



socialplatform

Work Programme 2016

Summary

The work programme is based on the objectives set in our strategic orientation adopted by the Steering Group in June 2013. These are:



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, Social Platform campaigns to ensure that EU policies are developed in partnership with the people they affect, respecting fundamental rights, promoting solidarity and improving lives.

Introduction

2016 is the year that the European Union needs to prove itself. Following the crises it faced the previous year – the Greek debt and the situation of migrants and refugees to name just two – it is of utmost importance that the European institutions and Member States stick fast to European values of human rights, human dignity and solidarity. We believe that promoting a social agenda that brings a social dimension to all EU policies is vital to achieving this.

Against a backdrop of increasing inequalities, poverty and unemployment, Social Platform aims to ensure that the European Union keeps the goals enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty at the forefront of all its policies, not least its macro-economic governance mechanisms. These include article 3 stating the EU's objective to strive to promote the wellbeing of the Union's peoples, and article 9 -called the social clause- stating that *"in defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health"*. To engage with the European Union representatives, we refer to article 11 of the treaty where *"the institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society"*.

Our 48 members and their members work daily to tackle the consequences of the high levels of poverty, social exclusion and inequalities that are still rife in our societies. So far instruments such as the European Semester and EU 2020 Strategy have failed to address the current situation. If anything they have worsened it by encouraging the pursuit of austerity by member states. The recently adopted UN Sustainable Development Agenda provides a new comprehensive framework for sustainable and social development that will be implemented and monitored at European and national levels.

Despite the fact that the Member States that best resisted the economic crisis were those with strong social policies, the EU still systematically prioritises the economy above all else – even if it is detrimental to the social rights of people in Europe. As such we have seen the development of a jobs and growth agenda disregarding the quality of those jobs; an Investment Plan that foresees investment in social infrastructures, social and solidary economy but which are yet to be used; and an Economic and Monetary Union with - until now - no agreed standards to avoid social divergence between and within EU countries.

Within the framework of our [Strategic Orientation 2014-2020](#) and building upon our work so far, we will rely on and support our members' activities around the following four pillars of priorities for our work during 2016, to bring about real change for people in Europe:

1. Social standards, including minimum income, minimum wage, unemployment benefits and access to quality services
2. Investment in services of general interest, promoting the "social investment" approach and unlocking the sector's job creation potential
3. Human Rights First: ensuring inclusion and equal opportunities for people in the EU
4. Civil dialogue, to ensure that rights are respected and civil society organisations are represented at the European decision-making level.

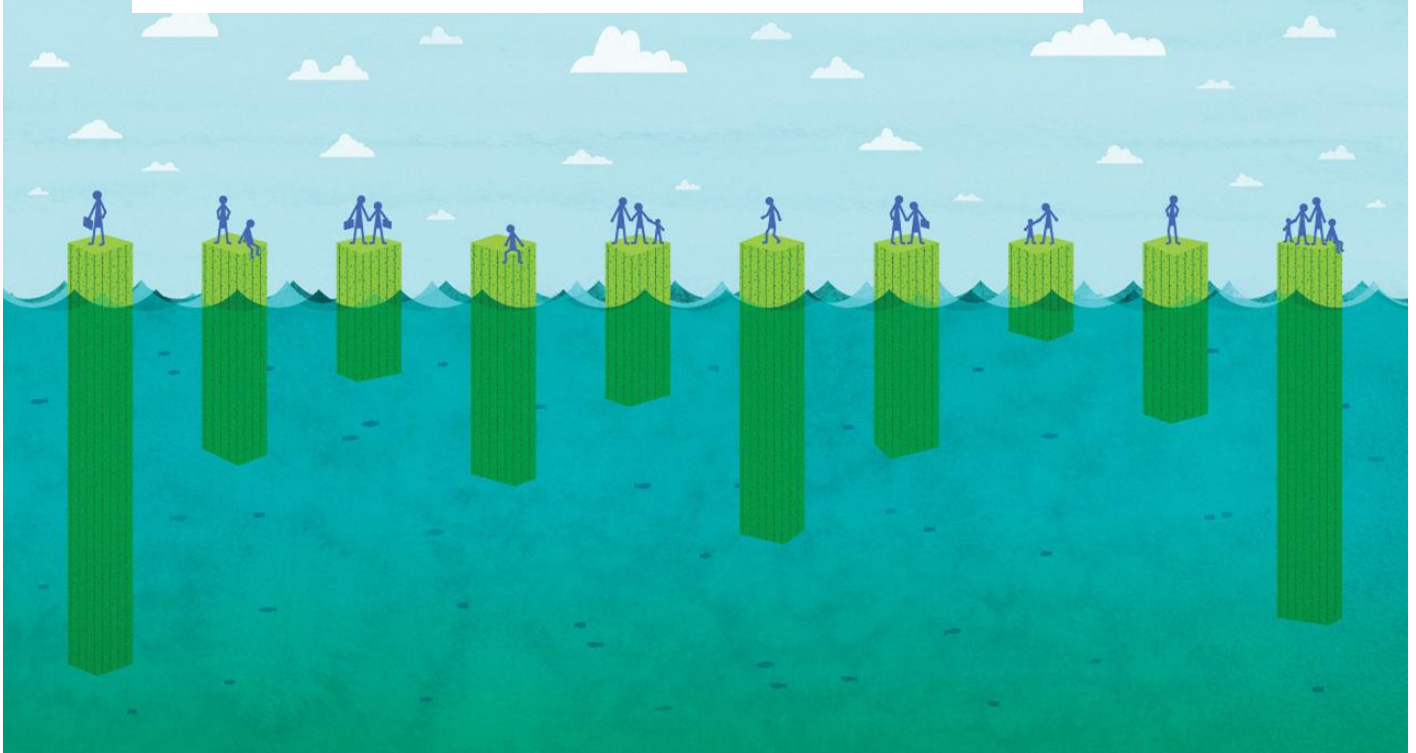
By advocating for a stronger social Europe through these four pillars we will draw attention to the direct impact of European and related national policies on people (social standards), the role of financial investment in preventing social emergencies (investment in services) and the need to have a strategic approach to human rights across the

Union (human rights). Civil dialogue is the vehicle for ensuring that the voices and needs of people in Europe are heard.

Our activities in 2016 will be carried out with our members at the heart of all activities, and will complement the work being conducted by their own organisations. By bringing together the expertise, knowledge and skills of our broad spectrum of members we will bring a real added value when advocating for the policies and practices that people in Europe need. Our common belief is that all people in Europe will benefit from a strong Social Europe – and we will campaign towards this end in 2016.

SOCIAL STANDARDS

For a level playing field for people in Europe



CONTEXT

EUROPE is facing a social emergency. Since the economic crisis swept across the globe in 2008, many governments and the EU itself have relied on the introduction of austerity measures to encourage economic growth and avoid recession. But this strategy came with a social cost. Inequalities are growing as the poor become poorer and the rich richer. The austerity-driven dismantling of social protection systems has had a knock-on effect on people's social rights, affecting the income of individuals and families. The spread of part-time and zero-hour contracts as well as bogus self-employment has led to an in-work poverty epidemic.

Evidence shows that the negative social impact of such measures are hitting disadvantaged and discriminated members of our society the hardest: women, older people, children and young people, migrants, people with disabilities and ethnic and racial minorities are particularly at risk.

The President of the European Commission is calling for a social Triple A for Europe and for a strong social pillar to be developed in 2016. We will pay particular attention to the implementation to the package for the long-term unemployed which was published in September 2015 and to the Commission's proposal for a labour mobility package expected at the end of 2015. We will contribute ahead of the European Commission proposal for a social protection floor to be included in the Economic and Monetary Union, as well as to the revision of its regulation on the coordination of social security. These are key opportunities in our work programme to promote a social agenda at European level.

TIME FOR ACTION!

We believe that prioritising social rights of people is key to inclusive and sustainable growth. That is why we are committed to raising awareness of and campaigning against growing inequalities,¹ increasing poverty and social exclusion and reduced access to quality services across the EU. Promoting EU-wide social standards is one sure-fire way of achieving this.

However, a social Europe cannot consist of guaranteed minimum standards alone. Following the principles set out in the ILO R202 on social protection floors, social safeguards have to be mainstreamed into economic decision-making to ensure a shift in policies inducing precariousness towards enabling social security aimed at preventing or alleviating poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion.

The main elements we will push for in 2016 are:

- Non-discriminatory universal **access to services** that are affordable and of a high quality
- Adequate **minimum income schemes** throughout the EU as the basis for high level social protection across the life cycle
- The introduction of adequate and non-discriminatory **minimum wages** for all
- Common standards for unemployment benefits
- Mainstreaming social safeguards into economic policy making

WHY NOW?

There is increasing realisation among European policy-makers that the social emergency cannot be left to snowball as it has been. Before his inauguration as President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker revealed his ambition of achieving a social “triple A” rating across Europe. Social standards are the key to doing so. In its first orientation debate on social policy, the College of Commissioners pledged to develop concrete proposals for European social standards with regards to income protection and social services for upwards social convergence among EU countries.

OUR ACTIONS

Advocating for European coordination of social standards

Building on our position papers on social standards, minimum income and minimum wage, we will approach all stakeholders to assess the political will for coordinated social standards across the EU with a view to putting across a strategically-considered argument.

We will:

- a) Build our case for support for social standards that sustain social convergence. We will gather from our members and partners facts, figures and recent trends in social standards in different Member States in order to show potential divergences as well as good examples.
- b) Develop and implement an advocacy strategy to influence EU policy and legislative processes in promoting social standards, with a focus on EU funds and the European Semester. This will include strategic partnership with think tanks and an event to promote our proposals.
- a) Launch an internal debate on mainstreaming social safeguards in economic policy making and resulting from that launch advocacy initiatives.

¹ See report from EC on impact of inequalities on growth:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7830&furtherPubs=yes>

INVESTING IN SERVICES

For people's rights and well-being



CONTEXT

Access to essential services of general interest is a human right and EVERYONE in Europe will be a service user at some point in their lives – a fact felt daily by our members who all work on access to services in one way or another. Investment in services – especially social, health and education services – is of benefit to us all. The strained economic situation of EU Member States has led to a worrying trend of cuts to essential services and a reduction in financial and professional support to those administering them. At the same time, the demand for services is growing everywhere in the European Union, due to demographic and societal changes, the economic crisis and increasing rates of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. The result is that people rely on services more, and for longer.

The EU launched its ambitious Investment Plan in spring 2015, yet little connection was made to the Social Investment Package adopted by the previous Commission in 2013.

We will advocate for the strengthening of services through ensuring adequate resources, investing in the workforce skills, qualifications and working conditions, and promoting social investment approaches in the design and implementation of services. Social investment helps to *prepare* people to confront life's risks rather than simply *repair* problems. It enhances people's capacity to participate in social and economic life and – when possible – in the labour market. In addition, data² show that health and social services play an important role in employment growth. Investment in this sector represents an important source of job creation.

TIME FOR ACTION!

Spending time and money on services is an investment, not a cost. The positive economic impact of investing in effective services that enhance people's capabilities will be felt across the life-cycle, making societies stronger, healthier and ultimately

² European Commission, Biennial report on social services of general interest, Brussels, European Communities 2008

less reliant on services in the long-run. We are committed to making the case for promoting investment in services and will push for it to feature prominently on the EU agenda.

WHY NOW?

The strain service providers and public authorities are under is having a detrimental impact on the availability of the services, putting in question their universality. Budget constraints are also having negative consequences on their affordability, accessibility and quality.

Europe is aging. By 2060, it is estimated that the number of people in the EU aged 80+ will increase by 181%, straining an already-struggling social sector beyond capacity. Cuts to services as part of austerity measures introduced by Member States may mean short-term savings, but will lead to long-term costs as more and more people turn to inadequate services not fit for purpose. Investment in social, health, education and life-long learning services have a high potential of job creation. In fact, between 2009 and 2013, 1.3 million jobs were created in the health and social services sector making it one of the biggest job creating sector in Europe. Job creation is expected to continue and to grow exponentially in response to the societal and demographic changes currently affecting most if not all EU Member States. Yet, the sector fails to attract enough workers due to for example often low wages, or difficult working conditions.

OUR ACTIONS

Investment, not cost: making the case

Building on our position papers on the financing of social services and on the Social Investment Package, we will advocate for a change in rhetoric to change European and national attitudes towards financing and providing services, and we will promote social investment approaches.

We will:

- a) Build our case for investment in services through the collection of good practices, demonstrating the added value of for people, society and the economy.
- b) Develop and implement an advocacy strategy to influence EU policy and legislative processes in promoting investment in services, focusing on the use of ESI funds, the EFSI, the European Semester and trade agreements.
- c) Monitor and influence EU developments on social impact investing and financing the social economy/social enterprises.

As a part of our work on human rights (see Pillar 3) we will call for an end to discrimination in access to services, focusing on:

- a) The right of people fleeing war, persecution and poverty to access to humanitarian assistance
- b) Ensuring that service providers are not criminalised or sanctioned for providing humanitarian assistance to undocumented migrants
- c) Raising awareness about the need for access to social services that ensure decent life for everyone and equal opportunities to socio-economic integration

As part of our work on social standards (see Pillar I), we will also call for non-discriminatory universal [access to services](#) that are affordable and of high quality, as essential element of the social standards people living in the EU should be guaranteed.

Human rights first

Ensuring inclusion and equal opportunities
for people in the EU



CONTEXT

HUMAN rights are a founding value of the EU, deeply embedded in its treaties, which should always take precedence over all the other political aims. In theory, this means that all people in Europe have to be treated equally and have full enjoyment of their human rights. In practice, many obstacles to human rights still exist. Despite Member States having signed up to various international and European human rights agreements, the EU has yet to put in place an overarching and comprehensive approach to human rights within the EU.

The *laissez faire* attitude of the EU towards human rights within its own borders has led to huge discrepancies between rights protection in Member States. The lack of an overarching approach to internal affairs contrasts starkly with the EU's dedication to its external affairs strategy.

TIME FOR ACTION!

The EU says that it supports human rights – it is high time those words were put into action. The European Commission's First Vice President for Fundamental Rights and Better Regulation has welcomed a dialogue with Social Platform and asked us to put forward concrete proposals.

An EU Internal Strategy to Promote Human Rights (including social rights) and their indivisibility and inalienability is required in order to enable the union to make use of all possible competences, laws and policies to support Member States in preventing human rights violations, monitor their compliance and enact sanctions in cases of infringement. However, for such a strategy to

be implementable it must be accompanied by an Action Plan. Furthermore, policy coherence needs to be ensured between the EU internal and external policies.

WHY NOW?

The failure of the EU to proactively uphold the human rights of people in Europe combined with the effects of the economic, social and humanitarian crises are some of the key reasons why we are witnessing a steep rise in the prevalence of far right parties, with racist, xenophobic and extremist views becoming increasingly widespread. Populist and Eurosceptic movements portray the EU as an elitist establishment far removed from the needs of ordinary people – a rhetoric and perception we must challenge.

OUR ACTIONS

Our overarching objective builds on our position of 2015 for an EU Internal Strategy to Promote Human Rights (including social rights), and focuses on the need for an implementable EU Action Plan. We will call for such a plan to include:

- a) EU-wide legal protection against hate crime and bias violence.
- b) EU-Wide legal protection against discrimination in access to services focus on:
 - The right of people fleeing war, persecution and poverty to access to humanitarian assistance
 - Ensuring that service providers are not criminalised or sanctioned for providing humanitarian assistance to undocumented migrants
 - Raising awareness about the need for access to social services that ensure decent life for everyone and equal opportunities to socio-economic integration
- c) The promotion of regular channels to the EU.

CIVIL DIALOGUE

For a European Union that speaks with its people



CONTEXT

Civil society represents the voice and the will of people in Europe. The Lisbon Treaty recognises the important role of dialogue between decision-makers and civil society organisations and calls for the establishment of an inter-institutional agreement to maintain “open, transparent and regular dialogue”. Six years after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty we have yet to see the establishment of a civil dialogue.

The social emergency in the EU can only be resolved if decision-makers listen to the people living with the direct consequences of EU policy. The EU has shown its willingness for an open dialogue with businesses and trade unions representing workers; it must show the same willingness for a dialogue with civil society. There is no denying that the voices of businesses and trade unions are important, but so too are the voices of children, disabled people, older people, the long-term unemployed, migrants, the LGBTI community and racial and ethnic minorities that the dialogue with social partners ignores.

TIME FOR ACTION!

We believe that the EU should speak with all people living within its borders. That is why we will campaign for EU institutions to finally set up an organised, meaningful civil dialogue so that the voices of all in our societies are heard.

WHY NOW?

The economic crisis has had the knock-on effect of making the disadvantaged members of our societies more disadvantaged, and the vulnerable more vulnerable. Despite much talk by decision-makers, poverty and social exclusion continue to grow, services of general interest are strained beyond capacity and human rights are cast aside in favour of quick-fix policies with economic goals that ignore social responsibility. Civil society represents the people that such policies affect, and only by engaging in a dialogue can the EU escape its social emergency.

OUR ACTIONS

Capitalising on the unique position of civil society organisations

Civil society organisations (CSOs) offer policy-makers a “one-stop shop” to access the views and needs of people in Europe. They bring a unique dimension to the decision-making process by reconnecting politicians and institutions with people on the ground that live with the impact of EU policies on a daily basis. We believe that by involving CSOs at all stages of the decision-making process we can create an EU more fit for people’s needs, and a society that can trust and take pride in its institutions. We will:

- a) Ensure that civil dialogue is featured in all the three other pillars of our Work Programme.
- b) Support our members’ actions for freedom of association and the right to peaceful assembly as well as the right to organise and participate in decision-making.
- c) Advocate for the right to be involved in the decision-making process at EU level.
- d) Advocate for the financial support of civil dialogue.