

EFEE STATEMENT ON THE ACTION PLAN TO IMPLEMENT THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

20/11/2020

The European Pillar of Social Rights, which was introduced during the Gothenburg Summit (2017), is one of the most fundamental initiatives to shape the European socio-economic dimension in recent history. The commitment of the European Commission to uphold and implement the values enshrined in this document were reinforced by the Political Guidelines of the Von der Leyen Commission, who presented their policy aim to present an Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights in 2021.

As education employers representing over 50 organisations in 22 European countries, the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) firmly believes that both education and social dialogue play a pivotal role in creating a fair, resilient and sustainable European Union that leaves no one behind. This is furthermore reflected in the prominent role that these two sectors take up in the European Pillar of Social Rights, as Principles 1 and 8 respectively. As the digital and green transitions are forcing more people than ever to upskill or reskill and unemployment numbers keep rising throughout Europe due to the recent pandemic, the importance of the education and training sector as well as social dialogue in tackling these issues cannot be overstated. It is therefore crucial that the Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights uses the momentum that this unprecedented crisis has given us and truly takes action in these sectors that will help Europe on its road to recovery.

Taking this into consideration, EFEE urges the European Commission to take into account the following key priorities when developing the Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights:

1. Education (Principle 1)

- Prioritize **access to quality and inclusive education and training** as well as lifelong learning at the heart of this action plan, as this sector will play a pivotal part in realising the goals set out in it. In this regard, it is crucial that we work through the **European Semester** as a means to monitor the Member States through clear education benchmarks, that are ambitious and holistic yet achievable. This approach would make it possible to develop tailored measures, via the country-specific recommendations, to tackle each particular challenge in the Member State as the solution can never be a one-size-fits-all method. We furthermore deem it crucial that the European social partners in education are involved in this process in a meaningful way, so as to ensure the feasibility of these benchmarks.
- Ensure **adequate and targeted funding opportunities**, which are easily accessible to education and training providers, as well as highlight the financial tools that are already available, including the Erasmus+ Programme, the European Social Fund+, the European Regional Development Fund, InvestEU, ReactEU, etc. Additionally, there is a clear need for an annual breakdown of available allocations for education and training in each Member State, to be compiled on the basis of

objective and transparent parameters and criteria in the funding distribution system. Long-term investments in this sector are absolutely necessary for the implementation of this action plan to be successful and should therefore be seen as a common good, not as a cost.

- Promote stronger cooperation as well as **deeper exchange of best practices** between Member States and their education and training systems to support a cohesive and unified education dimension. In tackling the twin transitions, the Commission should facilitate collaboration opportunities between Member States with a view to enhancing peer and mutual learning.
- Develop the **attractiveness of the teaching profession** by investing in the professionalisation and diverse career pathways of teachers, leaders and other staff working in education and training institutions at all education levels.
- Include **civic education and transversal skills** related to the ecological and digital transition as well as with the world of work, into the curriculum of especially the early/late levels of education. It has never been more crucial to implement a holistic perspective on education that aims at preparing active and responsible citizens who are aware of their rights and preserve principles of democracy, solidarity, equality, and non-discrimination, especially during a crisis situation. Having this in mind, we deem it of paramount importance that teachers are furthermore trained and supported in helping children acquire the necessary skills and attitudes that will allow them to become critical citizens of the European Union.

2. Social dialogue (Principle 8)

- Promote social dialogue at EU-level as an effective tool by facilitating the **structural and active participation of social partners** in the European policy-making process. The Covid-19 pandemic has created an unexpected and unprecedented new momentum to invigorate the social dialogue process at the EU-level and meaningfully involve the social partners in Europe's road to recovery. We urge the Commission to take a dual approach on this matter. On the one hand, the links between cross-sectoral and sectoral social dialogue as well as EU-level and national level need to be more fostered and facilitated. On the other hand, adequate, timely and qualitative consultation of sectoral social partners needs to be ensured.
- Ensure the **autonomy of social partners** at national and European level. Trust, formal and timely consultation with the social partners as well as support through robust EU-funding is a prerequisite for a well-functioning social dialogue process. Furthermore, the independence of social dialogue and social partners from the national government and political influence is essential, to fully represent the interest of workers and employers alike.
- Ensure that social partners can rely on **adequate dedicated funding**, which is not solely based on projects but is also directly granted to organisations in order to effectively support and facilitate their work. In order to raise awareness about social dialogue at the EU-level and increase its

attractiveness, it is paramount that the political support is also reflected in the funding mechanisms available to the European social partners.

- **Facilitate and fund the capacity-building** endeavours of social partners at the national and European level in order to create a robust and efficient social dialogue process. The Covid-19 pandemic has clearly showcased that the role of social partners is crucial in mitigating the effects of an external shock to the system. Nevertheless, some Member States still are significantly underrepresented at the European social dialogue level due to their oftentimes limited and weak national structures. This lacuna substantially impedes any form of legitimate European integration as it not only hinders national social partners from having their voices heard at the EU-level but also from the European policy initiatives being properly implemented on a national level.



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