Toolkit: Influencing the European Pillar of Social Rights

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About Social Platform

Social Platform is the largest network of civil society organisations in the European Union (EU) advocating for a social Europe. It is driven by a membership of European federations united in the fight for social justice, equality between all people, inclusion, sustainability, and participatory democracy in the EU and beyond.

[Insert name of relevant European umbrella organisation] is a member organisation of Social Platform.

About this toolkit

The objective of this toolkit is to support Social Platform's European member organisations in helping their national member organisations in lobbying their governments to back some important aspects of the European Pillar of Social Rights (Social Pillar) Action Plan, ahead of the Social Summit in Porto, Portugal on 7-8 May 2021. During this Summit, EU Member States are expected to officially commit to the Action Plan.

To achieve this objective, this toolkit provides information about the Social Pillar and its Action Plan and explains why it is important for national civil society organisations to get engaged in their implementation. It then provides information about key aspects to influence, with practical tips and a template letter that civil society organisations can use and adapt to their national context to lobby their national governments.

Part 1 - Orientation and key information

1. What is the European Pillar of Social Rights?

The Social Pillar is an initiative launched by the European Commission in 2017. It serves as the EU's compass to achieve greater social rights and better working and living conditions for all people across Europe.

It consists of 20 principles, divided into three chapters:

- Equal opportunities and access to the labour market
- Fair working conditions
- Social protection and inclusion

The full list of principles is available here.

If realised, the principles of the Social Pillar can positively impact the lives of all people living and working in the EU, especially those in vulnerable situations.

All EU Member States' governments have officially expressed their support for the Social Pillar and are therefore, together with the EU institutions, responsible for ensuring that the principles of the Social Pillar become a lived reality.

2. What is the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan?

Published in March 2021 by the European Commission, the Social Pillar Action Plan contains a variety of concrete initiatives that the EU institutions will undertake to turn the Social Pillar into a reality. It also makes recommendations to EU Member States' governments to take action in specific policy areas that are linked to the three chapters of the Social Pillar.

The Action Plan also proposes three quantitative headline targets (and related sub-targets) for the EU in the areas of employment, education & skills, and social protection. All EU Member States' governments will be asked to officially commit to the Action Plan, including to these targets, that they will jointly need to achieve by 2030, in-line with advancing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The EU targets across the three headlines are the following:

Employment

➢ **At least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment by 2030.**

- The gender employment gap should be at least halved compared to 2019.
- The provision of formal early childhood education and care should be increased.
- The rate of young people neither in employment, nor in education or training (NEETs) aged 15-29 should be decreased from 12.6% (2019) to 9%.

Education & skills

➢ **At least 60% of all adults should participate in training every year by 2030.**

- At least 80% of those aged 16-74 should have basic digital skills.
- Early school leaving should be further reduced and participation in upper secondary education increased.

Poverty reduction

➢ **The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion should be reduced by at least 15 million by 2030.**

- Out of 15 million people to lift out of poverty or social exclusion, at least 5 million should be children.

EU Member States will need to adopt their own national targets that contribute to the effort of reaching the EU targets by 2030.

The Action Plan also proposes an update of the Social Scoreboard, a framework of key statistical indicators that monitor the employment and social performance of EU Member States and can help detect related challenges. The European Commission's plans for this update, which will be finalised in June 2021, can be found in the annexes (annex II) to the Action Plan.

3. *Why is it important for national civil society organisations to advocate for the implementation of the Social Pillar and its Action Plan?*

As highlighted above, the Social Pillar and its Action Plan are the compass to guide the EU and its Member States towards creating new and improving existing social rights and better working and living conditions for people across Europe - until 2030 and beyond.

It is therefore crucial that civil society organisations at national level lobby their governments to ensure that they:

a) Officially commit to the Action Plan, including all of its targets;
b) Adopt ambitious national targets that are in line with and go beyond the EU targets;
c) Take ambitious policy, legislative and financial measures to reach their national targets and to progressively turn the principles of the Social Pillar into a reality in their country.

Part 2 - Key aspects to influence

This part of the toolkit lays out two key aspects that are important for national civil society organisations to advocate for in all EU Member States.

Additionally, we have left a space under '3. Thematic aspects' in which [Insert name of relevant European umbrella organisation] added other relevant information on the Action Plan that national civil society organisations working on these topics could aim to influence.

1. *EU targets*

As mentioned above, the European Commission has suggested three thematic EU headline targets and related sub-targets to focus on.

Ahead of the Social Summit, it is crucial that national civil society organisations call on their country's government to officially commit to all targets. Only with binding EU targets will it be possible to measure progress and to evaluate in 2030 whether EU Member States have been successful in reaching these targets.

Moreover, it is crucial that all EU Member States commit to setting their own national targets to contribute to the objectives of the Action Plan, which sufficiently respond to the realities on the ground. We therefore ask you to call on your national government to set ambitious national targets, that are in line with and go beyond the EU targets.

2. *Coordination mechanism*

In the Action Plan, the European Commission encourages all EU Member States to set up a so-called "coordination mechanism" to ensure the engagement of all relevant stakeholders at national level in implementing the Social Pillar.

It is crucial for civil society organisations to call on their country's government to set up this coordination mechanism in a timely manner and ensure that all relevant stakeholders at national level, including civil society organisations, are fully involved in all steps in the process of developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating policies, legislation and funding mechanisms that contribute to making the principles of the Social Pillar a reality.

3. Thematic aspects

[Add content here, if you wish]

Part 3 - Next steps

1. Time frames for action

Time frames to advocate on these topics might differ from country to country. However, we foresee roughly the following time periods for advocacy.

Targets

As EU Member States will need to officially commit to the EU targets during the Social Summit on 7-8 May 2021, it is important that you

- **Call as soon as possible on your country's Head of State or Government, with the responsible ministries in copy, to officially commit to these EU targets.**

Regarding the development of national targets to contribute to the joint effort of achieving the EU targets, time periods might differ from one country to another with regards to how much progress they have made in developing their own national targets. However, we recommend that you **contact your Head of State or Government, with the responsible ministries in copy as soon as possible** to:

- Call on them to adopt ambitious national targets;
- Find out where they are in this process;
- Find out if, when and how civil society organisations could get involved.

Coordination mechanism

Regarding the coordination mechanism, similarly to the national targets, time periods might differ from one country to another with regards to how much progress each EU country has made in deciding on and/or creating this mechanism. However, we recommend that you **contact your Head of State or Government, with the responsible ministries in copy as soon as possible** to:

- Call on them to create this coordination mechanism;
- Find out where they are in this process;
- Find out if, when and how civil society organisations could get involved with the creation and work of the coordination mechanism.

[Add content here, if you wish]

2. Send template letter to your Head of State or Government with the responsible ministries in copy

We have created a template letter (see Annex) that we encourage you to send to your Head of State or Government with the responsible ministries in copy. We want this document to be useful to you and your national and organisational contexts, so **please feel free to modify it to make it work for you** and to translate it into your national language, if you so wish.

3. Post as an open letter on your social media

If you decided to modify the letter and to send it to your responsible Head of State or Government/Ministry, please post it as an open letter on your social media as well. Below, you can find some suggestions for European hashtags and handles of relevant EU stakeholders to tag in addition to any national ones that you might know:

Hashtags:

- #EUSocialSummit21 (the hashtag for the Porto Social Summit)
- #EPSCO (a hashtag for the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council in which responsible national ministers meet regularly)
- #TimetoDeliver (the official EU hashtag for the Porto Social Summit)
- #SocialPillar
- #SocialRights
- #FutureofEurope

Twitter Handles of relevant EU stakeholders:

- @EU_Social (Twitter handle of the European Commission Directorate-General on Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion)
- @EUCouncil (Twitter handle of the Council of the EU, the EU institution representing all 27 Member States' governments)
- @2021PortugalEU @germanyintheEU @SLOtoEU (the current and two upcoming presidencies of the Council of the EU)
- @vonderleyen (Twitter handle of the President of the European Commission)
- @eucopresident (Twitter handle of the President of the European Council)
- @EP_President (Twitter handle of the President of the European Parliament)

If you put content on your social media accounts, please tag our social media channels:

- @social_platform (our Twitter handle)
- @Social Platform (our Facebook page)

4. Use content for your own advocacy work

Please feel free to use this content for your own advocacy work, in whatever way you see fit.

5. Useful links (EU level)

- Social Pillar
- Social Pillar Action Plan
- Annexes to the Social Pillar Action Plan
- List of the representations of the European Commission in all 27 EU Member States
- Social Platform initial reaction to the Social Pillar Action Plan

6. Contact

In case of any questions on how to lobby your government on these and other aspects of the Social Pillar and its Action Plan, you can contact [Insert name and email address of responsible colleague] at [Insert name of relevant European umbrella organisation].

Annex: Template letter

[Insert logo of your national organisation]

Dear [Insert name of responsible Minister/Prime Minister/President etc.],

Re: Your commitment to the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan

We are contacting you as the [insert name of your national organisation], member of [Insert name of your European umbrella organisation who sent you this toolkit], to call on you to **fully commit to the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, including all of its targets and sub-targets**, at the upcoming Social Summit in Porto, Portugal on 7-8 May 2021.

[Insert short definition/description of your national organisation]

We welcome the timely launch of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan as a crucial initiative to support the full and ambitious implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. This is especially relevant due to the devastating socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has only deepened existing inequalities. The full and effective implementation of the measures outlined in the Action Plan, including all quantitative targets, are indispensable to ensure no one is left behind in the EU's social recovery. Additionally, setting concrete national targets is necessary to monitor and evaluate progress made by 2030.

As such, **we call on you to adopt ambitious national targets, in line with the EU targets outlined in the Action Plan**, that make a strong contribution to jointly achieving, and exceeding, the European targets by 2030.

With regards to the targets on employment, we recommend to…

With regards to the targets on education, re-skilling and upskilling, we recommend to…

With regards to the targets on social protection, we recommend to….

Additionally, in the Action Plan, the European Commission encourages all EU Member States to organise a coordination mechanism to ensure the engagement of all relevant stakeholders at national level in implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights. **We call on you to create such a mechanism and to ensure that civil society organisations are included and fully involved in all steps of developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies, legislation and funding mechanisms** that contribute to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. As the [insert name of your national organisation], we would like to be part of this mechanism.

This is the time to take action and to demonstrate to people across [insert name of your country] that you are fully committed to building a more resilient, socially just and inclusive society for all.

We very much look forward to hearing from you and remain available for further information and consultation.

Yours sincerely,

[Name of your national organisation]