

Response to the consultation on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights

30th November 2020

EPR is a community of service providers working with people with disabilities committed to high quality service delivery. EPR's mission is to build the capacity of its members to provide sustainable, high quality services through mutual learning and training.

General and cross-cutting comments and recommendations

The EPSR must be high on the political agenda to ensure there is sufficient momentum and commitment to implement it. It needs to be at the heart of a just transition and inclusive recovery from Covid19.

This paper focuses on actions needed at European level.

Clear and effective Governance

The European Semester process should be a framework promoting a holistic approach to policy making, taking into account social and employment priorities and impact. It is the right tool to monitor the EPSR implementation and should continue to do so by highlighting social recommendations together with fiscal and economic policy ones.

Despite an increase in social issues being addressed in the Semester process, the impact of economic and fiscal policy recommendations on social priorities have not always been taken into account. This may have encouraged policy decisions across Europe that decreased investment in social protection and services, leading to increased challenges in ensuring social rights are upheld.

The Scoreboard should:

- promote data collation and develop indicators and statistics on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in line with the UNCRPD Country Concluding Observations
- Include indicators on access to social services.
- Include targets on poverty and employment and “sub-targets” including targets on employment and poverty of persons with disabilities.

The Action Plan should promote investment in quality social services as they enable people to live independently, in dignity, reduce unemployment and the risk and impact of poverty and social exclusion – at the core of the principles of the Pillar. The European Commission should issue policy guidance to member states, including around social investment and using the EPSR as a guiding framework.

The Action Plan should follow the Pillar principles, provide a clear timetable and facilitate accountability through the European Semester. EPR calls for a new governance model to be more inclusive.

The Action plan should include a clear policy framework ensuring the European Pillar of Social Rights clearly links and engages with relevant policy initiatives, ensuring coordination and synergies. This includes the 2030 Agenda and the implementation of the SDGs; the Green Deal, the European Action Plan for the Social Economy and the Digital transition. The Green Deal and Digital transition must take into account the implementation of the EPSR.

The Action plan should incorporate regular consultation of civil society, including networks of service providers. The European Commission should maintain structural funding of European Networks that work to implement and support the implementation of the EPSR.

Mainstreaming the UNCRPD

Meeting the requirements of the UNCRPD should be mainstreamed in actions to implement the Pillar and in monitoring implementation, and links should be made to the future European Disability Rights Strategy. The Action Plan represents a key opportunity for meeting the EU obligations of the UN CRPD.

Ensuring social services can fulfil their role

The Action Plan should be backed up with adequate funding to implement the initiatives.

The Action Plan should support Member States in allocating sufficient financing of services including care, education and training. There could be a requirement to access funds under the Recovery and Resilience Facility. 25% of the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility should be earmarked for social investment. The European Commission should facilitate access to EU funds in the social sector, including via a help desk or support centre that reaches service providers.

The European Commission should support a campaign across all Member States highlighting the importance of the social services sector and the potential of employment in the sector, and support social dialogue in social services. Actions at EU level should be taken to support recruitment, retention and the development of staff working in the social sector.

The European Commission should continue to promote the Active Inclusion concept which clearly outlined the importance of an integrated approach of access to services, inclusive labour markets and adequate income support for accessing social rights.

The issue of quality of services should be mainstreamed throughout the action plan, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights and Voluntary European Quality Framework for Social Services. The European Commission should engage Member States and stakeholders in discussions about quality services and how to support and develop them.

Specific recommendations linked to the principles

To ensure the implementation of these principles the following actions are needed:

Principle 1: Education, training and lifelong learning

- Specific attention to people with a disability should be given in all skills-related initiatives
- Measures relating to the recognition and accreditation of non-formal learning should be supported
- Actions should be taken to address skills gaps of people with a disability, particularly digital skills and soft and social skills
- Develop initiatives to support inclusive VET and education
- Support initiatives for upskilling and reskilling to address job losses due to digitalisation and automation
- Initiatives to support upskilling of staff in the social sector should be developed, to ensure that they are able to provide quality services as demands, expectations and skills needs change

Principle 3: Equal opportunities

- Mainstreaming of the needs and interests of people with a disability in all initiatives in the Action Plan
- Clear coordination with the actions of the future European Disability Rights Strategy
- Campaigns to combat discrimination, stereotyping and prejudices, involving people with disabilities and organisations working with them
- Actions to promote understanding of the social model of disability, which helps decrease prejudices and discrimination.
- Initiatives should be taken to ensure people with disabilities are recognised equally before the law
- Take into account the specific challenges and needs of women and girls in all initiatives, especially those who might experience double discrimination

Principle 4: Active support to employment

- A close study of, and then take actions that support the elimination of known and hidden poverty traps in social protection systems that sometimes hinder access to work; ensuring adequate benefits can compensate for people with disabilities who cannot work full time, that the labour market is flexible to people's evolving needs and heterogeneous working capacities.
- Promote the availability of tailor-made support services in the early stage of unemployment, after the acquisition of a disability, injury or illness, and also during employment, supporting the employee and employers, to improve job retention.
- Develop initiatives to support partnerships with employers and promote good practices, including on-the-job support
- Integrate mental health and well-being considerations in the workplace into employment initiatives.
- Ensure synergies with the Action Plan for the Social Economy and develop initiatives to support social enterprises employing people with a disability, helping them to adapt to changing demands and new opportunities, including the Green Deal.

Principle 17: Inclusion of People with Disabilities

- The rights of people with disabilities should be mainstreamed in all EU policies.
- Significant weaknesses and gaps in social services were demonstrated by the COVID-19 crisis, especially when it came to financial and other support for the provision of services to people with disabilities. Actions are necessary to ensure services continue to operate to support social inclusion.
- Coproduction as a model should be promoted in all actions, ensuring service users, as experts of their own experience, can co-create services and policy.
- Introduce a platform with comparative information on social protection and social services for people with a disability throughout the EU to help improve understanding on the portability of their benefits and services.
- Develop initiatives to ensure accessible digital work environments
- Promote employment integration methods that work; such as Supported Employment, IPS, Inclusive Job Design, Disability Management

Principle 18: Long term Care

- Reference to the UNCRPD article 27 should be made and the article taken into account in policy initiatives.
- Good practice in community-based services and exchange of good practices on the implementation of article 19 and how to empower people with disabilities to exercise their right to choose, should be showcased, particularly services funded by the ESIF.

- Actions should be taken to address the accessibility and affordability of Assistive Technology (AT) solutions to complement quality home care support services. Actions in the should explore synergies with research programmes in this area, in collaboration with AT developers and support service providers

To conclude

EPR believes the Action Plan should have a holistic and integrated approach to all the Pillar principles, including promoting quality social services and investment in the social sector. EPR believes the EPSR Action Plan accompanied by a new European Disability Rights Strategy represent a significant opportunity to ensure people with disabilities enjoy equality of rights in Europe.

As debates are taking place to define the future of Europe and as we reached 2020 without meeting the targets of Europe 2020, the European Pillar of Social Rights has become a new hope to deliver on a more social Europe and EPR will continue to work with its members partners to promote and implement it.



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