the development of social services already exists and should be further developed.

Since the adoption of the EPSR, the European Semester process has acquired a new dimension for engaging in a dialogue between Member States and the Commission in the social field. The reference since 2020 to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals should also reinforce its social dimension.

**The Social Employers calls for a strengthening of the social dimension in the direction of upward convergence through improved social services and their financing, which must be considered as a crucial investment throughout Europe.**

## 3. Investing in social services

Social services have been hit hard by the pandemic. They have been humanly affected, as high numbers of infections and deaths occurred in long-term facilities. There has been a psychological impact on workers and service users, such as elevated rates of stress and anxiety, caused by the increased pressure.



Social services are also financially affected and have to face additional wage expenses; overtime, maintenance of the wages of sick employees, replacements, etc. They also have to deal with extra costs in terms of equipment, with additional costs of protection and disinfection, but also reorganisation (creation of containment units, adaptation of services provided at home or remotely via digital applications). **These expenditures must be taken into account by the national authorities and in the various initiatives that the Commission will take to support the social services sector.**

The sector employs 11 million employees in Europe<sup>1</sup> and has created more than two million jobs in the last ten years. It should play a leading role in job creation in the future and has many needs that are not always clearly identified because of a lack of sufficient visibility.

Beyond the economic recovery from the pandemic, it is important to target social services in defining the operational programmes of European funds in the forthcoming long-term EU budget 2021-2027. In this regard, it is also necessary to recall that, in a Europe in which the population will decline and age and in which the needs of vulnerable people are evolving in the direction of more personalised support within the community, it is no longer applicable to regard spending in social services as a mere cost but as an investment for the future.

**For this support, one element of particular concern is the available workforce. While the demand for services is naturally increasing, particularly as a result of the aging population and the social needs that will arise as a result of the pandemic, social services are suffering from a workforce shortage, particularly severe in the elderly care sector, but also in other social services professions.<sup>2</sup>**

The initial training and qualification of employees working in new occupations linked to the changing needs of the people accompanied are therefore priorities. More generally, the question of the attractiveness of social services professions is becoming increasingly inevitable and will be a big issue for years to come in many European countries. Europe has a big role to play on this, notably with the shift of funds towards training in social careers but also in improving working conditions and in promoting and recognising the role that social services play in society.

**This issue can only be effectively dealt with, as part of the implementation of the eighth principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights on "social dialogue and workers participation", which has to consist of the development of adequate social dialogue structures in social services.**

Social dialogue in social services was initiated at European level through several projects that led to the creation of the Federation of European Social Employers at the end of 2017. This EU-level social dialogue has already led to agreements on Joint Positions Papers on [Digitalisation in Social Services](#), on the [Consequences of COVID-19](#) and on the [Recruitment and Retention of Staff](#).


After the imminent recognition of the representativeness of its actors, this social dialogue must go further, to form a sectoral Social Dialogue Committee, recognised by the European Commission. This committee will support the capacity building efforts of national social partners to develop social dialogue, to improve working conditions and the attractiveness of the sector and thus improve the quality of social services provided to the population.

**Only considerable effort to invest in social services, including to further build social dialogue and thus improve working conditions, will allow the sector to be able to cope with its current and future social challenges; ensure the well-being of the EU populations and the prosperity of the European model.**

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Eurostat 2019 for NACE codes 87 and 88.

<sup>2</sup> For a national example, read the report "*Plan national de mobilisation pour l'attractivité des métiers du grand âge*" written by former French Labour Minister Myriam El Khomri in October 2019.



The Federation of European Social Employers represents the voice of employers in the field of social services at European level. We understand social services to comprise all care and support services, especially for older persons, persons with disabilities, children, and other excluded or disadvantaged persons.

Our objectives are to strengthen the position of employers in social services at European and national level, establish common positions between our members, and negotiate with European Trade Union Associations, representing workers in social services. By doing so, we contribute to quality service provision and quality jobs.