Cluster Social Europe
Final Recommendations

Introduction

The following recommendations stem from the contribution of 20+ European Civil Society Organisations that share a vision for a socially and environmentally just European Union, as a precondition for achieving an inclusive, sustainable and just future of Europe.

Achieving this vision requires transformative measures in multiple policy areas: a Sustainable Economic Model, the promotion of Equal Opportunities and the implementation of Fair Working Conditions as well as the provision of Social Protection for All.

The recommendations that the reader can find below were based on the priorities identified by the EU CSOs that participated in the CSOs Convention as well as the national CSOs that responded to the survey circulated during the Going Local phase of the Convention.

This report is therefore the result of the collective intelligence of all these organisations, whose representativeness and ability to cooperate have to be recognised by the institutions at the EU and national level by establishing and implementing the Civil Dialogue and considering Civil Society Organisations active agents for social progress. Civil Society Organisations cater to the needs for diverse communities across Europe on a daily basis, filling the gap left by the lack of social investment, and promoting access to equal opportunities, inclusion, participation and justice for all, and notably the most marginalised communities and individuals.

The EU is undergoing multiple and intertwined societal and environmental crises that must lead to transformative policies tackling inequalities, environmental challenges, social and racial injustice and the intersection of discriminations that today prevent the many from enjoying rights and possibilities for self and collective emancipation.

Section 1 | A Sustainable Economic Model

Europe consumes more and more, while undergoing an era of mass extinction and rapid climate change acceleration. In the EU as a whole, we live as if there were 2.8 Earths, significantly overshooting
planetary boundaries while not meeting EU’s own social aims, as indicated by the EU’s Social Scoreboard - for example, in terms of unmet healthcare needs or the gender gap in employment. Moreover, the EU is currently far away in achieving its environmental objectives for 2030 and 2050.

Growth at all costs gets us into a situation where non-profitable (from a market perspective) resources such as care or ecosystem services are regarded as infinite and stretchable resources steadily available for production. In this context, there is a constant downward pressure on labour rights and wages, and increased precariousness of the workforce.

Vision

A new economic model in Europe which is sustainable because environmentally and socially just. The economy is much more than a narrow GDP number: it is the entire ‘realm in which people produce, distribute and consume products and services that meet their wants and needs’, regardless of whether or not this is done via the specific mechanism of markets. A socially and ecologically just economy allows for a good life for all, leaving no one behind and enhancing gender, environmental, social and global justice, and fostering peace rather than conflict. It overcomes past injustices and structural discrimination. It ensures that economic and political decision-making power is dispersed in democratic ways. It ensures that human economic activity is embedded in nature.

Recommendations

- Introduce post-growth strategies by
  1. Adopting indicators fit to measure the wellbeing of people beyond the limits of GDP and taking into account planetary boundaries
  2. Decoupling employment and social security systems from economic growth, designing the subsequent welfare policies in a way that takes account of socio-ecological needs
  3. Building a carbon-neutral, circular, non-toxic and inclusive economy by promoting solidarity economic practices, fostering social entrepreneurship and increasing the agency of the consumer
  4. Redefining international trade as a tool that is relied upon only if it contributes significantly to the wellbeing for all, and respecting the limits of our ecosystems
  5. Ensuring that decent labour migration and human mobility form part of broader efforts to reform sectors to be economically, environmentally and socially sustainable
  6. Adopting the policy recommendations described in the following sections
● **Promote equality and a feminist economy by:**

1. Introducing gender budgeting for public finance and economic policies to realise women’s rights and gender equality at all levels and in all public policy areas
2. Recognising paid and unpaid care work as essential components of the economy and for the wellbeing of the people and the planet, and enshrining care work within a human rights framework;
3. Investing in the provision of public services and supporting individuals and families to access affordable and qualitative domestic and care services;
4. Implementing progressive tax schemes benefitting women* and the well-being of all

● **Foster multi-stakeholder partnerships by developing measures and incentives to** support the cooperation among all economic actors, including civil society and philanthropic organisations.

### Section 2 | Equal Opportunities

A gender-based approach and measurable targets should underpin all the following recommendations, to ensure equal opportunities and thorough monitoring and follow-up processes.

All recommendations promote an intersectional approach to address social and economic inequalities.

**Education, training and lifelong learning**

**Preamble**

The [European Pillar of Social Rights](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/) establishes the right and the equality of access to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning: in light of the emerging [European Education Area](https://europa.eu/), specific measures need to be taken to ensure the realisation of this principle.

**Vision**
A sustainable future of Europe at times of fast-paced societal changes can only be achieved by ensuring universal access to quality education. This includes strong investments and the recognition of non-formal, informal, lifewide and lifelong learning along with formal education, creating more complementarity and continuity between learning opportunities to promote EU fundamental values, equity, social cohesion and active citizenship.

**Recommendations**

- Expand the right to education to the right to lifelong learning for all
- Promote the whole-community approach to facilitate avenues for cooperation between the formal, non-formal and informal education providers in policy-making and implementation
- Establish quality assurance systems for all types of learning (formal, non-formal and informal), and facilitate recognition of certifications, skills and prior learning. Pay particular attention to challenges facing specific groups of people (e.g. migrants)
- Invest to close the digital educational gap, in skills and infrastructure
- Defend and promote the EU fundamental values by including academic freedom within the annual EU Rule of law report
- Include value-driven education in all types of learning
- Establish a European Agency for Citizenship Education
- Ensure that the right to quality and inclusive education, includes the right for everyone to access comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights education [EG1] based on the values of equality, mutuality, respect, autonomy, critical-thinking, non-dominance, non-violence as well as personal and social responsibility
- Tackle social and labour market transformations, including the green and digital transitions, by investing in transversal and soft skills and creating more complementarity and continuity of learning opportunities throughout one’s life

**Youth Rights & Intergenerational Solidarity**

**Preamble**

The European Year of Youth offers an opportunity to tackle in a comprehensive manner the existing age-based discriminations that today undermine access to basic rights including social ones, and particularly for the youth with disadvantaged backgrounds, furthering unequal access to opportunities in life.
Vision

Young people should be recognised as a particular demographic group with specific needs. A rights-based approach to developing policies for youth should strive to actively promote the autonomy of young people as well as their full participation in society. Young people have the right to a positive journey from education to further education, employment and training and equality of access in both urban and rural areas. They need access to quality jobs and the equivalent access to social protection mechanisms as other age groups.

Recommendations

1. Establish an intergenerational pact in the EU: social protection systems at the national level to balance the spending across older and younger generations
2. End the sub-minimum rates for youth minimum wages: young people should, at the very least, be entitled the same minimum wage as other workers
3. Make social protection systems, such as minimum income schemes, more accessible to young people who are often ineligible to apply
4. Support the access of young people to housing
5. Ensure access to quality jobs to young people, who are over-represented in precarious forms of work, undermining their right to quality employment and a life free from poverty, and regulate at EU level new forms of precarious employment such as Platform Work
6. Ensure equal access to pension rights for current and younger generations alike, with special attention to the gender pension gap
7. Ensure access of undocumented young people to basic services and rights (including after age 18), and have clear and accessible pathways to regularise their status, to ensure that they do not become subject to poverty, and that they have access to equal opportunities.
8. Reinforce the Youth Guarantee through adequate investment to ensure better access to further education, training, apprenticeships or work
9. Ban unpaid internships across the EU via a legal instrument and a minimum standard for quality internships adopted and constantly monitored at the EU level
10. Establish a European framework for financial support to young parents to ensure equal opportunities for building families to current and future generations alike across European territories.
Gender Equality

Preamble

The past years have seen a strong backlash on women's rights. Women*'s most fundamental rights have been threatened and even restricted amid a growing political and social hostility. A backward trend has been observed resulting in women being deprived of rights they were previously able to enjoy, such as Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. The European Union is no exception to this backlash.

Vision

For a sustainable and inclusive Europe, gender equality must be put at the heart of the undergoing environmental, economic and social transformation. The economy must shift to an inclusive and intersectional feminist approach based on equality, well-being, social justice, and care as a universal collective need and responsibility of all genders.

Recommendations

1. Create the conditions for an ‘equal-earner-equal-carer model’ to move away from the ‘male-breadwinner-model’: promote work-life balance, eliminate gender-based discriminations in access to and within the labour market, combat the pay and pension gap, and increase the presence of women* in leadership positions across all sectors
2. Prevent and address all forms of gender-based violence, online and offline, through strong EU legal, policy and financial actions
3. Enable a sustainable women*’s movement by securing sustainable funding for the associations who are essential services providers deeply impacted by the pandemic
Section 3 | Fair Working Conditions for All

Preamble

The first headline target of the EPSR Action Plan aims at increasing the EU employment rate to 78% by 2030, as a way to recover from the pandemic and foster a stronger Social Europe[1]. However, for many people, employment no longer is a viable protection against poverty and the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened pre-existing inequalities in the labour markets: in-work poverty increased from 8.2% in 2005 to 9% just before the pandemic in 2019[2] and was exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis. In-work poverty mostly affects workers who face discrimination and exclusion from key rights and social safety nets such as low-qualified and atypical workers, the self-employed, women*, young and older persons, ethnic minorities, migrants and persons with disabilities, as precariousness of working conditions is among the main factors that ease the spread of in-work poverty[3].

Vision

Chapter II of the Social Pillar on fair working conditions should be concretely and ambitiously implemented across the EU, notably in view of the epochal changes implied by both the digital and green transitions. The recommendations listed below aim at supporting this and they should be underpinned by fair and redistributive fiscal policies and a sustainable feminist economic model. With this objective, the EU Care Strategy is a crucial initiative which should include investment in care services and provisions, decent pay, work-life balance policies for all genders, and value the care sector in Europe.

Recommendations

1. **Adequate minimum wages for all**[4]
   
   - Never below 60% of the national median wage and 50% of national average wage - a benchmark to be regularly tested for its adequacy in each Member State and updated
   - To be supplemented by government transfers (e.g. child allowances, disability or housing benefits) until it reaches an adequate level in all Member States
   - To be applied to all sectors of the economy and to all workers
   - It should complement and support collective bargaining in every EU to reduce the risk of in-work poverty[5]
● The fight for adequate wages should always be also a fight against undeclared work and exploitation

2. **Quality Jobs**

Job creation is not enough to tackle poverty and improve living conditions of people in the EU. **Quality and inclusive jobs are pivotal for the wellbeing of society and a truly Social Europe.** Quality jobs need to be based on the following criteria:

● Secure working conditions, equal pay, and access to social protection and pensions, regardless of the employment or residence status

● Adequate work-life balance for all workers

● The promotion of democracy at work

● A safe and healthy working environment for all workers. Workers’ mental health and wellbeing is a crucial dimension of such conditions

● Anti-discrimination and racism policies

● Effective labour monitoring, complaints and redress mechanisms\(^6\) and accessible for all workers, regardless of their employment status

● Increase and improve labour inspections

3. **Portability of Social Rights**

● Portability of Social Rights for mobile and migrant workers within the EU should be guaranteed to ensure universal social protection across Europe

● Workers of migrant origin should also have the portability of social rights (e.g. pension) if and when they return to their country of origin or move to another non-EU country
Section 4 | Social Protection

Social protection is the safety net that each individual should be able to count on for a life free from poverty and in dignity. CSOs have identified five key components for Social Protection that the CoFoE should address: adequate minimum income; social services; housing; childcare; long-term care; health.

An adequate minimum income

Preamble

A minimum income is one of the last defenses against poverty and inequalities. A minimum income that meets the standards of a decent life is an investment rather than a cost – and for many it’s the life-line needed to not slip into poverty. Even though the harsh realities and consequences of poverty are well-known, almost no EU country provides adequate levels of minimum income and gaps in coverage persist. This political choice leads to devastating consequences for individuals and their families, and the need to make difficult choices, such as heating the apartment or having a cooked meal for the family.

Vision

Leaving the responsibility of setting an adequate minimum income to EU countries has not brought about the drastic change people living in poverty need to see, which is why we are calling for EU action and a Directive on Minimum Income to set legally binding standards on how to ensure an adequate minimum income for those in need.

Recommendations

An EU framework directive on Minimum Income should set legally binding standards for national minimum income systems in order for those to be:

1. **Adequate**: national at-risk of poverty thresholds are good starting points to calculate the adequacy of minimum income. However, those need to be cross-checked with the actual costs of goods and services in a country to ensure people will really be able to afford a decent life.
2. **Accessible**: minimum income must be accessible to everyone in need and be available as long as it is needed for.

A flagship initiative of
3. **Enabling**: minimum income needs to be linked with access to quality and affordable services and labour market integration and quality employment for those able to work.

**Affordable and accessible social services**

**Preamble**

Social services are central to the European Social Model and key to ensure the rights and principles enshrined in the EPSR become a reality for all.

**Vision**

With the economic and social crisis likely to continue in the months and years to come, the need for quality social services to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, rising inflation, and support a sustainable recovery is continuing to increase. It is therefore crucial to set the right ecosystem for building-up the continuity, sustainability and resilience of social service provision for all in the EU.

**Recommendations**

4. Develop common EU quality standards on social services, rooted in a human rights-based approach and with a strong focus on social justice and equality in their accessibility
5. Create the right public funding and investment conditions for social services to thrive
6. Unlock the job creation potential of the social services care sector across Europe by improving the attractiveness of jobs, labour rights, working conditions, collective bargaining, career paths, decent labour migration pathways, also when care is provided in the home
7. Improve the recognition of formal and informal care work
8. Develop and implement policies fostering an equal sharing of care work between women and men
9. Support the digitalisation of social services

**Access to quality and affordable housing**

**Preamble**

While housing is a fundamental right, staying safe at home is not an option for the around 700,000 people sleeping rough in Europe every night. Europe’s housing situation is alarming: in 2018 for example,
around 10% of the population lived in households that spent 40% or more of their equivalised disposable income on housing.

**Recommendations**

10. Set clear targets and actions for the elimination of homelessness
11. Invest in and facilitate access to public housing
12. De-criminalise landlords, organisations and individuals providing shelter and assistance to undocumented migrants
13. Facilitate the transition to energy efficiency for low-income households
14. Ensure equal access to the housing market and housing costs that are proportionate to household incomes
15. Strengthen the rights of tenants

---

**Childcare and support to children**

**Preamble**

The availability, accessibility, and affordability of childcare services are important factors for both the children and the parents having care responsibilities. Despite the Barcelona targets set by the European Council in 2002, children suffering from social exclusion still do not benefit from an equal access to these services, due among other things to high costs, lack of places and discriminatory access in law and/or practice.

**Vision**

Provoking the closing of formal care facilities, the Covid-19 pandemic strengthened inequalities between children and can have a long-term impact on their development and well-being.

**Recommendations**

16. Promote the access to affordable childcare services for all children and families
17. Encourage the development of formal childcare services responding to family’s needs
18. Foster the professionalisation of childminders to guarantee the quality of the education and care provided to children
19. Identify and eliminate legal barriers obstructing access to formal childcare services

---

A flagship initiative of CIVIL SOCIETY EUROPE
Long-term care

Preamble

Whilst the fragmentation of health and social care services already has a strong impact on our welfare systems, the growing share of people aged 65 years or older in the EU population, from 20.3% in 2019 to 30.3% in 2070 questions both their sustainability and efficiency \[7\]. In many cases ageing threatens the equal enjoyment of human rights by older people who do not have the ability to decide between home and residential care. The lack of coordination between those services has a tremendous impact on the financial effectiveness of our social protection systems since residential care is often more expensive than homecare \[8\].

Vision

Accessing affordable and quality long-term care (LTC) is a right for all people across the life cycle and a significant component to ensuring a socially just, equal and inclusive society that leaves no one behind.

Recommendations

20. Adopt a rights-based approach and place autonomy at the centre of LTC policies\[9\]
21. Develop coordinated care approaches between social and health care
22. Ensure EU action on LTC aligns with the principles of the Social Pillar, is based on the principle of non-discrimination, and is informed by ongoing dialogue with social partners, civil society organisations and users of LTC services
23. Establish strong links between LTC services and the EU budget, including the EU’s recovery funds
24. Ensure EU action on LTC not only recognises the contribution of mobile and migrant care workers but takes concrete action to link quality of care with quality work

Health

Preamble

Health belongs to the supporting competences of the EU, which can only support, coordinate or complement the action of the Member States to ensure the accessibility, effectiveness, and resilience of their health systems.
Recommendations

25. Boost funds and resources for health in the EU
   1. Re-establish an independent, sizeable and integrated health programme within the EU budget
   2. Increase financial resources allocated to the health portfolio within the Multi-annual Financial Framework

26. Prioritise common health challenges and health system strengthening for the EU research and innovation agenda

27. Establish Health-in-all-Policies as the new normal in policymaking; prioritise and ensure systematic health impact assessment of EU policies

28. Provide EU citizens with an equal and comprehensive access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Services, including abortion healthcare

29. Implement the right to health enshrined in the EU Charter by defining its basic elements every European shall enjoy without prejudice and with equal conditions

30. Implement the right to health enshrined in the EU Charter by defining its basic elements every European shall enjoy without prejudice and with equal conditions
A NEW MACROECONOMIC GOVERNANCE FOR EUROPE

The previously illustrated recommendations imply a reform of the macroeconomic governance of the EU, including of the European Semester process. Such a reform should include:

- The design and implementation of new flexibility rules and guidelines within a **Sustainability and Wellbeing Pact** as replacement of the Stability and Growth Pact to lay the foundation for a wellbeing economy that tackles inequalities and environmental protection.
- The adoption of **indicators fit to measure the wellbeing of people** beyond the limits of GDP, taking into account planetary boundaries, and coherently adapting the Country Specific Recommendations to prioritise environmental, social, racial and gender justice goals.
- The enhancement of the role of education in the European Semester and notably within the social scoreboard, encouraging increased public investment in education in particular to increase inclusiveness, and recognising its multiple purposes.
- The promotion of the social and economic rights set out in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.

---


[3] Luca Ratti (2020) In-work poverty in times of pandemic:  


[6] See also EFFAT, Towards Inclusion and Equal Treatment for all Mobile and Migrant Workers, June 2021


[9] As outlined in the recent Council conclusions adopted by the German and Portuguese presidencies on 9 October 2020 and 12 March 2021 respectively, and in the 2018 report of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency.

[EG1] Based on the values of equality, mutuality, respect, autonomy, critical-thinking, non-dominate, non-violence as well as personal and social responsibility