2 July 2015

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE INFORMAL EPSCO COUNCIL

Luxembourg, 16-17 July 2015

Reinforcing social governance of the European Union for social progress and upward convergence

Contribution to the discussion on "The social dimension in EU's governance framework" (16 July)

Fostering sustainable inclusion of young people in the labour market beyond the Youth Guarantee

Contribution to the discussions on "Youth employment and job creation: Youth Guarantee and beyond" and "Luxembourgish Presidency proposal for an initiative on youth employment through vocational training in the Magreb countries" (16 July)

Addressing challenges for women and men to become equal earners and equal carers throughout the life-cycle

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socialplatform

Social Platform is the largest civil society alliance fighting for social justice and participatory democracy in Europe. Consisting of 48 pan-European networks of NGOs, we campaign to ensure that EU policies are developed in partnership with the people they affect, respecting fundamental rights, promoting solidarity and improving lives.

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KEY MESSAGES

Reinforcing social governance of the European Union for social progress and upward convergence

I. **Ensure progress on the EU's social and equality objectives:** *Put in place ambitious employment and social policies at EU and national level, and give the same weight to objectives in these fields as to economic and financial priorities.*

II. **Ensure the positive social impact of all policies and consistency of processes:** *Review the architecture of EU processes, in particular the European Semester, to ensure policies and actions are consistent with all the EU's objectives, and to ensure their legitimacy through more transparency.*

III. **Ensure meaningful and structured stakeholder involvement at all stages and levels of policy processes:** *Open up the decision-making processes to social NGOs and work with them as partners in developing, implementing and evaluating economic and social policies.*

Fostering sustainable inclusion of young people in the labour market beyond the Youth Guarantee

I. **Invest in sectors with high potential for creating quality and sustainable jobs for young people:** *Create a significant number of quality jobs for young people to make a difference to their lives and future prospects and to have a lasting impact on our society and economy.*

II. **Ensure young people's autonomy and inclusion in society:** *Create an inclusive society for young people, requiring measures that safeguard their autonomy and prevent them from ending up in poverty and social exclusion.*

III. **Support transitions between education and work as well as between jobs:** *Develop quality measures to help young people's transition from education to work and between jobs, and ensure these measures create efficient stepping-stones into the labour market and into adulthood.*

Addressing challenges for women and men to become equal earners and equal carers throughout the life-cycle

I. **End discrimination in the labour market for all:** *Combat all forms of discrimination and address the structural barriers for women to access and participate in the labour market on an equal footing with men.*

II. **Ensure women and men are equal earners:** *Address and eliminate the gender-segregation of labour markets and close the different employment related gender gaps, in particular with regards to pay and pension rights.*

III. **Support women and men as equal carers:** *Address inequalities between women and men in paid and unpaid work and promote the equal sharing of the responsibilities and costs for children and for care for all dependents between women, men, and society as a whole.*

Reinforcing social governance of the European Union for social progress and upward convergence

Contribution to the discussion on "The social dimension in EU's governance framework"

Introduction

With the introduction of the **Europe 2020 strategy** in 2010, EU member states committed themselves to achieving growth that was not only smart and sustainable, but also inclusive. This encompasses empowering people, helping them to anticipate and manage change, building cohesive societies, ensuring access and opportunities for all throughout the lifecycle and promoting equality between women and men. To achieve this, headline targets were set for employment rates, educational attainment and the reduction of poverty and social exclusion.

Five years later we are no-where near reaching inclusive growth, as demonstrated by the failure to reach the poverty and employment targets, the rise of inequalities and growing social divergence. While this was caused to a certain extent by the economic crisis, its impact has been strongly aggravated by the implementation of austerity. Ill-conceived structural reforms in the form of badly targeted fiscal consolidation in the social sector caused more harmful economic and social imbalances, and undermined economic and social cohesion.

Current economic and social policies and processes are out of balance and do not suffice to reverse the breakdown of social Europe. As the EU and member states narrow their focus to growth, productivity and jobs, social cohesion and equality, including gender equality for all, are lost. This narrow focus is reflected in the lack of a social counterpart to the EU's economic governance framework.

Earlier this year member states restated their commitment to inclusive growth that *"must enable everyone to take up employment, education or training and ensure that all citizens benefit from adequate social protection when exposed to different risk."*[1] Member states must translate these words into concrete ambitious policies and actions and consider the announced review of the Europe 2020 strategy as a key opportunity to do so.

In light of this, we welcome the initiative of the Luxembourgish EU Presidency to discuss how **European social governance** could be strengthened. We consider that the issues and recommendations included in this contribution should be taken into account.[2]

I. Ensure progress on the EU's social and equality objectives

Put in place ambitious employment and social policies at EU and national level, and give the same weight to objectives in these fields as to economic and financial priorities.

We have seen that member states, under the directions of the Commission and the Council, were able to agree to fiscal control on their budgets. The same commitment should be made for social policy.

Adding a social dimension to economic policies, such as in the context of the Economic and Monetary Union, is a good starting point, but it is not enough. The EU and member states need ambitious employment and social policies that exist in their own right. This would reinvigorate the inclusive growth pillar of the Europe 2020 strategy and the rebalance financial and economic priorities with strong social priorities.

Although the EU is currently pursuing an economic investment strategy, it will only be effective if developed in parallel with comprehensive social investment policies. Social investment constitutes a long-term strategy that not only brings social progress, but also reduces pressure on public finances and enhances growth.

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[1] EPSCO Council, Council Conclusions, 9 March 2015.
[2] More info & proposals: Social Platform, Position paper on the mid-term review of Europe 2020, May 2014.

To move forward towards a more social Europe, bring the EU back on track with the Europe 2020 social targets, reduce inequalities, and promote equality, including gender equality, we call on member states to:

1. **Invest in ambitious integrated employment and social policies.** This includes maintaining and improving investments in adequate social protection systems, in the creation of, and equal access to, quality and sustainable employment, as well as in social, care, health and education services beyond infrastructure. To support this, budgets for measures pursuing social investment need to be safeguarded and upgraded.
2. **Mainstream equality and fundamental rights objectives throughout all policies** at EU and national level, to ensure equality for all and to eliminate discrimination on grounds such as sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation or social status.
3. **Break down the Europe 2020 social targets by population, age and gender** (women, children and young people, older people, people with a disability, migrants, etc). Set annual objectives and develop concrete actions for reaching them, and include this in National Reform Programmes (NRPs).
4. **Support the development of European social standards with regards to income protection (including minimum income), minimum wage and social services,** inspired by the concept of the International Labour Organisation's Recommendation 202 on social protection floors. This could guide member states towards upward social convergence, ensuring all people can enjoy their social rights across the lifecycle.
5. **Request the European Commission to develop a concrete work plan to operationalise the 2013 Social Investment Package** (SIP)[3] with specific work streams on key priorities such as confronting homelessness, active inclusion, investing in children, adequacy of universal social protection systems and in-work poverty.
6. **Demand the Commission to include concrete recommendations on all the Europe 2020 social headline targets** in the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) and to put forward social Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) for all member states, including those that are subject to macro-economic adjustment programmes. Make sure the CSRs properly reflect the social reality in each member state, including by taking into account assessments of national civil society organisations (CSOs).
7. **Ask for the revision of the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions** to enable the collection of more up-to-date figures for all the Europe 2020 social targets and to ensure the figures regarding poverty and social exclusion also reflect those most excluded such as the homeless.

II. Ensure the positive social impact of all policies and consistency of processes

Review the architecture of EU processes, in particular the European Semester, to ensure policies and actions are consistent with all the EU's objectives, and to ensure their legitimacy through more transparency.

Looking back at previous European Semester cycles, there is a clear lack of consistency between policies and recommendations in the economic field and those in the social field. Very often they contradict each other, with economic priorities winning at the expense of social priorities. Instead of having a trade-off between economic and social priorities, policy-makers should take a comprehensive approach.

Pursuing an ex-ante coordination of fiscal, economic and social policies and reforms – both at EU and national level – is a minimum requirement to avoid inconsistencies and contradictions and to ensure social policies are enabled and not undermined by economic and financial policies. Such coordination should take place within the EU institutions as well as between ministers of financial and economic affairs and those responsible for social and employment affairs, both at member state level and European level.

[3] European Commission (EC), Communication: Towards Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion – including implementing the European Social Fund 2014-2020, 20 February 2013.

To improve the performance of processes and the positive social impact of all policies, we call on member states to:

1. **Perform extensive and comprehensive ex-ante and ex-post social and gender impact assessments of all policy proposals and reforms,** taking into account input and assessments by CSOs. Employment and social reforms in particular should improve the inclusiveness of labour markets and the adequacy and performance of social systems. Request the European Commission to apply such an assessment to all proposals for legislation (soft and hard law) it puts forward.
2. **Organise joint meetings of EPSCO and ECOFIN to discuss political and practical strategies** and follow up to ensure equal value is given to the positions of both Council formations.
3. **Report progress on all Europe 2020 headline targets in the NRPs and on the follow up of CSRs in the fields of poverty and social exclusion, education, health and employment.** Ask the Commission to provide an overarching annual progress report; this should include information on how fundamental rights and equality, as well as the well-being of people (for example, in terms of life expectancy and access to healthcare) were impacted.
4. **Ask the European Commission to define more clearly the different roles of, and linkages between different relevant tools**. These tools include the European Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (EPAP), the SIP, the social Open Method of Coordination, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), the European Semester, the Scoreboard of Social and Employment Indicators as well as the social indicators in the scoreboard of the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure.
5. **Make best use of social indicators in all policy processes and support the development of a system that triggers preventive and corrective actions** in the social field to complement the Social Scoreboard. Such system should be activated once the indicators in the scoreboard reach a certain value and responsive actions should include the delivery of a CSR. Furthermore, the indicators should be reviewed on a regular basis and, where identified, extended with other relevant social indicators, for example on extreme forms of poverty and social exclusion.[4]

III. Ensure meaningful and structured stakeholder involvement at all stages and levels of policy processes

Open up the decision-making processes to social NGOs and work with them as partners in developing, implementing and evaluating economic and social policies.[5]

A true dialogue operates as a two-way process, differing from one-sided consultation or communication of policies and reforms, and is directed towards joint actions on projects that are developed together with all relevant stakeholders. Such involvement must take place at all policy levels including the European, national, regional and local levels.

Civil society organisations are an invaluable asset in making sure that people are active in shaping their society. A genuine and long-lasting commitment to engage in a permanent and structured dialogue with organised civil society will enable policy-makers to tap into the existing, on-the-ground experience and knowledge of social NGOs and will give a voice to those who are directly impacted by different policies and reforms.

The importance of involving stakeholders in policy-making has only grown in recent years. Civil dialogue supports democratic legitimacy and ownership of policies, and reinforces the adequacy of measures proposed. We are already witnessing an improvement of social partners' involvement in the European Semester process, including their formal invitation to comment on CSRs, but no equal treatment is given to organisations representing civil society.

[4] The scoreboard, like other EU instruments, does not fully account for certain problems, such as extreme forms of poverty. There is a real risk of "creaming", leaving the most excluded out of progress towards the poverty target.
[5] More info & proposals: Social Platform, Contribution to the informal EPSCO Council (Latvia), Part 1: Civil Dialogue, 14 April 2015.

To achieve a genuine civil dialogue that supports democratic governance as well as ownership of policies, and reinforces the legitimacy, accountability and adequacy of measures proposed, we call on member states to:

1. **Push for the adoption of an Inter-Institutional Agreement between the Parliament, the Council and the Commission on civil dialogue**.[6] Such an agreement should include principles, procedures and mechanisms to be put in place for the effective and meaningful involvement of civil society, and would establish common practices within institutions.
2. **Set up a framework for the structural involvement of CSOs, within member states** at all government levels, for developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies. Provide sustainable funding and structural support to enable them to engage. Consult stakeholders on a regular basis and in time to allow them to provide meaningful and well-developed input and give them with sufficient opportunities to contribute throughout the policy-making process. Provide detailed information in the NRPs on the extent to which stakeholders have been actively involved in the process and on how their input was taken into account.
3. **Request the adoption of clear and transparent procedures for civil dialogue at EU level, similar to the ones on social dialogue.** Ask the Commission to actively seek to expand its sources of information and to take into account the alternative proposals produced by social NGOs, i.a. when developing the AGS and CSRs.[7]
4. **Support the development of a framework for shadow reporting by CSOs on the implementation of EU social policies**, similar to the United Nations framework for monitoring the implementation of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
5. **Engage social NGOs as reliable partners to meet the obligation to implement the "partnership principle" of the ESIF**. This should encompass their involvement in the preparation of partnership agreements and progress reports throughout the development and implementation of programmes, as well as in monitoring committees.

[6] Social Platform, How to establish an effective dialogue between the EU and civil society organisations, 2012.
[7] This includes the work of the Semester Alliance that formulated alternative CSRs in previous years.

Fostering sustainable inclusion of young people in the labour market beyond the Youth Guarantee

Contribution to the discussions on "Youth employment and job creation: Youth Guarantee and beyond" and "Luxembourgish Presidency proposal for an initiative on youth employment through vocational training in the Magreb countries"

Introduction

As the youth unemployment crisis lingers on, nearly one out of four young people are still at risk of poverty and social exclusion[8]. This has short-term costs on their autonomy and well-being, and long-term consequences for their personal and professional development, as well as dramatic impacts on society as a whole.

Young people bear too many of the flexibility requirements of the labour market, often resulting in them not being able to benefit from quality and valuable work and personal experience. Member states should protect young people from precarious work and abusive situations, ensuring that opportunities such as internships and apprenticeships are valuable stepping-stones into the labour market rather than replacements for the creation of new jobs.

In this context, the Youth Guarantee can support the route of young people into employment and improve their social inclusion. However, some current limits and challenges have been identified and have to be taken into account if real change is to be brought about for them in Europe.

The Youth Guarantee should not be seen only as a short-term solution to decrease the rate of youth unemployment; it should contribute to the development of sustainable and long-term solutions for young people to make sure they are socially included, and can contribute to the development of society itself. For this to happen, Youth Guarantee schemes must support the transition of young people into the labour market in a much more personalised way. This will require a fair allocation of human and financial resources at national level to complement EU financial support. In implementing and monitoring this instrument, the involvement of all relevant stakeholders – in particular young people and the organisations that represent them – is crucial to ensure the positive impact of the scheme.

Given the nature of the challenges related to the Youth Guarantee, we must accept that targeted schemes like this alone will not tackle the youth unemployment crisis nor safeguard the well-being and sustainable inclusion of young people. Such schemes must be part of a long-term, ambitious and coherent set of policies and a broader social investment strategy.

I. Invest in sectors with high potential for creating quality and sustainable jobs for young people

Create a significant number of quality jobs for young people to make a difference to their lives and future prospects and to have a lasting impact on our society and economy.

To impact positively on youth unemployment rates, Youth Guarantee schemes need to be part of a comprehensive approach to youth employment, centered on the creation of quality jobs for young people.

Some specific sectors have great potential for job creation, such as information and communication technologies, clean technologies, the green economy as well as the social, care and health sectors. In addition, entrepreneurship and self-employment are opportunities for job creation for young people, but they often lack the necessary support.

The European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) provides an opportunity to create new jobs. As mentioned in a recent report of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), if projects for investment are carefully selected, 2.1 million new jobs could be created by 2018.[9]

[8] Eurostat: 22.6% of young people aged 18 to 24 were at risk of poverty and social inclusion in the EU28 in 2013.
[9] ILO, An employment-oriented investment strategy for Europe, 2015.

Furthermore it is crucial that young people have access to quality jobs. In recent years, conditions for young workers on the labour market have deteriorated, with 42% of young people on temporary contracts versus 11% of the rest of the population. Young people in non-standard work tend to have more job strain, receive less training and have less job security than people in standard works.[10] The dominant trend since 2007 has been a freeze or decrease of minimum wages targeted specifically at youth.[11]

Given the 75% employment rate target of Europe 2020, and the high economic cost of not integrating NEETs[12], we call on member states to:

1. **Invest in emerging sectors with high job creation potential:** information and communication technologies, clean technologies and green jobs. The ILO highlights for instance that a greener economy could lead to net gains of up to 60 million jobs[13].
2. **Invest in the social, care and health sectors and develop a comprehensive job creation strategy**. Partly as a result of demographic changes, demand for new positions in these sectors is expected to increase, with a projected eight million job openings between 2010 and 2020.[14]
3. **Support young entrepreneurs in their business or enterprise, especially within the social economy,** and promote sustainable and participatory business models such as cooperatives.[15] Create a stable, enabling and supportive environment where young people starting up a business have access to financial support and adequate social protection.
4. **Invest in quality and sustainable employment** to counter the increase of in-work poverty, precariousness, the gender pay gap, poor working conditions and labour market segmentation. Raise the level of employment protection for temporary contracts to the standards of permanent ones. Improve employment protection, working conditions and social security coverage of part-time workers and make sure no one has to take up a part-time job involuntarily.
5. **Establish non-discriminatory, adequate minimum wages in all member states and raise the level of these wages where insufficient**, to ensure decent living standards for all irrespective of contract type, and to protect young people from in-work poverty.[16]
6. **Adopt measures to guarantee the quality of jobs when putting forward proposals and recommendations promoting the labour mobility of young people.**
7. **Foster public and private investment in both fundamental and applied research and development (R&D) and innovation.** Implement incentives for investors to entrust young people to manage and receive large-scale R&D projects and grants.
8. **Make best use of the EFSI to create jobs for young people and push for social indicators to be part of the selection criteria** of projects submitted for financing under this fund, to ensure the added value and high social rate of return of the European Investment Plan.

II. Ensure young people's social inclusion and full participation in society

Create an inclusive society for young people, requiring measures that safeguard their autonomy and prevent them from ending up in poverty and social exclusion.

The economic and financial crisis has had a significant negative impact on young people and children in the EU, increasing the likelihood of poverty and social exclusion being passed on to the next generation. Different policy measures were taken that aggravated the situation.

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[10] OECD, In it together: why less inequality benefits all, 21 May 2015.
[11] In Greece the general minimum wage was cut by 22% and the minimum wage for young people by 32%.
[12] Estimated at over €150 billion in 2011 by Eurofound.
[13] ILO, Sustainable development, decent work and green jobs, 2013.
[14] Between 2008-2011 the 'health and social work' sector created about 1 866 000 new jobs; EC Communication: Towards a job-rich recovery, 2012 6 AND Joint Employment Report 2013.
[15] For example in worker cooperatives young people can take part in the management in a democratic way, through their double status of employee and co-owner. This constitutes an important difference with conventional enterprises where it is difficult for young people to reach the leading positions.
[16] Social Platform, Position Paper on Minimum Wage, 2015.

Public budgets for education were largely reduced, the flexibility of employment regulation for young people has increased, and social benefits, in particular unemployment benefits, became the subject of age-based cuts. Young people are also increasingly forced to leave their country to find a job elsewhere, with no guarantee of adequate social protection in their destination country, putting them at risk of destitution.

To ensure all young people have access to appropriate means to be socially included and are protected against any form of discrimination, we call on member states to:

1. **Guarantee non-discriminatory and universal access to social protection**, following a rights-based approach to social policies. Ensure the right to an adequate minimum income to enable people and especially young people to live a life in dignity. This will keep young people socially included, which is a precondition for their inclusion in employment.
2. **Guarantee non-discriminatory and universal access to affordable and quality services of general interest** including early childhood education and care, healthcare, debt counselling, public transport and social housing, particularly for young people in a vulnerable situation.
3. **Invest in a life-cycle approach to education as well as in quality and inclusive education systems.** From an early age, education systems play an important role in a young person's ability to learn, develop their full potential and support their participation in society. Invest in prevention programmes of early school leaving and social exclusion through the education system.
4. **Address multiple discriminations through the enforcement of strong legislative measures** - particularly on age-based discrimination - including stronger commitments from member states to enforce the Employment Equality Framework Directive. Adopt article 19 of the Equal Treatment Directive which would provide protection against all grounds of discrimination in access to goods and services.[17]
5. **Invest in public employment services providing personalised and quality services to young people.** Make sure that employment services have the human and financial resources to implement the Youth Guarantee and to support each individual –including the least qualified – in a tailored way. Establish a follow-up process after a job placement to ensure quality and sustainability.
6. **Adopt measures to ensure adequate social protection coverage when putting forward proposals and recommendations promoting the mobility of people**.

III. Support transitions between education and work as well as between jobs

Develop quality measures to help young people's transition from education to work and between jobs, and ensure these measures create efficient stepping-stones into the labour market and into adulthood.

In recent years, the use of internships and apprenticeships, which aim to allow young people to gain work experience and facilitate the transition from education and training to the labour market, has been abused. While 4.5 million students and graduates take part in internships in Europe each year, 40% work with no contract, 30% report that their internship had no learning content and only 30% of interns are paid.

A development linked to the crisis is the policy focus on young people' skills and the so-called skills mismatch. Skills development is indeed crucial for youth employability, but is even more important for the personal development of young people into active participants in society.

To ensure that labour market transitions bring about real opportunities for young people for better employability and life-long learning, and to avoid abuses and the multiplication of precarious forms of employment, we call on member states to:

1. **Implement the Quality Framework for Traineeships with appropriate legislative measures.** Ensure that the issue of remuneration of interns outside education is

[17] Council Directive 2000/78 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, 27 November 2000; EC, Proposal for a Council Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment, 2 July 2008.

adequately addressed in national legislation and in practice, as requested in the European Youth Forum's European Quality Charter on internships and apprenticeships.[18]

2. **Strengthen vocational education and training systems (VET) by improving both the quality and the supply of apprenticeships,** while understanding that VET systems are dependent on national legislation and cultures around education systems and labour market relations, so a one-size-fits-all approach is not advisable.
3. **Ensure the positive impact of the Youth Guarantee by improving the quality of offers made to young people** (internships, apprenticeships, VET and education opportunities) so that the experience they gain thanks to the scheme is valuable for their personal and professional development. Safeguard the sustainability of the scheme beyond EU financial support through national funds and coherent budget allocations.
4. **Organise education systems, training programmes and life-long learning programmes to make them accessible to all.** Promote diversity, a learner-centred approach and stronger links to local economies.
5. **Officially recognise and validate 'hard' and 'soft' skills and competences gained through non-formal and informal learning** – such as in youth work and volunteering – to increase the employability of young people and develop knowledge-based economy.
6. **Provide accompanied, accessible and high-quality support for transition periods as well as decent income levels** for job seekers, through unemployment benefit schemes or other forms of social protection such as adequate minimum income.

[18] YFJ, European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships, 2012.

Addressing challenges for women and men to become equal earners and equal carers throughout the life-cycle

Contribution to the discussion on "A changing labour market: challenges for women and men"

Introduction

The EU has been a pioneer for gender equality since the beginning and was instrumental in legislating for equality between women and men on the labour-market. Gender equality is enshrined as a value and a goal in the EU Treaties as well as a in the Charter on Fundamental Rights.[19] It is crucial that the EU lives up to its commitments to uphold this value.

The Europe 2020 Strategy sets an overall employment rate target of 75% of people aged 20 to 64. While this target has been reached for men, the employment rate for women is only at 63.5%, reflecting a gender employment gap of 11.5%.[20] Women experience lower employment rates across the life-cycle. The parenthood penalty affects them more as their drop-out rate and changes in working patterns increase after childbirth and continue to do so with the number of children. On top of this, the EU is facing a demographic challenge with decreasing fertility rates coupled with an ageing population. Women continue to be the main care-givers to children and other dependent family members. Improving gender equality in the labour market and reconciliation between professional, family and private life requires promoting the sharing of care between women and men and between generations. Policies have to take a holistic approach to ensure women and men are supported at different moments throughout their life and can actively participate in the labour market and in society as a whole.

Furthermore, the average EU employment rate of Trans people is only at 51% compared to 68% for the overall population, and one third of trans job-seekers have reported feeling discriminated.[21]

Since the onset of the financial crisis, research shows that cuts in public spending are having a disproportionate negative impact on women and other discriminated groups. For example cuts in public services and services receiving public funding such as childcare, home care and long-term care, were particularly felt by women, being the main beneficiaries. In addition, funding for women's rights and gender equality was often among the first to be reduced.[22]

It is therefore urgent that a new Strategy for equality between women and men is adopted for the post 2015 period. The 2010-2015 Strategy has proven to be an important reference framework for action and while progress has undoubtedly been achieved, gender equality remains "unfinished business". A strong new strategy should address the different challenges of and discriminations against all women, men, girls and boys in their diversity in Europe. It is consistent with the EU's commitment to a stand-alone goal on gender equality in the UN Sustainable Development Goals.[23] This should be complemented by an EU LGBTI Strategy with the objective of putting an end to the discrimination that these people continue to face within EU borders.[24]

I. End discrimination in the labour market for all

Combat all forms of discrimination and address the structural barriers for women to access and participate in the labour market on an equal footing with men.

Women and men are not at the same starting point on the labour market. This is often due to gender stereotypes keeping simplistic generalisations alive about the attributes, differences, and roles of individuals and/or groups. One persistent stereotype about women is that they are or should be caregivers and that this constitutes an inferior role. This contributes to a

[19] Art. 2 and 3 TEU, art. 8 TFEU and art. 21 and 23 of the Charter.
[20] Numbers for 2014; Eurostat, News Release 81/2015, May 2015.
[21] Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), Being Trans in the EU, December 2014.
[22] EWL, The Price of Austerity: Impact on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Europe, October 2012.
[23] European Parliament (EP), resolution on EU Strategy for equality between women and men post 2015, 9 June 2015.
[24] EWL & ILGA Europe, Joint Open Letter to European Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans, March 2015.

division of work in the private sphere and on the labour market, with women 'encouraged' to take a larger part on unpaid activities.

Also discrimination on the ground of gender identity is strong across the EU, with trans people facing serious barriers in entering the labour market and discrimination in employment.[25]

Other factors, such as ethnicity, age, religion or believe, sexual orientation, or living with a disability, intersect with gender stereotypes and determine participation in all areas of life. Policies and legislation should therefore take into consideration and address aspects of multiple discrimination. It is therefore crucial to address stereotypes for everyone who does not conform to the stereotypes and face discrimination and violation of their rights.

45% to 55% of women in the EU-28 have experienced sexual harassment in the work place.[26] For women with a university degree and those in the highest occupational groups, the numbers even go up to 75%. This violates women's human rights and dignity at work while also brings costs for both employers and society in general i.e. more absenteeism, reduced job satisfaction and productivity, higher rates of staff turnover, increased need for health care, long-term rehabilitation of victims and unemployment.

To ensure equal access to and full participation in the labour market for all women and men, we call on member states to:

1. **Develop concrete actions to implement the principle of equal treatment for men and women in access to and participation in the labour market**, including with regards to vocational training, promotion, working conditions[27] and equal pay.
2. **Develop effective measures to address discrimination based on sex in the media**, as part of the implementation of the 2006 Recommendation on the protection of minors and human dignity. This includes promoting a diversified and realistic picture of the skills and potential of women and men in society.[28]
3. **Ensure the full implementation of the Gender Recast Directive.**[29] In line with the jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice, this directive confirms the need to combat discrimination on the ground of gender identity.[30]
4. **Ensure full and effective implementation of the EU directive on violence against women at work**, which legally addresses harassment and sexual harassment.[31] On top of this, the EU and all member states should take actions beyond this directive by ratifying and implementing the Istanbul Convention that addresses all forms of male violence against women, including in the work place.[32]
5. **Politically support combating sexism and gender stereotypes** in society as a whole, and undertake concrete initiatives to raise awareness on this issue.
6. **Support the access to employment and job retention for people with disabilities,** through measures incorporating a gender dimension. Such measures should aim at, inter alia, improving training and skills, raising awareness on equal opportunities and training of professionals in the field, and providing safe and healthy working conditions, including protection from harassment and the redress of grievances.[33]
7. **Implement policies for the inclusion of Roma that foster the empowerment of Roma women**, including through inclusive education systems and their participation at all levels of decision-making and in the implementation and monitoring of the National Roma Integration Strategies.

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[25] Fundamental Rights Agency, Being Trans in the EU, December 2014.
[26] FRA, Violence against women: an EU-wide survey, March 2014.
[27] EP and Council Directive 2002/73 amending Council Directive 76/207 on equal treatment between women and men as regards access to employment, vocation training, promotion and working conditions, 23 September 2002.
[28] EP and Council Recommendation 2006/952 on the protection of minors and human dignity in audiovisual and on-line information services industry, 20 December 2006.
[29] EP and Council Directive 2006/54 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation, 5 July 2006.
[30] ECJ C-13-94, P. v. S. and Cornwall County Council, 30 April 1996; ILGA Europe, Transgender people and the gender recast directive: Implementation guidelines, December 2009.
[31] Directive 2002/73, *ibid*.
[32] Council of Europe, Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, 2011
[33] All people with a disability are less likely to be employed than average, but men are still more likely to be employed than women; EDF, Manifesto on the Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities in the European Union, 2011.

II. Ensure women and men are equal earners

Address and eliminate the gender-segregation of labour markets and close the different employment related gender gaps, in particular with regards to pay and pension rights.

Occupational segregation is one of the barriers preventing women and men from fulfilling their full potential in the labour market. Women tend to be concentrated in the lower paid jobs (e.g. caring, catering, cleaning, clerical, cashiering) and the lower grades within companies. The latter is often the result of non-binding measures for career progression within a company or sector which impact on women.[34]

The average gender pay gap is 16% in the European Union and while it persists in all member states, only few actions are taken to address this.[35] Women's unpaid work, not just in household chores but in caring and in family businesses or farms, continues to be ignored when calculating pensions or social security rights. This widens the gender pension gap that is currently at 39% in the EU[36], while on-going pension reforms continue to aggravate the situation. [37]

The traditional concept of women and men's roles and of nuclear family is further challenged as the number of single-parent families, families based on same-sex unions, adolescent mothers, etc. are on the rise in the EU. A failure to acknowledge this diversity amounts to further discrimination and negatively affects people living in the EU and their families.

To ensure women and men develop their full potential in the labour market and become equal earners, we call on member states to:

1. **Improve working conditions and the value of work in sectors where mostly women are represented** (i.e., care and domestic work). Encourage more men to work in female dominated sectors as well as more women to work in male dominated sectors need to be cornerstones of this socio-economic strategy.
2. **Close the gender pay gap by 2020**, by setting an annual target of at least a 5% and by introducing adequate minimum wages in all member states. This will also support the closing of the gender pension gap.[38]
3. **Reform pension systems in view of closing the pension gap**. Take account of women's life course by introducing care credits for both women and men as equivalent periods for building up pension rights. Guarantee individual pension rights for elderly women and shared pension rights in case of divorce and legal separation. Support the development of European standards on care crediting.
4. **Replace household unit models by the individualisation of taxation and social security rights** to ensure that women have individual rights and to counter dependency status through their partners or through the State.
5. **Implement policies and legislation that acknowledge the increasing diversity of family relationships and parenting arrangements**. This will support the reconciliation of work, private and family life for everyone.
6. **Adapt legislation and policies to ensure equal rights of all forms of families, including same sex couples** regarding partnership and parenting, including in terms of access to statutory leave and other rights related to maternity, paternity and parental leave.

[34] For example, approximately 3-4% of women are CEOs of listed companies and women make up approximately 19% of supervisory boards; EC, Women in economic decision-making in the EU, 2012.
[35] For example, in 2010-2013 only Austria received a CSR regarding this issue.
[36] EIGE, Gender gap in pensions in the EU, 2015
[37] In 2015, 14 member states received CSRs to reform pension systems without referring to the addressing gender equality in pensions.
[38] Nearly two-thirds of the workers potentially benefitting from minimum wage policies are women and young people; see for example Eurofound.

III. Support women and men as equal carers

Address inequalities between women and men in paid and unpaid work and promote the equal sharing of the responsibilities and costs for children and for care for all dependents between women, men, and society as a whole.

Caring for others is central to the continuation of society. It is a collective need as well as a collective responsibility. Policies that seek to address reconciliation of private and professional life have to be gender equal and target both women and men.

The *right to care and be cared for* is a pre-requisite to women's economic independence and a pre-condition for career choices for both women and men throughout their lives. Targets need to be set to meet quality care needs across the life-cycle and the job creation potential of the sector should be developed, making it an attractive career option for both women and men.

Providing adequate child care and support for dependent relatives will in the long run provide more opportunities to engage in full-time work. It is however neither sustainable nor acceptable to expect from women that they continue to be the main providers of care for all generations. It perpetuates rigid gender roles and maintains the gender pay and pension gaps. Care leaves are still often grounds for discrimination and despite existing legislation on the protection of pregnant workers, women continue to be discriminated on the grounds of childbirth. Barriers also persist for women to reintegrate the labour market after a long care period.

Care services have suffered from severe cuts due to austerity policies. This has resulted in a transfer of caring responsibilities to families and mainly to women. Marketisation of care services, particularly child care, is resulting in exorbitant costs and an effective barrier to women's equal participation on the labour-market. [39]

To ensure an equal balance in taking up caring responsibilities, improve women's employment rate and support the choice to have children we call on member states to:

1. **Request the Commission to put forward proposals for stringent EU legislative measures regarding maternity and paternity leave**, to compensate for dropping the revision of the Maternity Leave Directive from the EU agenda.[40] It is essential for all member states to set the compulsory maternity leave period at 20 weeks, ensure women keep their full salary throughout this period, and strengthen their legal protection against dismissal and working time arrangement on return to work.
2. **Ensure effective implementation of the Parental Leave Directive** and take action to increase the take up rate for men. Develop additional legislation to ensure a coherent framework for all types of care leaves (maternity, paternity, parental, adoption, non-child related and filial leave), including the promotion of flexible working time arrangements by choice.
3. **Create publicly-financed accessible, affordable and good quality care services for all dependents** including child and elderly care, and ensure these are adapted to the needs of one-parent families. Maintain public intervention in privately provided services to ensure their quality, affordability and accessibility. Make best use of the European Structural and Investments Funds as well as the European Fund for Strategic Investments to develop community-based care services, which includes, but is not limited to, investment in infrastructures.
4. **Effectively implement the Barcelona targets on childcare by 2020** and promote its quality by endorsing the 2014 European quality framework on early childhood education and care through specific Council conclusions.[41]
5. **Support the development of European targets for care for the elderly**, similar to the Barcelona targets. Include requirements regarding quality, affordability and accessibility.

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[39] EWL, The Price of Austerity: Impact on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Europe, October 2012
[40] EWL, Withdrawal of the Maternity Leave Directive is a blow for women's rights in Europe, 1 July 2015
[41] Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, Key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care, October 2014

6. **Implement the recommendations formulated in the European Reconciliation Package**, put forward by the 2014 Alliance for Reconciling Work and Family Life in Europe.[42]
7. **Tap into the growth potential of white jobs.** This requires addressing the low job quality characteristic for the health and care sector across the EU. Low pay, high levels of part-time work and poor working conditions do not reflect the social added value of this sector and make it difficult to maintain and attract new pools of persons.

[42] COFACE, European Reconciliation Package, March 2015.