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REVIVING THE EUROPEAN UNION TO REGAIN PEOPLE'S TRUST

Key messages to
Heads of State and Government Social Summit
Gothenburg | 17 November 2017

Safeguard our democracy by tackling inequality - a matter of urgency



The world today is much more unequal than a generation ago [1] [2]. Inequalities are growing between men and women for the first time in over a decade [3]. There is a widening gap between the rich and poor, and worsening social mobility [4] [5].

Poverty, in-work poverty and job insecurity remain worryingly high. Europe's tentative economic recovery is not benefiting people equally. There is growing social divergence both within and between EU Member States.

Across Europe the trend of rising Euroscepticism shows no sign of abating. Inequalities generate mistrust in the political establishment, and threaten to undermine our democracies.

Recent disclosures of how a powerful wealthy elite avoid paying taxes add fuel to the fire. After almost a decade of austerity policies which has squeezed social, education and health spending, it is reasonable that the electorate ask questions about whose interest their leaders represent.

Poverty and inequality are not inevitable. These trends can be reversed by the right political and economic choices which heal the divides in our societies and ensure no one is left behind.

Deliver a strong social agenda that goes beyond employment - a matter of coherence

While employment should be a top priority of the EU, the social agenda is far broader than jobs and growth. Levels of in-work poverty, job insecurity and underemployment mean that while employment remains an important vehicle of social inclusion, it is not the panacea to all social problems, nor it is enough to protect people from hardship. And if we want to truly build an inclusive Europe we need policies that respect the rights and dignity of everybody in society, regardless of whether they are in employment or not.

In this sense, it is important to recognise spending on social protection, social services, health promotion, education and training not as a cost, but as an investment in the future. Investment in the right kinds of enabling services can strengthen people's autonomy and resilience and prevent costs further down the line. The benefits of social investment are increasingly recognised by economic and governance bodies, from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [6] to the International Monetary Fund [7] .



The EU needs a broad social agenda if it is to effectively tackle inequalities and promote upwards social convergence between and within its Member States. The European Pillar of Social Rights has the potential to move this agenda forward, but it needs real commitment and resources for implementation. Member States cannot hide behind the principle of subsidiarity. Social concerns are not constrained by borders and need to be central to any debate on Europe's political and economic future.

Partner with organised civil society to leave no one behind - a factor of success



European civil society networks bring together local, regional and national members working with, and representing the interests of, people who are traditionally underrepresented in decision-making. We are not lobbyists nor do we pursue a business agenda. Our members have a very comprehensive understanding of social realities on the ground.

They may be service providers, social economy enterprises, self-advocates, or human rights defenders. They have direct experience of building inclusive societies in practice and can demonstrate what is possible. Importantly, civil society helps people take back control of their lives and involves them in decisionmaking. We recognise people with support needs as rights holders and agents of change, not as passive dependants.

Civil society is an important partner for government. We are a partner in service delivery, often contributing to innovation and finding better ways to reach out to the most vulnerable. We help people voice their concerns and ideas, thereby helping to build more participatory democracies.

We call out policies and public funding that are not working in the way they should, ensuring that governments are held accountable for the commitments they make. Partnering with civil society can therefore help to restore trust in our democratic institutions.

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