

Social Summit: Non-paper by Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands and Sweden

Given the COVID-19 pandemic with large socioeconomic consequences for all Member States and the upcoming twin digital and green transitions, the Social Summit comes at a timely moment. The Action Plan on the Pillar of Social Rights by the Commission is a welcome contribution to the discussions at the Social Summit. This non-paper by Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands and Sweden contains input for the declaration of the Summit.

The Pillar of Social Rights and its principles contribute to a deeper and fairer single market. The Social Pillar serves as a compass for effective social and labour market policies, and promotes the exchange of good practices between Member States. In this way, it supports reforms in the Member States and encourages the process of upward socioeconomic convergence.

As also emphasized in the Action Plan, the effective implementation of the Social Pillar greatly depends on the action of Member States, who primarily hold responsibility for employment, education and skills and social policies. Targeted EU-level action can complement national action, but – as underlined in the Strategic Agenda by the European Council and in the European Pillar of Social Rights – any action on EU-level should fully respect the division of competences of the Union, its Member States and the social partners. Any EU initiative in these areas should be in line with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality and needs careful consideration of different national starting points, challenges and institutional set ups. Setting EU-level headline targets could help to steer national debates, policies and reforms.

The three proposed new EU headline targets provide important political guidance and can contribute to fostering convergence and wellbeing. Considering the challenges ahead the closely interlinked areas of employment, skills, and poverty/social exclusion are well chosen. Monitoring mechanisms at EU-level need to adequately reflect the situation and starting points within Member States.

Creating quality jobs to boost employment is instrumental to support the economic recovery, reverse the negative social impacts of the crisis and accelerate the green and digital transitions, in a sustainable and inclusive way. Specific attention should be paid to the digital and green transitions. In the coming decade jobs will be created in green and digital companies and sectors. The recovery phase offers a unique opportunity to accelerate these transitions, create these jobs in Europe and hence make our labour markets future proof. Small and medium-sized enterprises play a key role in job creation. Equal opportunities, inclusiveness, an innovative economy, good and fair working conditions and creating quality jobs should be our goal, while taking gender equality aspects into account.

The recovery and green and digital transitions should be supported by providing people with the needed skills and qualifications. The transitions will significantly change labour markets

and create opportunities as well as challenges. These developments underscore the importance of ensuring adaptability, flexibility and resilience of workers and job seekers. Basic skills, such as literacy, math and digital skills are essential for people to participate in the labour market. Once active on the inclusive labour market, lifelong learning will support people to get and stay in the driving seat of their own careers, while at the same time boosting the competitiveness of the EU in the global context.

Finally, more and better quality jobs across Europe will reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion. We should pay specific attention to vulnerable groups who have been hit hard by the COVID-19 crisis. The EU strives to be inclusive and sustainable for all. Against this background, addressing poverty and social exclusion of the most vulnerable, the overall wellbeing of children, active ageing, as well as the inclusion of persons with disabilities is of the utmost importance. Social dialogue and constructive cooperation of employers and employees is indispensable.