



Social Services Europe

Social Services Europe reacts to the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan

4 May 2021

On 4 March the European Commission published the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. On 7 and 8 May our leaders are gathering for the Social Summit in Porto. We issue this statement ahead of this crucial moment to promote a Social Europe.

[Social Services Europe](#), representing not-for-profit social service providers of social and health care and providing support to millions of people in Europe, welcomes the ambition the European Commission has set in terms of creating jobs in the social services sector, investing in the health and care workforce, and putting forward European initiatives promoting social inclusion.

Social service providers have been essential for coping with the pandemic, proving to be resilient whilst being exposed on the front line along with the healthcare sector. Set against the current context of a deepening social crisis, Social Services Europe sees the **potential of the Action Plan to step up support for the social service sector**, to act as a lever to bring social justice on a par with economic and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, to revamp the current economic, social and ecological system and to put the social agenda on an equal footing with the green and digital agendas. This potential now needs to be seized and realised with effective measures and initiatives on all levels.

Supporting Member States to invest in social services and social infrastructure while making the best use of EU funding will be vital. **EU policy guidance** – including through new actions proposed by the Action Plan and existing processes such as the European Semester – **needs to emphasise investing in people, in the quality of social services and leaving no one behind.**

Some **key elements of progress in the Action Plan that Social Services Europe welcomes** are the fact that:

- The Action Plan positions **the social services sector** as an essential actor and part of a well-functioning welfare system in the EU. The recognition of the growth potential of the social services sector in terms of employment and service provision, the need to invest in it, and the ambition to improve its attractiveness, are particularly welcome. The Voluntary European Quality Framework for Social Services would benefit from a review to ensure it can act as reference document for initiatives aiming at an improvement of the quality of social services.
- The Action Plan sets **headline targets** until 2030 for the EU as a whole on employment, education and training, and poverty reduction. We note nonetheless that the poverty target unfortunately does not correspond in terms of figures and ambition with the Sustainable Development Goals. Social Services Europe urges European leaders to agree the targets and Member States to set up more ambitious national targets than the EU targets and to consider adding more sub-targets e.g. youth unemployment/long-term unemployment, reducing homelessness, etc.
- The updates made to the **Social Scoreboard** are steps in the right direction. As the Social Scoreboard still does not adequately measure progress in all of the 20 principles of the Pillar of Social Rights, it would be the occasion to include more indicators in the category of social protection and inclusion (e.g. the number of people on waiting lists to access social housing, homeless people, care services

and youth support services, the coverage of minimum income provisions and the length of time that people stay dependent on minimum income).

- There are strong links to the **use of EU funding**, starting with the Recovery and Resilience Facility. The planned delegated act to define a methodology for re-reporting on social expenditure under the Recovery and Resilience Facility will set the tone for social investments to follow from the Multiannual Financial Framework. In the case of the European Social Fund Plus and the European Regional Development Fund, where specific enabling conditions corresponding to the EPSR apply, investments in reform-triggering initiatives in the social services sector should be encouraged.

Delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights is a shared political commitment and responsibility of the EU institutions, national, regional and local authorities, social partners and civil society. Given that the Action Plan encourages Member States to organise a coordination mechanism to ensure engagement of all relevant stakeholders at national level in implementing the Pillar, Social Services Europe urges its effective realisation and that the **not-for-profit social service providers and their national and European umbrella organisations are fully involved in all steps of the related policy making, implementation and monitoring processes** within the EU Member States and at EU level. Such a comprehensive and structured involvement is the precondition for a successful implementation of the Action Plan and the basis to make national governments and European institutions accountable. It might also be timely for the EU to encourage all its Member States to ratify the Revised European Social Charter in support of the implementation of the Social Pillar.

There is a **range of policy initiatives relevant for the members of Social Services Europe which we will be following closely and contributing to**. These include

- Action Plan for the Social Economy
- Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030
- Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee
- European Platform for Combatting Homelessness
- Commission Recommendation for Effective Active Support to Employment (EASE)
- Framework Initiative on Long-Term Care
- Green Paper on Ageing
- Guidance Notices on Public Procurement of Innovation and on Socially Responsible Public Procurement
- High-Level Expert Group to study the future of the welfare state to present a report by the end 2022.

Notwithstanding the ambition and strategic direction that the European Commission sets out with the Action Plan, its **success, and social progress in the EU in general, will only happen if these are matched with political commitment in the Member States, comprehensive policy design and implementation backed up by adequate public funding**. Considering the deepening consequences of the global pandemic, it is time more than ever to place people at the centre of recovery and to prioritise those furthest behind. In preparation of a Europe 2030 Strategy, the Action Plan on the Pillar of Social Rights has to play the steering role of **prioritising social protection and social inclusion** in a time when green and digital economic development are prominent drivers of change. A successful implementation of the EPSR Action Plan for social services would benefit from a **stronger horizontal approach across the various principles and different sub-sectors of social services**.

As representatives of not-for-profit social service providers to people with disabilities, homeless people, migrants, children, older people, and people in vulnerable situations, Social Services Europe aims to support the development of EU policies which help social services provide quality care and support to all people in Europe, in particular those in the most vulnerable situations. We promote recognition of the social services sector, improved investment opportunities, access to financial support, and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights at national, regional and local levels. **We look forward to constructive collaboration with the European Commission and the Member States to realise these joint ambitions.**