

# Consultation on the European Pillar of Social Rights

Fields marked with \* are mandatory.

Welcome to the European Commission's online public consultation on the "European Pillar of Social Rights".

Are our social rights fit for the 21st century? The Pillar will identify a number of essential principles to address the challenges in the field of employment and social policies.

We want to involve everyone in shaping the European Pillar of Social Rights. We welcome contributions from citizens, social partners, organisations and public authorities, so have your say!

Please submit your contribution below until the end of 2016.

## I. Questions for the identification of the respondent

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**\* Are you replying as an individual or as an organisation?**

- Individual
- Organisation

**What is the type of your organisation?**

- Business
- EU level organisation
- National level organisation

**Your EU level organisation is a(n)**

- NGO
- Trade Union
- Employers organisation
- Think tank/academia
- Other

**\* Name of your organisation or institution:**

*500 character(s) maximum*

European Platform for Rehabilitation

**\* Respondent's first name:**

Laura

**\* Respondent's surname:**

Jones

**\* Respondent's email address:**

ljones@epr.eu

**\* Postal address of your organisation or institution:**

*500 character(s) maximum*

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1210 Brussels

**Country**

For individuals: country of residence.

For organisations: country where the organisation is based or country where the organisation's headquarters are.

Belgium

**Register ID number (if you/your organisation is registered in the Transparency register):**

If you would like to register, please refer to the following webpage to see how to proceed : <http://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/info/homePage.do>

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**\* Your reply:**

- Can be published with your personal information** (I consent to publication of all information in my contribution and I declare that none of it is under copyright restrictions that prevent publication)
- Can be published in an anonymous way** (I consent to publication of all information in my contribution except my name/the name of my organisation and I declare that none of it is under copyright restrictions that prevent publication)
- Cannot be published - keep it confidential** (The contribution will not be published, but will be used internally within the Commission)

## II. Questions for the consultation

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The Commission invites all interested parties to reply to the questions set out in the questionnaire below, together with any additional comments, by 31 December 2016. (*See also [Commission communication "Launching a consultation on a European Pillar of Social Rights", COM\(2016\) 127 final](#)*)

### On the social situation and EU social "acquis"

## 1. What do you see as most pressing employment and social priorities?

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More people are living longer & will be in need of care and support; yet there is already pressure on social & health services & on the people working in them, as well staff shortages in those sectors. Unemployment remains high & people with disabilities (PWD), similar to other disadvantaged groups, are particularly vulnerable to labour market exclusion, long-term unemployment & face challenges to access services due to societal and environmental barriers. Therefore EPR proposes the following priorities

- Take initiatives to ensure access to quality social & health care services for all people in need of care or support, including
- Promote a social investment approach in EU policy initiatives & processes to facilitate sufficient financing of social protection schemes & social & health services.

Sufficient financing of services including care, education & training is essential. Investing in quality social services enables people to live independently, in dignity, reduces unemployment & the risk & impact of poverty & social exclusion. It is essential to ensure quality employment in the social & health sectors, thus promoting recruitment & retention.

- Create inclusive labour markets; tackling unemployment, including long-term, by ensuring that individualised (& specialised) support services are available not only in the early stage of unemployment when actively seeking a job but also during employment, supporting the employee & employers, to increase the number of PWD employed, and improve job retention.

Discrimination & prejudices must also be tackled.

- Improve access to quality education & vocational training (VET) services for PWD to improve their skills & qualifications; promote cooperation between the labour market & VET actors, involving local & regional authorities & stakeholders' associations in order to ensure good transitions from education to employment.

Member States need to commit to a social Europe & agree to work towards upward social convergence.

## 2. How can we account for different employment and social situations across Europe?

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This is an extremely complex issue. However, the existence of different employment and social situations across Europe can be partly explained by differing attitudes to employment and social policy; whether or not supportive employment and social policies are seen as necessary for an economically sustainable and socially cohesive society and whether social investment is considered an automatic stabiliser with positive financial impacts. Expenditure in social and health care services must be seen as an investment with positive long-term gains. However, in recent years, in many countries the focus has been on reducing costs of social services in order to reduce public debt rather than ensuring the quality, accessibility, affordability and availability of these services, which would promote social and labour market inclusion and mitigate the social and economic impact of poverty and social exclusion. Short term cuts to financing of services can lead to longer term costs and in some countries have exacerbated the crisis.

The level of stakeholder engagement in policy making can also explain disparities; if decision makers do not take advantage of the expertise of and engage with all actors; social and employment outcomes may be less successful.

### 3. Is the EU "acquis" up to date and do you see scope for further EU action?

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Uneven implementation of the EU acquis means that many people are not fully able to enjoy their rights and live their lives in dignity. This can partly be attributed to the fact that it depends on Member States taking effective actions. Mechanisms that monitor and report on the progress of the implementation of these rights in the Member States and encourage upward convergence should therefore be put in place, and not inadvertently encourage Member States to settle for a minimum benchmark. The approach in the "Active Ageing Index" would seem to be a suitable model to follow.

In terms of policy instruments, the European Semester process has the potential to be a framework promoting a holistic approach to policy making, taking into account social and employment priorities, contributing to the implementation and monitoring of the Europe 2020 targets and the UNCRPD. However, so far it has not done been such a framework, and the impact of economic and fiscal policy recommendations on such priorities have not been taken into account. This has encouraged policy decisions across Europe that decreased investment in social protection and services, leading to increased challenges in ensuring social rights are upheld.

EPR calls the European Commission to complement the Europe 2020 headline targets on employment and poverty with specific "sub-targets" including targets on employment and poverty of persons with disabilities, developing indicators and statistics on persons with disabilities in line with the UNCRPD Country Concluding Observations, and refer to the Concluding Observations in the Country Specific Recommendations.

The UNCRPD should be mainstreamed in the Pillar and the EU Disability Strategy with actions to implement the CRPD principles. To improve the implementation of initiatives and aims of the EU Disability Strategy, EPR calls for a greater recognition of the role of services to PWD and a greater involvement of service providers for PWD.

### On the future of work and welfare systems

**4. What trends would you see as most transformative? [Please select at most three from the list below]**

*between 1 and 3 choices*

- Demographic trends (e.g. ageing, migration)
- Changes in family structures
- New skills requirements
- Technological change
- Increasing global competition
- Participation of women in the labour market
- New ways of work
- Inequalities
- Other

**5. What would be the main risks and opportunities linked to such trends?**

*2000 character(s) maximum*

The health status and the ability of elder people to live independently influences the growth in LTC needs. The need for LTC in the older population is connected to increased dependency due to the prevalence of fragility & mental health problems. The growing demand for care & rehabilitation services represents both a challenge & an opportunity. The greater challenge is to develop services that respond to the needs of all ageing people, including people with disabilities. The demand for formal care is also increased by the reduction of the availability of informal carers due to changing family and work patterns. The shortage of staff in the social services sector, sometimes precarious working conditions, the lack of development opportunities and a key contributing factor to this situation - the lack of public funding - represent the biggest risk. However, the rising demand for social services offers an opportunity for the creation of more and better jobs, if the right policies are put in place to ensure this.

The increasing use of ICT and ATs to meet service users' needs requires individual, services and welfare capacity to adjust and learn new skills. VET services need to keep on top of trends and adapt programmes and curricula, in cooperation with businesses, to ensure they match with labour market needs and equip people to work in fast-changing environments and with ICT tools. Training opportunities for staff need to be available, as well as investments in innovative solutions, in order for them to acquire the skills necessary to work in a digitalised labour market.

**6. Are there policies, institutions or firm practices – existing or emerging – which you would recommend as references?**

*2000 character(s) maximum*

- The social investment approach (and SIP)

To facilitate social investment, the European Commission should take into account the positive impact of such investments and consider them "eligible for favourable treatment when assessing government deficits and compliance with the 1/20 debt rule assessing (ex-post) possible deviations from the Stability and Growth Pact requirements". (The "silver rule" proposed in the draft EMPL committee report from the European Parliament.)

- Active Inclusion approach

- The voluntary quality framework for social services; EQUASS system ([www.equass.be](http://www.equass.be))

- Social Considerations in Public Procurement

We call for a renewed Guide to Social Considerations in Public Procurement, to include highlighting the opportunities for measures that support PWD and good practice in this field, as well highlighting the possibilities for and benefits of contracting high-quality social services. The Commission should continue to promote the VQF for Social Services, particularly among public authorities.

- Co-production of services

- Mainstreaming of specialist services

- De-institutionalisation

- Serious games and interactive computer programmes for improving life skills of people with disabilities

To facilitate employment of people with disabilities:

- Supported employment, individual placement and support, job carving /customised employment

- Building partnerships with employers

- Social enterprise, particularly work integrating social enterprises

## On the European Pillar of Social Rights

**7. Do you agree with the approach outlined here for the establishment of a European Pillar of Social Rights?**

- I strongly agree
- I agree
- I disagree
- I strongly disagree



Please specify:

2000 character(s) maximum

The outline of the EU pillar of social rights recognises that adequate and sustainable social protection, as well as access to high quality essential services, including childcare, healthcare and long-term care, equal opportunities and access to the labour market, including skills development and life-long learning, and fair working conditions are essential. However, it is too focused on employment as the main outcome and does not recognise the importance of social inclusion in itself (and not just as a step on the path to employment), nor does it sufficiently take into account people who are far from the labour market.

The Pillar is an important opportunity for the EU to rebalance economic and social policy at EU level, highlight the importance of the social policy dimension of the EU, and provide a tool to mainstream social policy in other policy areas. This is necessary to help rebuild trust among the inhabitants of Europe in the EU by showing it can bring benefits in areas important to them (social and employment issues), and in so doing, help counter nationalistic tendencies that can arise because unmet needs are perceived as not being addressed at EU level. However, this potential will not be fulfilled unless the Pillar is integrated with existing EU policy mechanisms (see answer to question 3) - and this integration is not outlined in the approach.

**8. Do you agree with the scope of the Pillar, domains and principles proposed here? (If you wish to provide detailed comments on any of the 20 domains, please see the section "Detailed comments by domain" below)**

	I strongly agree	I agree	I disagree	I strongly disagree
1. Skills, education and life-long learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Flexible and secure labour contracts	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Secure professional transitions	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. Active support for employment	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Gender equality and work-life balance	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Equal opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Conditions of employment	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Wages	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Health and safety at work	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Social dialogue and involvement of workers	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Integrated social benefits and services	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Health care and sickness benefits	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. Pensions	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. Unemployment benefits	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. Minimum income	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. Disability benefits	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. Long-term care	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. Childcare	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19. Housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20. Access to essential services	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Are there aspects which are not adequately expressed or covered so far?**

*2000 character(s) maximum*

There is no reference to social investment and the importance of adequate financing of social protection systems and social services in the outline, which are essential for accessing rights as explained above. There is also a lack of reference to quality social services yet these services must be of sufficient quality to be effective and efficient.

Recognising that employment is an important factor to achieve social inclusion should not divert from the fact that there are people who cannot work during all of their working years or part of them, and who are more at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The strong focus in the Pillar on employment may led to the conclusion that integrated service provision needs to have employment as the sole outcome to be considered as effective and adequate.

The UNCRPD is not mentioned and in "Chapter 1, principle 6 3 Equal opportunities", there is no explicit reference to the disability dimension, while people with disabilities often face a high level of exclusion in the society and still suffer from specific barriers and discrimination.

**9. What domains and principles would be most important as part of a renewed convergence for the euro area? (Please select maximum 5)**

*between 1 and 5 choices*

- 1. Skills, education and life-long learning
- 2. Flexible and secure labour contracts
- 3. Secure professional transitions
- 4. Active support for employment
- 5. Gender equality and work-life balance
- 6. Equal opportunities
- 7. Conditions of employment
- 8. Wages
- 9. Health and safety at work
- 10. Social dialogue and involvement of workers
- 11. Integrated social benefits and services
- 12. Health care and sickness benefits
- 13. Pensions
- 14. Unemployment benefits
- 15. Minimum income
- 16. Disability benefits
- 17. Long-term care
- 18. Childcare
- 19. Housing
- 20. Access to essential services

*Comments:*

*2000 character(s) maximum*

**10. How should these be expressed and made operational? In particular, do you see the scope and added value of minimum standards or reference benchmarks in certain areas and if so, which ones?**

*2000 character(s) maximum*

### Detailed comments by domain

**If you wish to provide detailed comments on any of the domains, please select one or more from the list below and fill the table(s) and comment box(es) underneath.** *(A detailed description of the domains and principles is available in the [Annex "A European Pillar of Social Rights - Preliminary Outline"](#) to the [Commission communication "Launching a consultation on a European Pillar of Social Rights"](#), COM(2016) 127 final).*

- 1. Skills, education and life-long learning
- 2. Flexible and secure labour contracts
- 3. Secure professional transitions
- 4. Active support for employment
- 5. Gender equality and work-life balance
- 6. Equal opportunities
- 7. Conditions of employment
- 8. Wages
- 9. Health and safety at work
- 10. Social dialogue and involvement of workers
- 11. Integrated social benefits and services
- 12. Health care and sickness benefits
- 13. Pensions
- 14. Unemployment benefits
- 15. Minimum income
- 16. Disability benefits
- 17. Long-term care
- 18. Childcare
- 19. Housing
- 20. Access to essential services

### 3. Secure professional transitions

	I strongly agree	I agree	I disagree	I strongly disagree
Do you agree with the challenges described?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is the principle addressing those challenges in the right way?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Should the EU act to put in reality this principle?	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you have other comments or additional suggestions? For instance: how to address these challenges in the right way? How should the EU act to put in reality this principle?

*2000 character(s) maximum*

Improving access to quality education and vocational training services for PWD to improve their skills and qualifications, and promoting cooperation between labour market and vocational education and training actors, in particular, the involvement of local and regional authorities and stakeholders' associations in order to ensure good transitions from education to employment.

Ensuring people with disabilities can access guidance from persons that understand disability and the importance of tackling environmental and social barriers that people with disability face (e.g. social model of disability).

### 4. Active support for employment

	I strongly agree	I agree	I disagree	I strongly disagree
Do you agree with the challenges described?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is the principle addressing those challenges in the right way?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Should the EU act to put in reality this principle?	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you have other comments or additional suggestions? For instance: how to address these challenges in the right way? How should the EU act to put in reality this principle?

*2000 character(s) maximum*

Addressed in 16

## 6. Equal opportunities

	I strongly agree	I agree	I disagree	I strongly disagree
Do you agree with the challenges described?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is the principle addressing those challenges in the right way?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Should the EU act to put in reality this principle?	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you have other comments or additional suggestions? For instance: how to address these challenges in the right way? How should the EU act to put in reality this principle?

*2000 character(s) maximum*

Equal opportunities should not be reduced to the context of employment. Discrimination and prejudices against people with disabilities limit equal opportunities in society, not just the workplace (see also answer to 4. above). Inclusive work environments and labour markets must be created.

## 9. Health and safety at work

	I strongly agree	I agree	I disagree	I strongly disagree
Do you agree with the challenges described?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is the principle addressing those challenges in the right way?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Should the EU act to put in reality this principle?	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you have other comments or additional suggestions? For instance: how to address these challenges in the right way? How should the EU act to put in reality this principle?

*2000 character(s) maximum*

Support for mental health and well-being is essential for healthy working environments and must be ensured. Stress levels in working environments have increased yet there is often insufficient support or understanding of psychosocial health risks.

## 11. Integrated social benefits and services

	I strongly agree	I agree	I disagree	I strongly disagree
Do you agree with the challenges described?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is the principle addressing those challenges in the right way?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Should the EU act to put in reality this principle?	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Do you have other comments or additional suggestions? For instance: how to address these challenges in the right way? How should the EU act to put in reality this principle?

*2000 character(s) maximum*

It is a shame that the Active Inclusion concept is no longer used. This concept clearly outlined the importance of the three dimensions or "three-fold alignment" of access to services, inclusive labour markets and adequate income support.

Integration is also about coordination and providing guidance and supported decision-making for service users. Access to services should be coordinated and facilitated and the structures that do so should be supported (e.g. one-stop shops, case managers). Care should be taken to ensure that one stop shops do not create stigmatising environments and ensure mainstreamed specialist support services.

Coproduction as a model should also be pursued and promoted, ensuring service users, as experts of their own experience, can facilitate the integration of services, through co-creating services and policy.

## 16. Disability benefits

	I strongly agree	I agree	I disagree	I strongly disagree
Do you agree with the challenges described?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is the principle addressing those challenges in the right way?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Should the EU act to put in reality this principle?	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you have other comments or additional suggestions? For instance: how to address these challenges in the right way? How should the EU act to put in reality this principle?

*2000 character(s) maximum*

(This principle is broader than benefits)

PWD face challenges in accessing services due to barriers posed by society and the environment. Reference to the UNCRPD article 27 should be made and the article taken into account.

Reasonable accommodation as a concept must be promoted. In the planned work on employment and reasonable accommodation in the EU Disability strategy it is important to engage service providers who have experience of partnerships with employers for integrating PWD in the workplace, to share good practice and dispel stigma.

Issues include discrimination, stereotyping and prejudices. Campaigns to combat these issues, involving people with disabilities and organisations working with them should be supported.

Introducing a platform with comparative information on social protection cash benefits and social services for PWD throughout EU can contribute to improving their understanding and access information on the portability of their social protection cash benefit and services.

If someone is unable to work full time benefits should compensate for this.

Supported employment as a model should be promoted.

It is also important to showcase good practice in community-based services, particularly services funded by the ESIF.

## Contact

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