

## Social Rights take a step forward



(4 March 2021) Today, the European Commission published its Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights.

EPSU welcomes the action plan as a step towards making social progress tangible and concrete for EU citizens. Member States and the EU institutions must now live up to expectations and improve work and living conditions.

EPSU is pleased that the Commission, following consultation this year with social partners, will present an initiative to support social dialogue at EU and national level in 2022. The initiative will include a new “supporting frame” for EU social partner agreements. This has been a key demand of EPSU. The initiative recognises the problems created by the Commission after it rejected the EU level social partner agreement on information and consultation rights, throwing out 25 years of experience and resulting in the Court case with EPSU. EPSU's demand for this to be addressed was recently reinforced by the report of Andrea Nahles, special adviser to the Commission for Jobs and Social Dialogue. EU social partners need a solid framework to negotiate more and better agreements at EU level.

Less positive is the tamey-worded commitment in the Action Plan to strengthening national -level information and consultation rights and collective bargaining. Here the Commission says only that measures to improve enforcements of existing Directives “could” be envisaged. Much more is needed however to nurture strong trade unions capable of shaping Europe’s labour markets through collective bargaining, in a fair, forward-looking, and inclusive manner.

In times of COVID-19 and the ongoing sacrifices of health and social care workers to combat the pandemic, it is more than justified that the Action Plan recognises the “structural staff shortages and growing inequalities” in health and social care. The Commission rightly encourages Member States to “invest in the health and care workforce, improving their working conditions and access to training”. We now need to see action, specifically investment in more staff, higher pay and better working conditions.

Strengthening the monitoring of Member States spending on health and long-term care is a positive step to strengthen our public health systems and to ensure long-term care needs are met. However, the Action Plan is less clear that equal access to quality and affordable health and social care will be a key Commission objective for the upcoming Health Union.

Ensuring everyone has the right to quality health and social care requires increased public funding, and a stronger place for public services in the implementation of these and other human rights outlined in the EPSR and Action Plan. In this sense, it is positive that the Action Plan encourages improvements in the quality of public finances, transparent and fairer taxation and socially sustainable investment and finance.

The Social Summit in Porto on 7—8 May 2021 organised by the Portuguese Council Presidency will provide the opportunity to confirm at the highest political level the commitment and ambition to put people first in Europe’s recovery and beyond.

[All relevant information regarding the Pillar here](#)

[For more information on the agreement and how the Commission rejected it](#)

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