



## **Towards the establishment of a European Pillar of Social Rights**

### **Briefing for Eurocarers members**

**4 July 2016**

#### **Introduction: a unique political momentum**

Last 9 September, President Juncker announced the establishment of a ‘*European Pillar of Social Rights*’. The European Commission (EC) wants to boost convergence towards more resilient economic structures within the euro area. The process is led from the side of the Commission by Allan Larsson as Special Advisor<sup>1</sup>. This consultation is expected to have an influence on the Economic and Monetary Policies of the EU, hence its calendar in line with the preparation of the EU semester.

Interestingly, this consultation<sup>2</sup> is underpinned by very positive arguments.

- This initiative departs from the ‘trickle-down’ theory- according to which social progress would derive automatically from growth and jobs- that was underpinning European Union (EU) policies in the previous years. It recognizes the need to act proactively in order to reinforce social cohesion within the EU.
- In addition, it takes a holistic point of view, addressing all challenges at the same time, rather than addressing them one by one and adding up new ad hoc tools.
- It values adequate social protection as a productive factor, and social convergence as a necessity for the stability of the euro area. The fact that more cohesive countries perform better in difficult times is considered as clearly demonstrated.
- It contains a number of positive proposals, some of them having been put forwards by civil society organisations.

Though, uncertainties remain as to what extent this initiative will be able to introduce a major step towards a truly social Europe. Notably:

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<sup>1</sup> Mr Larsson was the first Swedish Director-General of the European Commission, in charge of managing the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion from the time of Sweden's accession to the European Union in 1995 to 2000, where he contributed, *inter alia*, to launching the [European Employment Strategy](#).

<sup>2</sup> See references below

- The EU has only a subsidiary role when it comes to social protection and social policies: will this initiative raise consensus among Member States?
- A majority of Member States are still implementing austerity policies in compliance with the EU Stability and Growth Pact, and no new EU funding is attached to this initiative. Then, what will be the room of manoeuvre for reinforcing social protection and social cohesion?
- Non Euro EU countries are invited to join at a later stage, but the fact that they are not involved in this first step leaves aside a number of EU citizens.
- The initiative concerns only legal EU citizen, leaving behind undocumented migrants.

Yet, despite these limitations, this initiative creates a unique political momentum in favour of a more cohesive Europe built on a strong social protection.

### A. The Social Pillar in a nutshell

The announced establishment of a Social Pillar starts with a consultation period on a 'first preliminary outline of the social pillar'. Outcomes of this consultation are likely to impact on the content of a White Paper to be adopted in 2017.

#### *The content of the proposal launched on 8 March 2016*

- Considering that there is a deficit in the implementation of the social acquis in the EU, the EC proposes a series of **principles, based on this social acquis**, aimed at addressing the current challenges faced by the euro area. The set of principles would serve as a **reference framework** to assess the performance of participating Member States. The 20 principles proposed are attached in the Annex, the priorities of concern for Eurocarers are highlighted in orange.

#### *A process likely to set the social agenda in the coming years*

- The consultation is open till the end of 2016, including:
  - a structured questionnaire aimed at all stakeholders;
  - two "work streams" engaging the Commission, one on the 'Social acquis' and one on the 'future of work and welfare systems' with specific hearings;
  - one event in each of the 28 Member States before the end of 2016;
  - a European Conference on the 28/11/2016 (to be confirmed)
- The Commission should issue a White Paper early 2017 presenting final proposals. This paper will propose an agenda for the coming years in relation to Social Europe. This process may pave the way for the adoption of new EU instruments, such as Directives, Recommendations from the Council or from the EC, or benchmarking framework.

### B. Why it is important for Eurocarers?

This consultation offers an opportunity both content and process wise for Eurocarers.

## **We are clearly concerned by the content of the Communication.**

The point of view of Eurocarers is **particularly relevant** with regards to challenges pointed out in the document, notably:

- The need for the EU to adapt to “progress in life expectancy and demographic ageing”, as well as the digitalisation of society;
- The need to make progress with regards to gender equality, work-life balance, to ensure access to labour markets and adequate and sustainable social protection including long-term care.

In the first preliminary outline of the European Pillar of Social Right, the situation of informal carers is acknowledged (see box below). Even if this outline is far from responding to the real needs of the carers, these mentions give Eurocarers a solid hock on which to argue that the needs of carers should be addressed.

*“All parents and people with caring responsibility shall have access to adequate leave arrangements for children and other dependent relatives and access to care services” (in 5. Gender equality and work life balance)*

*“Measures should be taken to address the gender pension gap, such as adequately crediting care periods. (in 13. Pensions)*

*“Family carers, usually women, often fill the gap left by unavailable or costly institutional care services.” (Recital in 17. Long-term care)*

Eurocarers is in a position to contribute with constructive proposals based on research and experience on the ground in a number of areas, notably lifelong learning, active support to employment and equal opportunities, work-life balance, health and safety at work, social benefits and services, disability, long-term care...

## **This process multiplies opportunities to raise awareness on the needs and point of view of carers.**

Participating in this process allows us to feed in the EU policy making process, it also gives us the opportunity to engage in a debate at EU level and national level, thus raising awareness about our organisations, about the needs and expectations of carers, as well as to demonstrate that responding to our demands is not only socially fair but also economically valid.

### **References:**

[Launching a communication on a European Pillar of Social Rights, Communication from the European Commission, 08/03/2016](#)

[Annex: first preliminary outline of a European Pillar of Social Rights, 08/03/2016](#)

[Commission staff working document on Key economic, employment and social trends behind a European Pillar of Social Rights, 08/03/2016](#)

[Commission Staff Working Document on the EU social acquis, 08/03/16](#)

[European Commission website devoted to the consultation](#)



## ANNEX

The preliminary outline of the annexed Pillar of Social Rights lists the following priorities under three main themes: access to the labour market, working conditions and social protection.

### Chapter I: Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

1. Skills, education and lifelong learning
2. Flexible and secure labour contracts
3. Secure professional transitions
4. Active support for employment
5. Gender equality and work-life balance
6. Equal opportunities

### Chapter II: Fair working conditions

7. Conditions of employment
8. Wages
9. Health and safety at work
10. Social dialogue and involvement of workers

### Chapter III: Adequate and sustainable social protection

11. Integrated social benefits and services
12. Health care and sickness benefits
13. Pensions
14. Unemployment benefits
15. Minimum income
16. Disability benefits
17. Long-term care
18. Childcare
19. Housing
20. Access to essential services