To: EU Member States' ministries responsible for the 2021 European Semester cycle

Subject: Open letter on the European Recovery and Resilience Plans and the involvement of civil society organisations at national levels

Dear colleagues,

We are facing unprecedented health, economic, employment, and social crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Social Platform, its member organisations and their members at national level represent the interests of social organisations and people, including those who are in the most vulnerable situations and among the most strongly affected by the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. We acknowledge the efforts made by the EU institutions and Member States in ensuring a rapid pandemic response.

The European Semester process is an important instrument in the current context: it is one of the key tools the EU has at its disposal to analyse the socio-economic situation at national level and to make recommendations for reforms to address existing and new challenges. Considering the impact of this crisis and the urgency of action, it is essential that these recommendations are the right ones. They must be people-centred and ensure that no one is left behind. They must also be supportive of the realisation of social rights and build more secure social protection and integrated active inclusion systems that are the foundation for more resilient, equal, and solidary societies that can better face crises in the future.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are key interlocutors at EU and national levels in the European Semester process. They bring together local, regional, and national members working with and representing the interests of people, including those who are traditionally underrepresented in decision-making. They also represent local social services organisations who support on a day-to-day basis millions of people in the day-to-day lives. Their involvement helps ensure that policy and legislative reforms recommended and implemented in the context of the European Semester process to ensure Europe's social recovery from the crisis correspond to the situation on the ground, i.e. the concrete living and working conditions, also of those at the risk of poverty and social exclusion, of disadvantaged persons and vulnerable groups.

We are therefore very concerned by the lack of involvement of CSOs in the design and adoption of the Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs). It is crucial that the national RRPs are developed in close consultation with civil society organisations.

National civil society organisations, supported by their European umbrella organisations that constitute Social Platform's membership, are currently striving to engage with your national ministries on the preparation of the plans. However, at this moment, in some countries, negotiations are ongoing behind closed doors, with no opportunities for these actors to input into draft RRPs. Indeed, CSOs face significant difficulties to give input during the elaboration phase due to unclear responsibilities within ministries, the reduced importance of Employment and

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Social Affairs Ministries (as the “established” interlocutors for these national social CSOs), short deadlines and a lack of structured and transparent procedures for their meaningful involvement in this year’s changed cycle.

The European Commission’s Guidance Documents for the elaboration of the national RRF requires that consultation must be carried out in accordance with the highest principles of good governance, transparency, and democratic inclusiveness. At the same time, its guidance for developing the RRPs only requires that Member States detail consultations with stakeholders, such as CSOs, they have undertaken, without any obligations with regards to the quality and quantity of their involvement.

We urge you to go beyond the European Commission requirements and to do your utmost at national level to engage in constructive dialogue with CSOs, in addition to the social partners, in the design and preparation of the plans. You can also facilitate their involvement by publishing your draft RRP ahead of its approval, enabling stakeholders to provide input on the draft plans.

Considering the negative impact of not having earmarked investments and reforms in the employment, education, housing, health, and social services areas, contrary to the 37% to be set aside for climate neutrality and the suggested up to 20% on digital transformation, we also urge you to set ambitious earmarking for these areas for the remaining funds in your RRPs.

Ensuring a strong social dimension of the European Semester process and a concrete space to enable the participation and consultation of CSOs, is crucial to guarantee democratic and accountable decision-making that corresponds to the situation on the ground and therefore helps ensure Europe’s social recovery from the crisis, making Europe a more prosperous, resilient, and socially just continent.

Yours sincerely,



Piotr Sadowski, Social Platform President

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