



Dear President von der Leyen,

### **Speak up for social rights in next State of the European Union**

Europeans are looking for assurances that their social rights are a priority and that more will be done at EU level to fight poverty and social exclusion. 93% of Europeans are worried about the cost of living and an ever-rising number of children and families are now living in poverty and social exclusion. These struggles must not be ignored.

Last year's State of the European Union (SOTEU) highlighted the solidarity shown by Europeans in the face of war returning to Europe. We must continue that solidarity and support civil society, social service providers, and social economy enterprises who have done so much to support those displaced by the war in Ukraine. The EU must also demonstrate that it can provide solutions for the rising cost-of-living, high energy costs and increase in poverty and deliver for everyone who calls Europe home regardless of their residence status or background.

As the largest, leading European organisation working on social issues, Social Platform unites tens of thousands of organisations and hundreds of millions of people in all their diversity in Europe and hopes to see the following included in September's SOTEU to show that the EU is listening and responding to what Europeans want, a more social and equal Europe:

**1. An EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Income** – delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan means that we need more ambition, not less. Now more than ever, Europe needs strong, adequate minimum income schemes to protect and empower persons in vulnerable situations. Yet none of the EU Member States' minimum income schemes are set above the poverty line. Considering the limited results achieved by soft law measures in 30 years, millions of people will continue to fall through the gaps unless the EU acts. A directive on adequate minimum income is the next necessary step, one already called for by the European Parliament in its resolution from March 2023. We urge you to support a Framework Directive on Adequate Minimum Income in your SOTEU address as a crucial step forward in achieving the 2030 targets.

**2. A union of equality** – the EU proclaims itself to be a global champion for human rights and equality. However, as the rights of people within the EU and of those arriving continue to be violated, the EU needs to demonstrate its ability to safeguard the rights of all people, regardless of ethnicity, race, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, migration or residence status. The EU has developed good strategies, but to understand the situation on the ground the SOTEU must call for better and disaggregated equality data and stronger monitoring and reinforcement of existing equality strategies, Action Plans and Union law. The EU must continue to take the lead by unlocking the Equal Treatment Directive, which would ensure their synergies and impact on the diverse groups that make up our union.

**3. Supporting solidarity with people displaced by war** – as the war in Ukraine continues in its second year, the SOTEU should recognise the pivotal role civil society organisations, social service providers and social economy enterprises are playing in response to the war and

should pledge more structural investment and support for those actors. This should include inviting civil society to be part of the Solidarity Platform and ensuring access to resources under the MFF for civil society organizations across the EU. The activation of the Temporary Protection Directive has shown the EU's commitment to providing regular pathways for people displaced from Ukraine. In last year's SOTEU, you said that solidarity towards Ukrainians should be the blueprint rather than the exception - it is time for Europe to show the same solidarity to all people seeking refuge.

**4. Empowering social services and social economy** – the essential services provided by civil society, not-for-profit social service providers, and social economy actors are under threat. A lack of investment, the knock-on effect of years of austerity, and unprecedented levels of inflation mean that these sectors are suffering and underfunded, shifting the burden to informal caregivers, including family members. While the EU has promoted social economy and work integration as a business model that tackles green and digital challenges, we now need a more ambitious roll out of the Social Economy Action Plan using cohesion and other funds.

**5. A European Civil Society Strategy** – the EU must recognise the essential role of civil society in shaping healthy democracies and the increasing need to protect civic space and civil society organisations. To fill the gaps of existing policies and mainstream positive practices, we call on the EU to urgently develop a Civil Society Strategy; to ensure the protection of civil society and its structured and meaningful engagement in the policy-making process, as well as bring much-needed openness and transparency.

Finally, to be a truly inclusive SOTEU, accessibility measures including sign language interpretation, live subtitles and web accessible documents must be provided to make the address as accessible as possible to people in Europe, including people with disabilities.

Yours sincerely,

Laura de Bonfils



Interim Secretary General of Social Platform

Social Platform is the largest civil society alliance fighting for social justice and participatory democracy in Europe. Consisting of 46 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. Social Platform acknowledges the financial support of the European Commission's Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) programme.