

POLITICAL DECLARATION 2019

15 September 2019

Building a European Union on a social basis for all

Over the last year, the [European Anti-Poverty Network](#) has been calling on all candidates for the European Parliament to “Make Europe Poverty Free”, because we all share a moral and social responsibility to ensure that everyone has a decent standard of living. This reflects our shared value of justice for all and protecting each other from harm. The fact that over 113 million people in Europe are living at risk of poverty and social exclusion highlights that we must take these values more seriously. Poverty is an inevitable consequence of political choices, and an explicit denial of fundamental human rights, brought about by moral, economic and political systems – systems which we can make more compassionate, more reflective of our European values. Ending poverty in all its forms must be a pre-requisite for effective social and sustainable development, and poverty eradication must be at the heart of Social Europe.

Political leadership to eradicate poverty needed

“We will support the people and regions most affected through a new Just Transition Fund. This is European way: we are ambitious and we leave nobody behind.”¹ European leaders have made ambitious political commitments in the SDGs and the Social Pillar, and we expect to see a ‘European Green Deal’ proposed by the Commission in early 2020.

Political leadership is crucial to ensure a transformative implementation of these commitments, to ensure meaningful changes to the lives of people experiencing poverty. We welcome the new Commission’s commitment to “*putting forward an action plan to fully implement the European Pillar of Social Rights*”, but stress that for the Pillar and to prosper, this action plan must contain **binding measures** for the implementation of the Pillar, and not simply rely on coordination efforts and ‘soft law’. We also welcome the aim to refocus the European Semester into an instrument that integrates the SDGs – but our Institutions must show how this is done in concrete terms, not simply with reflection papers. **That said, we are concerned that if the Semester is THE instrument for the implementation of the Pillar and the SDGs, it may lead to an unbalanced implementation, as there are only 3-4 recommendations given to member states per year. The Semester should be one of a variety of tools to ensure implementation of the Pillar and the SDGs.**

An urgent priority for leaders must be a review of **Europe 2020** and the creation of **Europe post-2020 strategy, underpinned by the SDGs and the Social Pillar**. This must form the guiding principles for a sustainable Europe free of poverty and social exclusion. The strategy must aim to leave no-one behind, enable us to live within Europe’s fair share of our planetary boundaries, and put respect for human rights at the core of EU and national policy-making. The European Semester must be transformed into a social and sustainable Semester delivering on these goals.

In recent years, we have seen a focus on growth, growth and nothing but growth. However, we have seen no improvement for the low and lower middle incomes – we **have** seen more stress, less job certainty, attacks on health and social care services, no or little value placed on voluntary work, or informal care (where tens of thousands of young people also make a great commitment). Social protection is not just about ensuring that everybody has adequate income, it is also about access to care and support at times of need. Women and especially lone parents

¹ Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission, p6

suffer deeply from a disturbed life balance, being confronted with duties and tasks, but with no relief or improvement for their future. The people at the bottom of society see nothing of the economic prosperity – the trickle-down economy is a myth. Their housing costs are becoming unbearable and their belief in and hope for improvement is declining day by day. This is reflected in the increasing choice to either ignore politics altogether or to opt for nationalism and populism.

Poverty eradication is an issue of rights and justice

Implementing a rights-based integrated antipoverty strategy, based on integrated Active inclusion (the right to quality jobs, services and social protection) and minimum income, adopting an ambitious poverty target for all Member States (50% reduction, as proposed by the SDGs) as well as a commitment to end extreme poverty by 2030 (including homelessness), would set a clear moral and political commitment to the fight against poverty, the fight for social and economic rights. The new Commission and the Parliament have a historic opportunity that they cannot afford to lose with the definition of the new Multiannual financial framework, which could meaningfully support these goals. Mobilising EU funds to more effectively support the strategy is essential, as is increasing the earmarking to 30%, and implementing clear outcome indicators which track real impact on poverty.

Eradicating poverty is a question of rights, of justice. It is promising for the economy that European leadership appears committed to ensure that every worker in Europe has a “fair minimum wage”, allowing “for a decent living wherever they work”. **In-work poverty** is a growing and alarming issue for, and a key focus for EAPN – low wages, low quality jobs and business models eroding social rights are all contributing factors. To make a meaningful difference, our institutions must agree an **EU framework to guarantee adequate minimum wages and / or living wages**. A benchmark for adequacy could be 60% of the average wage.

Social Protection and Tax Justice

EAPN sees two other crucial issues of economic and social rights, notably **Minimum Income and Effective Social Protection** and **Tax Justice**. The time is right for European Framework Directive on Minimum Income, which could complement minimum wage legislation and provide a boost to social protection in Europe. Minimum income, and other parts of our social protection system, form the bedrock of our societies, and we call on the Finnish, Croatian and German Presidencies of the European Council to prioritise this issue in the Council, and the Commission to propose this Directive as part of their proposed implementation of the Social Pillar, Increased political focus on social protection is very promising, and this should be backed up by a ‘golden rule’ on social protection spending - no less than 35% of GDP. More progressive taxation systems are needed to finance this, notably a European wide financial transaction tax and digital tax, and meaningful efforts against tax avoidance and tax evasion and increase taxes on wealth, property and capital, as crucial components to fund social protection systems.

A ‘just transition’ which protects people experiencing poverty

The President Elect of the new Commission has committed to putting forward a proposal for a European Green Deal in the first 100 days of her mandate. This is a move in the right direction, and a strong response to the European Parliamentary Elections. We underline the fact that climate change affects the poor more than the rich, the underprivileged more than the privileged. Months of demonstrations in France have shown that **the poor must not be asked to pay** for this transition to a carbon-free economy. A fair distribution of costs and revenues of structural change must ensure that possible negative impacts are limited as far as possible. In order to guarantee a socially just transition, climate policy goals should be linked with active social and employment policies. Systematic ex-ante social and distributional impact assessments must be paired with massive public investments to create decent green jobs, retrain those impacted and finance adequate social security frameworks, ensuring that nobody is left behind.” Prioritising investment in energy efficiency measures which reduce energy poverty for people living in poor housing, protecting them from increased costs, is a key example.

However, we reiterate that these measures are about mitigation and adaptation, not about rights and justice. We recognise that the richest 1 % of people pollute 175 times more than the 10 % poorest, yet it is the richest who are best placed to cope with the impact, and the poorest who are the most affected. We recognise that climate change is not simply a problem that requires protection of vulnerable people - it is a dangerous development that requires governments, corporations and the rich to drastically reduce their CO2 emissions. **Because of this, we stand in solidarity with the [Global Climate Strike on 20 / 27 September](#), and call on all anti-poverty activists throughout Europe and the world to join this strike.**

As the UN Special Rapporteur on Poverty and Human Rights says, “A robust social safety net and a well-managed transition to a green economy will be the best response to the unavoidable harms that climate change will bring”²

People’s access to basic economic and social rights (food, land, water, health care, affordable housing, and education) are clearly threatened by climate change. **We call on our European Institutions to put in place the necessary measures through the Green New Deal, the Just Transition Fund and other instruments to protect these rights and to regulate corporations to ensure that they play their part to the fullest** – we know that the fossil fuel industry is simply incapable or unwilling to do this alone.

Participation of people experiencing poverty and their organisations

The meaningful participation of civil society and people experiencing poverty and their organisations is key to tackling poverty and social exclusion. **We call on new political leadership across Europe to create obligatory guidelines to make organized civil society equal partners to other stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of processes like the SDGs, Social Pillar, European Semester**, implementing recital 11 of the Employment Guidelines, and to formally commit to organising regular exchanges with Commission funded European level civil society networks. This participation is at the heart of true democracy, and we call on all political institutions to recognise this and adequately finance it.

A final warning flag

The mandate of the Commissioner for “Protecting the European Way of Life” should have a holistic approach to the issue of mobile populations (refugees / migrants) and not a symptomatic management approach. It’s not just the title that concerns us, it is the whole mandate. Welcoming migrants is a question of solidarity – it enriches our societies by increasing our diversity and by creating positive demographic consequences. This is a political and humanitarian responsibility which flows from the principle of solidarity at the heart of the European Charter.

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² https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/A_HRC_41_39.pdf