

21st February 2017

President of the European Commission
Mr Jean-Claude JUNCKER

Dear President Juncker,

Re: The time for timidity is over - the EU needs an ambitious European pillar of social rights not just principles

We are writing to you on behalf of **the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)** to stress the urgency for an ambitious EU proposal on the upcoming European Pillar of Social Rights. This should not just repackage existing initiatives with only benchmarking on common principles, but must set out an ambitious **EU roadmap towards guaranteeing essential social standards**, which can ensure that everybody has access to a dignified and decent life. The EU needs to convince people on the ground that it is working on **their** behalf and not just defending the Euro, economic growth and markets, primarily through promoting austerity. An ambitious Pillar of Social Rights may be the **last chance for not only Social Europe but for the EU**. **“Participation must also be at the heart of the Social Pillar”**, as highlighted by participants with direct experience of poverty in the 15th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty.

EAPN is the largest platform of grass-roots anti-poverty organisations in Europe, representing more than 6000 organisations across 31 countries and involving 16 European organisations, working with and for people with direct experience of poverty. **EAPN welcomed the Commission’s initial proposals** and actively involved its national and EU members and people experiencing poverty in the debates and consultation on the Social Pillar.¹

We now **underline the key proposals** that we consider essential to demonstrate this ambition. These build on our position paper of September 2016. Many proposals are also taken up by the **EP report by Maria João Rodrigues MEP**, adopted on the 19th January, and by the **EESC report**, adopted on the 25th January 2017.

1. A new paradigm – a transformative EU strategy that invests in social rights and reduces poverty and inequality

- The **Pillar of Social Rights must apply to the whole of the EU** and not just the Euro area.
- It needs to be set within a **new vision and plan** which re-centres the EU on the objectives of **social, inclusive and sustainable growth**, committed to radically reduce poverty and

¹ *This process started in November 2015 with the Strategic Dialogue meeting of the **European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty** on Social Convergence, organised with the European Commission prior to the EC proposal, followed by a major **EAPN stakeholder conference** in June 2016, and the development of our **own consultation response and position paper**. Many of our members actively engaged in the national stakeholder dialogue meetings and in presenting their own responses.*

inequality through **an integrated antipoverty strategy** and embedding social rights and standards in the heart of economic and all policies.

- Economic and social objectives must be treated equally by developing a **Social Pact to balance the Stability and Growth Pact – particularly essential in driving a re-socialized European Semester**. This should be linked to a new **social protocol** in any revision of EU Treaties to ensure social rights are not undermined by economic freedoms.
- **A revised and more transparent social impact assessment is essential** to take account of distributional impact, with new social indicators in the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure and in the Joint Assessment Framework (JAF), acting as triggers to ensure that macroeconomic goals are not developed at the expense of social goals and rights.

2. Invest in concrete measures to guarantee social standards

- **The time for timidity is over**. The initiative needs ‘big ideas’ which can progress towards a **concrete guarantee to citizens of social rights, and close the inequality gap across the EU**, particularly through distributional measures: to ensure an adequate income for all, access to quality jobs, services and social protection and financed through tax justice.
- **We fully support a proposal for legislation expanding employment rights**, particularly to those currently in insecure and atypical jobs and ensuring equal rights to social protection.
- We underline the priority to create an **EU Framework Directive for adequate minimum income**, benchmarked against the at risk of poverty rate and an **EU Framework on minimum wage** to ensure a minimum wage at 60% of average wages, particularly in the context of the threats of new ways of working. **An EU unemployment benefit scheme**, supported by EU funds, could be a vital instrument to act as an automatic stabiliser and help to close the gap and provide a level playing field as part of a social protection floor.
- **A golden rule on social protection spending**, which establishes a threshold below which public social spending should not fall, and which should be discounted in calculations of public deficit and debt, is also key.

3. Use EU funds to support delivery on Social Rights

- **EU funds must be channelled to support the implementation of social rights, to reduce poverty and inequality** across the EU and **promote public social investment**.
- This means strengthening **the key role of ESF**, and particularly the **20% earmarking to fight poverty and social inclusion**, underpinned by the ex-ante conditionality requiring an integrated antipoverty strategy, together with FEAD providing material support for the most deprived.
- Require an increase in **public social investment reinforcing the right to access quality services and jobs**, and not just to cover risk for private investment and growth through the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) with unclear social benefits.
- A new **comprehensive EU funding programme to combat the widening gap across the EU in poverty and inequality, underpinned by an integrated antipoverty strategy** could be a major vehicle to deliver on social rights, promoting ownership by supporting grass-roots initiatives through a partnership approach involving NGOs and people experiencing poverty directly.

4. Participation is key to making pillar of social rights a reality!²

- A key challenge currently facing the EU is the **loss of faith in democracy linked to the declining priority given to participation and civil dialogue** at national and EU level.
- **Participation is a key to delivering on rights** – resources should be allocated for capacity building for community organisations, NGOs and to engage people with direct experience of poverty in monitoring how the European Pillar of Social Rights is being implemented, including how ESF is used to deliver on fighting poverty and granting access to social rights.
- **Meaningful dialogue with civil society and people in poverty needs to be put on an equal footing with social partners**, investing in adequate governance structures at all levels and stages. This should include obligatory EU guidelines and quality indicators to monitor quality engagement in design, delivery and monitoring of the EPSR, including through the European Semester as a key instrument to support delivery.

We hope that our concerns are taken on board and would like to ask for an urgent meeting to discuss these final priorities.

Yours sincerely,



Sérgio Aires

EAPN President



Leo Williams

EAPN Director

Cc: Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis, European Commissioner for the Euro and Social Dialogue.
Commissioner Marianne Thyssen, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility.

Allan Larsson, Special Adviser on the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Thomas Händel MEP, Chair of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee, European Parliament

Maria João Rodrigues, Rapporteur of EP Opinion on European Pillar of Social Rights

Key Documents:

- [EAPN Position Paper: Last Chance for Social Europe and Consultation response](#)
- [European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty key messages on the Pillar of Social Rights 2015.](#)
- [EAPN 2014: "Giving a Voice to Citizens – Building stakeholder engagement for effective decision-making"](#) – Guidelines for Decision-makers at EU and national levels.

² 15th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty, 15-16 November 2016.