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Piotr Sadowski, President of Social Platform, stressed the timeliness of the Flagship Conference and the EU Social Summit in the context of the pandemic. People in the most vulnerable situations have suffered most during this crisis and the pandemic laid bare the fragility of our current socio-economic governance systems. He pointed out that to overcome the crisis and to build resilient societies, we need strong action and to work together, create alliances and build a better system.

Rune Halvorsen of OsloMet University, coordinator of the three-year Horizon2020 EUROSHIP project (Social Platform is one of the partners) said that the meeting of EU Heads of State and Government in Porto could not be more important in the context of the recovery and that all stakeholders need to be involved. This process must ensure that people are able to exercise and enjoy their European citizenship. He pointed out that the European Pillar of Social Rights (Social Pillar) Action Plan can help to close several existing gaps in the implementation of social rights in various Member States and in the involvement of social partners and civil society organisations in decision-making. He introduced the EUROSHIP project, which brings together Social Platform, project partners and European and national stakeholders to provide new insights into how the EU can help Member States to realise the Social Pillar principles and to examine the opportunities for people to exercise their social citizenship and influence decision-making processes. With a broad and multidimensional approach to social citizenship, the projects aims to provide concrete evidence-based policy options to help decision-makers boost social citizenship.
1. EU and Member States must ensure to reach the quantitative headline target 1 in a way that creates and fosters QUALITY employment. This means adopting bold strategies and measures as part of a just green transition and recovery, including adequate wages, job security, health and safety, life-long learning, collective bargaining and work-life balance, for all.

2. An holistic interpretation of just transition is necessary to ensure social and labour market inclusion for those who are traditionally “left behind” and most negatively affected by the green transition. EU and Member States must strengthen the integration of environmental and social policies and strategies and considerably increase the Just Transition Fund to underpin them.

**Workshop 1 recommendations:**

**Description:** This workshop reflected upon ways to create and foster sustainable and quality jobs as part of a fair, inclusive, and resilient recovery and a just transition to greener societies. The speakers brought contributions from different perspectives to the discussion and their interventions together with the questions and suggestions from the audience were fundamental for the elaboration of two policy recommendations for the Porto Summit.
Carlos Roldán Mejías, Social Policy Coordinator at SOLIDAR, moderated the event.

In his welcoming speech, Mikael Leyi, SOLIDAR’s Secretary General, introduced the concept of the event, as well as SOLIDAR’s idea of the just transition. He also highlighted the crucial momentum offered by the Porto Social Summit and the Action Plan of the Social Pillar to build a stronger Social Europe together.

Ana Carla Pereira, Cabinet Expert for European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit, set the scene by describing European Commission’s policy priorities with respect to quality employment. She mentioned initiatives at EU level that will complement the Action Plan on the Social Pillar, such as the Pay Transparency and Minimum Wage Directives, the framework that the European Commission will present concerning health and safety at work, and the proposed initiative on platform workers. She also reminded the importance of Member States’ commitment to social objectives. She concluded mentioning the extraordinary funding capacity offered by the Recovery and Resilience Facility to achieve social goals.

During the panel debate, Pedro Marques, MEP and S&D negotiator for the Just Transition Fund, stated that the just transition needs to be as ambitious in delivering in social rights, as it is in delivering in carbon-neutrality. He also mentioned the short-term measures that the US are implementing to support consumption as an example for the EU, which is focusing on long-term recovery instead. Moreover, he pointed out that in the field of social policies Member States hold the primary competence and that EU-level coordination, as well as “naming and shaming”, can help pressure them to adhere to ambitious social measures.

Second panelist, Félix Mailleux, ETUC advisor in charge of Sustainable Development and Climate Change, outlined the definitions of “quality jobs”, “green jobs” and “just transition”. In all those, the concept of decent work and life was pivotal. He also stressed the necessity for more funding under the Just Transition Fund.

Third panelist, Nadège Lharaig, Member of the Steering Group at SDG Watch Europe and Senior Policy Officer Sustainable Development & Gender Expert at EEB, highlighted the risk that the European Green Deal as it is formulated prioritises those workers that are already privileged. In fact, she noticed that “green jobs”, as meant by the European Commission, exist in sectors where male, white workers are overrepresented. She also made a point regarding the necessity to consider care work as “green work”, and to invest in this sector, which is crucial for the recovery.

Fourth panelist, Anna Sundström, Secretary General of Olof Palme International Center and SOLIDAR Board member, presented SOLIDAR’s position on the Action Plan on the Social Pillar, highlighting its shortcomings, but also reminding the importance of its endorsement by Member States. She also focused on the need to make sure that the green transition and the recovery are just and fair also beyond national and EU borders. Concerning funding for such processes, she proposed to redirect the high investments allocated for military expenditure.
Fifth panelist, Sebastiano Sabato, Senior Researcher at European Social Observatory, explained that the Green Deal offers a narrow interpretation of the Just Transition that does not include the notion of quality employment. He noticed that a broader interpretation is needed. To this end, the implementation of the Social Pillar is fundamental, but stronger governance arrangements and more funding are necessary.

Two questions from the participants sparked the conversation in this session. One concerned the role of the Action Plan in making sure that older workers are not negatively impacted by the transition, while the other focused on the relation between European social and digital policies.

To summarise the content of the workshop, Andrea Casamenti, Just Transition Project Officer at SOLIDAR, showed a visual representation of a roadmap (below) composed of the key messages from the speakers. The map will ideally lead to a just green transition and fair recovery.

Anna Krózser, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator at EAPN, concluded the event with a clear message: poor people must not pay for the green transition; instead, they should actively benefit from it. She called on institutions to identify, also through social and civil dialogue, which groups are negatively impacted by or excluded from the just transition and fair recovery processes and to act to leave no one behind.
Workshop 2 recommendations:

1. Every EU policy has to make sure that it contributes to a just green transition and to the implementation of a sustainable digital infrastructure and digital skills; these are key to inclusion and cohesion. Life-long and life-wide learning is a continuous process and a human right which needs a holistic approach to curricula, methodology and evaluation and which hears the voices of all stakeholders: students, learners, parents, employers, civil society, and democratic institutions.

2. Every EU policy has to make sure it contributes to a just green transition and has to include a life-long learning dimension. Life-long learning cannot be reduced to employability; to maintain and enhance democratic societies we must include the development of active democratic citizenship. Transversal competences are mainly acquired through non-formal and informal learning, social action and volunteering. Member States must guarantee that these competences are validated in cooperation with civil society and employers' organisations, chambers and other responsible actors.
Report:

Life-long and life-wide learning consists mostly of informal learning and non-formal learning, especially through social action and volunteering, and it has become even more crucial after the COVID-19 pandemic; this had demonstrated differences we experience regarding education policies both at national and EU level and their implementations.

On the one hand, we realised that most of the trainers were not ready to use digital tools and parents and trainers had a lack of communication and collaboration skills. Trainers need support regarding digital green skills and authorities have to provide that support. In addition, the role of parents should be recognised by national and European institutions, since parents are the primary educators and during the pandemic, they have been on the frontline. On the other hand, digital literacy has become more important for adults. Life-long learning has to be thought of as a continuous process and requires a holistic approach that includes the design of its curriculum, methods and evaluation and that engages all actors: students, parents, trainers, civil society organisations, employers and democratic institutions. Public authorities thus should recognise the role of civil society organisations. Education has to be accessible for everyone. We have seen that most training is focused on the labour market, but it is an undeniable fact that life-long learning cannot be reduced to gaining skills for employability. Last but not least, the role of volunteering fosters the way young people engage with others and acquire green, life-long and digital skills. Member States must guarantee that the competences gained throughout life-long and life-wide learning processes are validated in cooperation with civil society, employer organisations and educational institutions.

Therefore, we must ensure that every EU and national policy contributes to a just green transition and to the implementation of a sustainable digital infrastructure and digital skills. These are key to inclusion and cohesion and the development of just and democratic societies.

The workshop produced two recommendations which have been presented during the Flagship conference led by the Social Platform as an official side event related to the upcoming Social Summit under the Portuguese EU Presidency.

Video recording of the workshop.
Workshop 3: Reducing inequalities from the first years of life: the role of early childhood development

Organised by

Description:
The workshop mobilised strategic stakeholders, such as policy and decision–makers, civil society organisations, professionals and interested parties to highlight the importance of early childhood development for providing equitable solutions to health and social inequalities and advance ‘social Europe’. It provided clear policy messages and recommendations on what is needed to tackle systemic disparities affecting vulnerable children such as Roma and Travellers, children with disabilities, migrant and refugee children, children at risk of entering, or in, alternative care, and those living in extreme poverty.

Workshop 3 recommendations:

1. A strong social Europe starts with upholding the rights of all children regardless of their social, administrative (e.g. migrants) or other status from their earliest years. In implementing the Social Pillar Action Plan, Member States and EU decision-makers must set ambitious targets to reduce child poverty and tackle persistent health and social inequalities disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups by investing in early childhood development so that every child has a fair start in life.

2. Member States and EU decision-makers must urgently address levels of social exclusion, poverty and discrimination faced by children from vulnerable groups from early childhood. This requires an assessment of needs, including disaggregated data on poverty and exclusion among children under the age of 6, and action to address systemic disparities in access to social rights.
Radost Zaharieva, Policy Coordinator for Health inequalities at European Public Health Alliance opened the discussion by reiterating the importance of early childhood development as a major social determinant of health and a component of health equity. Moreover, she raised some questions about the recently launched Social Pillar and its capacity to tackle the growing health and social divide. Jana Hainsworth, Secretary General at Eurochild and Mihaela Ionescu, Program Director, International Step-by-Step Association introduced the First Years First Priority campaign, launched in December 2020, which intends to ensure every child has a fair start in life. They emphasized the role of the Social Pillar Action Plan, and the Child Guarantee in increasing governments' attention to, and public investment in, quality early childhood development services, ensuring early intervention. Maureen Piggot, Treasurer and Board Member of the European Disability Forum and Barbara Norris, self-advocate, underlined the importance of reducing child poverty and exclusion among children with disabilities through integrated measures for early childhood development. Barbara Norris shared her personal experience trying to access early childhood development services. Alyna C. Smith, Senior Advocacy Officer, Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (Picum) shed light on the status of undocumented children and the administrative as well as financial barriers they face.

In the second panel, moderated by Géraldine Libreau, Policy Officer – Early childhood education and care, Directorate-General Education and Culture, European Commission, the speakers focused on the EU's role in promoting children's rights and social inclusion of children from vulnerable groups. Lavinia Banu Policy Officer at the Directorate-General Justice and Consumers, European Commission, presented the measures within the 2020 Roma Strategic Framework which aim to tackle discrimination and exclusion of Roma children from the earliest age of their lives. Irma Borde from the Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion European Commission, provided insight into the European Child Guarantee and its potential for tackling child poverty and exclusion by investing in early childhood. Dragoș Pîslaru, MEP, Vice-Chair of the MEP Intergroup for Children's Rights concluded the discussion by emphasising that all policies have an impact on children. Many packages like the Recovery and Resilience Facility and NextGenerationEU did not even include the word ‘children’ in their first version, so it requires more efforts to ensure that these broader regulations are designed and implemented also with children in mind. The workshop produced two recommendations which have been presented during the Flagship conference led by the Social Platform as an official side event related to the upcoming Social Summit under the Portuguese EU Presidency.
Description:
The social economy Action Plan will be the most important tool of the European Commission to support Europe’s social economy in the years to come. This workshop identified European social economy actors’ recommendations for the upcoming Action Plan. Given its broad scope, this workshop approached the Action Plan from different perspectives: cooperativism and job creation, from the perspective of work integration social enterprises, the circular economy, the role of the social economy in the recovery process and youth involvement, and Roma socio-economic empowerment. This multitude of topics reflected the diversity of Europe’s social economy and shed light on the many challenges the Action Plan needed to address in synergy with other EU initiatives, such as the Social Pillar Action Plan.

Workshop 4 recommendations:

1. The Social Economy Action Plan must have real impact on the support and promotion of the social economy, its actors and their economic model. It should make strong links with the existing EU policies enabling green, fair, circular transition in the post-COVID economic recovery. While embracing social economy enterprises, activism, and all sectors of the economy, it should also prioritise the social and professional inclusion of disadvantaged people, especially young people and ethnic minorities, including the Roma.

2. Adequate funding encouraging accessible education and training opportunities to achieve social justice and equality are fundamental. For the adequate implementation of the Action Plan, public authorities at all levels (national, regional and local) should guarantee an active participation of all stakeholders. In order to provide an effective impetus for the social economy, the European Commission need, in parallel to the Action Plan, to also consider social economy enterprises, their specificities and their needs, in all other policies and regulations that concern them such as the Industry Strategy, taxation policies, the SME Strategy etc.
The workshop brought together different actors of the European Social Economy and beyond to discuss the main issues that the Social Economy Action Plan will need to deliver.

Gabriel Bastos, the Portuguese Secretary of State for Social Security gave a first intervention. He introduced the work of the Portuguese Council Presidency and reiterated the importance of the Action Plan in European Social Policy. He discussed the potential of the Social Economy in fighting inequalities, creating jobs, providing general interest services, whilst being resilient to the current crisis. This was followed by Patrizia Bussi, Vice-President of Social Economy Europe, who reiterated that a common understanding of the Social Economy across Europe is crucial, both to raise the visibility of the Social Economy, and to ensure access to financial tools and markets.

The panel debate moderated by Mila Shamku, Management Committee Member of the Social Platform. Aziza Yussupova, Policy Officer at ENSIE, introduced the work that work integration social enterprises (WISE) are doing in upskilling and including socially and professionally disadvantaged persons. For the Action Plan, she highlighted four main WISEs’ challenges related to the legislation, access to markets, access to finance and representation in the European Semester process, which the Action Plan will need to address. The Secretary General of CECOP, Diana Dovgan, called for the Action Plan to include social economy actors in all sectors, with worker and social cooperatives being an important example. The Social Economy Action Plan therefore cannot stand isolated, but other EU policies such as the Industry Strategy, the Skills Agenda, the SME strategy, and the Social Pillar Action plan need to accompany it. Julija Kekstaite, Policy Officer at RREUSE, discussed the options of the Action Plan to support the establishment of a circular economy. The European Commission needs to mainstream support for the social and circular economy in all the EU policy tools and to raise awareness for its potentials. Jan Mayrhofer of the European Youth Forum argued that the European Union will need to implement significant changes to its economic model. The Action Plan therefore cannot only strengthen ‘Social Europe’, but must foster economic system change. Amana Ferro of ERGO Network, the European Roma Grassroots organisation, advocated for the Social Economy Action Plan to actively fight discrimination and racism against Roma. She said that the Action Plan must prioritise social goals over financial gains, as well as include specific support measures for Roma in Europe.

At the end of the workshop, the speakers and audience discussed their joint key recommendations for the Social Economy Action Plan.
In a pre-recorded video message, Commissioner Schmit stressed the need for a strong social Europe and that the pandemic, while giving even more value to the EU's social model, also highlighted its shortcomings. The Commissioner pointed out that citizens expect action and that he was looking forward to hearing civil society organisations' voices at the Porto Summit. He assured participants that he will continue rallying all forces around the Social Pillar, which will be central to the EU's recovery. In his view, the recovery, green and digital transitions need to be driven by social rights and cohesion so that everyone benefits. He pointed out that the Social Pillar Action Plan is ambitious, contains a range of specific proposals and its targets are concrete. He stressed that implementing the Social Pillar relies on all actors and invited the European Council to endorse the targets, calling on them to be ambitious in defining their way to reach them. He also said that civil society, together with social partners should be actively involved in national coordination mechanisms of the Social Pillar. In his concluding remarks, the Commissioner said that the Porto Summit must put us firmly on track towards a fairer, more inclusive and more resilient Europe in 2030.

The panel discussion was moderated by

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**Nicolas Schmit**

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Video recording of the Commissioner's address.
Joost Korte said that the main outcome of the Porto summit should be a clear commitment at the highest level of the EU towards a green, digital and fair recovery. Despite confusion and misunderstandings about EU’s role in social field, he hoped that the Porto Summit would deliver an endorsement of the three headline targets. He characterised Porto as the start of a process to re-ignite the European Semester process. He stressed the importance of the support and involvement of civil society organisations in this process – especially important in EU Members States where a strong call for action is needed. While much can be done in Brussels, the real changes need to happen in cities and companies, with the involvement of social partners and civil society. This is important particularly because EU competence is limited and the institutions, while doing their best, cannot advance much without the support of civil society organisations. He also supported the call for a regular EU Social Summit.

Piotr Sadowski outlined Social Platform’s reactions to and recommendations for the Action Plan. He pointed out that the current challenges are interdependent and require balanced and mutually supportive macroeconomic, fiscal, employment, social and environmental measures. Social Platform advocates for changes in the EU’s socioeconomic governance system and an overarching EU post-2020 strategy. He expressed disappointment that there are only three headline targets, as these are crucial to measure progress made and it is a missed opportunity not to have measurable targets on all principles of the Social Pillar. He called on Member States to endorse these targets and commit to set their own ambitious national targets to ensure that the EU jointly at least achieves, and hopefully exceeds the EU targets. He stressed that more needs to be done on social protection to guarantee a life in dignity for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and that Social Platform calls for an EU Framework Directive on Adequate Minimum Income. He pointed out the lack of employment sub-targets for youths and other groups in vulnerable situations. Employment rates should not be increased at all costs and all measures need to have the assurance of quality employment at their core. He underlined the need for an EU Strategy for Social Services to support Member States in developing a resilient ecosystem for social services, contributing to building a quality, affordable, available, accessible, and resilient social infrastructure in all Member States. He expressed regret there is no reference to strengthening of civil dialogue. Civil society organisations, with crucial expertise and knowledge of lived realities of people, including those in the most vulnerable situations, are key stakeholders.
Minister Godinho stressed that the crisis has caused a significant increase in poverty, unemployment and inequalities and that there is an expectation and a call by civil society organisations and society on EU stakeholders to take decisive action. Outlining the expectations and goals of the Porto Summit, she pointed out that the Summit would bring together all stakeholders on the same stage and put the Social Pillar Action Plan at the centre of discussions. She said the Summit must deliver concrete measures and goals, and drive momentum for Europe working as one to swiftly and decisively address the challenges of the crisis. She expressed hope that stakeholders would adopt a different approach to tackling the crisis – investment instead of austerity – and that the Summit would set the scene for a common ambition. In her view, the Porto Summit would be a unique opportunity to help the recovery, with the social dimension at its core. She said this was a unique opportunity to reinvigorate the European social model and to turn the principles of the Social Pillar into concrete measures and a reality. She said there was an increased interest in more regular Social Summit and a growing interest in a social Europe model from a number of stakeholders.

Minister Kralj underlined the importance of discussions with civil society organisations and acknowledged that not all vulnerable situations can be reflected in statistics. He expressed gratitude to Social Platform for its efforts to make the Social Pillar principles a reality and reminded participants that Slovenia supported the Social Pillar from the very start and was calling for genuine upward convergence in the EU. He said that effective Social Pillar implementation in the context of population ageing, digitalisation and the green transition must be part of all discussions and contribute to improving living and working conditions, and all stakeholders need to invest in it. Reflecting on the priorities of the Slovenian Presidency, he assured participants that they will take into account global challenges and address them in a fair way. The Slovenian Presidency will focus on quality work for life quality of all generations: health and safety at work, skills through the life-cycle and measures for better work-life balance. He echoed previous speakers in that the Porto Summit would be an important open dialogue with all stakeholders and would need to include civil society organisations and social partners. He also promised to build on the work of the Portuguese Presidency.
Luca Visentini described the proclamation of the Social Pillar as a game changer that puts the social dimension back at the centre of discussions, and praised the social partners and civil society organisations that had been involved. He pointed out the lack of implementation of the Social Pillar at national level, the lack of upward social convergence, and the absence of fundamental investment in services that added to the social crisis during the pandemic. While agreeing that the Social Pillar Action Plan is a good start, it is not ambitious enough and the principles still need to be translated on the ground. He stressed the need for a radical reform of economic governance. He also expressed concerns about some Member States voicing skepticism, questioning the EU’s legitimacy to be working on some policy areas, and a lack of ambition. At the same time, there was cause for optimism about the commitments of the European Council conclusions and the joint declaration. He pointed out that the commitments should result in all stakeholders putting in place actions that comply with the targets. He called for the social dimension to be embedded in revised economic governance and fiscal rules, and an end to austerity. Transition should not only be about skills, it must also mobilise massive finances to create quality jobs in the communities most affected. Member States must ensure social and civil dialogue, guaranteeing that they work in practice and have a voice and influence.