

## Belgian-Spanish Non Paper ahead of the Porto Social Summit

*The European Pillar of Social Rights is an essential compass for employment, education and social policies. Its implementation needs to be stepped up a gear because of the Covid-19 crisis and the upcoming green and digital transitions. The Commission Action Plan is a welcome step and its momentum should be seized at both the EU and the national level, to foster social progress and upwards social convergence in Europe.*

### **The Pillar as part of a balanced long-term strategy**

Employment, education, social protection, and social rights policies can never be a standalone but need to be an integrated part of a broader economic and environmental strategy for a fair, just and inclusive transition. The Pillar is the right instrument to balance economic policies and the Single Market with a more social and more sustainable growth strategy, to foster gender equality and to fight against discrimination. The social strategy should be informed by dialogue with other partners in society, in particular social partners. The **new social headline targets**, that we endorse, should be linked to the broader economic targets and be embedded in an updated set of integrated guidelines. A mid-term review after five years could be foreseen from the start.

The proposal for subtargets should be developed further to include **quantitative goals** on job quality, the gender pay gap, health and safety, homelessness, early school leaving and accessible and affordable high quality social and educational services, in particular childcare and elderly care for all. It is equally paramount that all Member States use the same **agreed indicators** to base their national targets upon and design a clear pathway towards reaching them.

Moreover, the renewed Social Scoreboard should be equipped with **an alert mechanism** that triggers a more in-depth follow-up and discussions at committee and ministerial level, based on the approach for macro-economic imbalances in the Alert Mechanism Report.

### **The Pillar as part of the recovery**

Beyond reinforcing the social protection system, an essential step to realize the Pillar's ambitions must go through the NextGenerationEU Recovery and Resilience Fund. The Digital and Green transition should go hand in hand with social investment to foster upward convergence. In this light, the governance arrangements of the **European Semester** should be used to their full extent and all different Council formations should hold frank and open policy debates as an input to the European Council.

In light of **digitalisation and to embolden social mobility**, we need to encourage life-long learning, job creation, innovation, entrepreneurship and new working methods, while reinforcing workers' rights, social security systems, health and safety and environmental sustainability. Moreover, a specific focus on the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion is necessary to end the **intergenerational transmission of poverty**.

Looking forward and in the context of the Stability and Growth Pact review, we must make sure that we **foster an environment for productive investments** also in the social domain, and social protection. The general escape clause needs to be in place as long as the crisis prevails. In our way

towards recovery, we should opt for a growth-oriented consolidation supportive to the Pillar. Building on a thorough evaluation of the experience of the SURE initiative, setting up an **EU basis for unemployment systems** that contributes to economic stabilization and solidarity is equally crucial.

### **The Pillar as a basis for minimum social standards**

Upward social convergence can never become a reality without a minimum level-playing field and a **clear social rulebook**. The existing legal framework should be monitored, implemented and enforced, i.a. through the European Labour Authority. A stronger and clearer commitment to implement the recommendation on access to social protection is a necessity. Likewise, the recommendation on minimum income and the **Child Guarantee** must be ambitious, operational and come with a strong monitoring and accountability framework.

We need a focus on a number of well-chosen **legal initiatives**, which could encompass a framework for labour rights in the context of digitalisation, a right to lifelong learning for workers of all ages and a directive on musculoskeletal disorders. Finally, it is important that all legal initiatives in the social and other fields come with an assessment not only of proportionality and subsidiarity but also of their impact on specific (vulnerable) groups.