



Eurodiaconia  Connecting faith
and social justice
through action

Monitoring the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights

November 2022

Eurodiaconia is a European network of churches and Christian NGOs providing social and healthcare services and advocating social justice.

Mission

Eurodiaconia is a network of churches and Christian organizations that provide social and health care services and advocate for social justice. Together we work for just and transformative social change across Europe, leaving no-one behind.

Vision

Driven by our Christian faith, our vision is of a Europe where each person is valued for their inherent God-given worth and dignity and where our societies guarantee social justice for all people, including the most vulnerable and marginalized.

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Publication: November 2022



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INTRODUCTION

The European Pillar of Social Rights (Social Pillar) is a framework of 20 principles that aim to make existing social rights more effective, while also providing the foundation to further develop and deepen these rights. Since its proclamation in November 2017, it should serve as a ‘compass’ for social policies at EU level.

Eurodiaconia is a network of 58 faith-based organisations providing social services in 32 European countries. Our network has been involved in the work around the Social Pillar since the very first consultations on a

potential Pillar and has closely followed its implementation since.

On the Social Pillar’s 5th anniversary, this report analyses the existing mechanisms for the implementation and monitoring of the Social Pillar and provides concrete recommendations to improve the monitoring of all Social Pillar principles. Eurodiaconia calls on the European Commission to strengthen its implementation by addressing all its principles and clarifying the methods used for its monitoring.

1. IMPLEMENTATION AT EU LEVEL

While being aware of the fact that the EU’s competencies in the areas of the Social Pillar are limited, all levels of governance have committed themselves to take part in the implementation of the Social Pillar. Our network welcomes the European Commission’s commitment to take an active role in the implementation by proposing legislation where this is possible and otherwise initiatives which aim at encouraging the application of minimum standards, providing additional funding and mutual learning. We call on the European Commission to ensure that it is adequately

covering all pillar principles through its different initiatives, as well in its monitoring through the European Semester process.

1.1 EU Action Plan

Our network welcomes the concrete steps that were taken last year by the European Commission to push forward the implementation of the Social Pillar. In March 2021, after a long consultation process, in which Eurodiaconia took part, the Social Pillar Action Plan was published together with three Headline targets to be achieved by 2030 and a revised social scoreboard.

The Social Pillar Action Plan is the European Commission's commitment to further implement the Social Pillar. Overall, Eurodiaconia welcomes the Action Plan, as there are several promising measures in it. Although the Action Plan does not present systematically initiatives on all aspects of each principle of the Pillar, it covers most of them.

We welcome in particular the following initiatives, which cover the principles that we believe to be central to improving people's quality of life across the EU and making sure no one is left behind in a post-pandemic EU:

- **European Skills Agenda** (principle 1): It is undeniable that skills are crucial for successful integration in the labour market and ensuring that people are not left behind. Eurodiaconia, therefore, welcomes the European Skills Agenda, which should contribute to the implementation of principle 1. To be successful, it needs to give particular attention to those who need skills most to (re)-enter the labour market. Opportunities for low-threshold support, up- and re-skilling of low-skilled workers, including persons with a migrant or minority background are essential for the Skills Agenda to be fully successful.

- **European Child Guarantee** (principle 11): The European Child Guarantee shows the European Commission's commitment to support all children in the EU and to have a particular focus on children in vulnerable situations. We welcome the focus on children experiencing homelessness, living with disabilities, with precarious family situations, from migrant, minority racial or ethnic backgrounds, as well as on children living in alternative care. We also appreciate the strategic and comprehensive approach to child poverty and social exclusion, and the aim to establish an integrated, person-centred, and multidimensional approach to the issue and an enabling policy framework.

- **Minimum Income** (principle 14): Adequate minimum income plays a key role in reducing poverty and fighting inequalities. It allows to maintain the dignity of the person and serve as safety net for people in difficult life circumstances. However, our network deeply regrets that only a Council Recommendation on Minimum Income was proposed this year and calls on the European Commission to have this followed by a EU Framework Directive in the near future.

- **European Care Strategy** (principle 18): Eurodiaconia very much welcomed the European Care Strategy, as it recognises the main challenges in the care sector – availability, affordability, accessibility, quality, workforce, funding and governance challenge – and points in the right direction regarding the needed actions. The initiative is a crucial step towards addressing the challenges the care sector has been facing over the last years, and we are glad to see some of our network’s recommendations taken on board, although we regret that it is not putting forward many concrete actions.

- **European Platform on Combatting Homelessness** (principle 19): The creation of the platform is a welcome first step to addressing the issue of homelessness, as it demonstrates political will at EU level to eradicate homelessness by 2030. However, the Platform now needs to deliver on its promise and come forward with concrete steps to be taken at an EU level. Furthermore, we call for the development of National Homelessness Strategies, laying out concrete plans on how homelessness can be eradicated by 2030.

- Furthermore, there has also been the launch of an **Anti-racism Action Plan**, which was not originally part of the Action

Plan, but is a welcome step giving recognition to the wide-spread issue of (institutional) racism in the EU. Racism is undermining many efforts to promote social rights and needs to be urgently addressed. It can therefore be seen in conjunction with principle 3, but needs to be addressed in a horizontal approach across all principles in order to ensure that persons with a migration or ethnic minority background are benefitting from the Social Pillar in the same way than others.

Together with other stakeholders, Eurodiaconia had called for an EU Strategy on **Social Services**, as these are crucial for the implementation of the Social Pillar in all its dimensions¹. Although this has not been included in the Social Pillar Action Plan, we recognise that it is to a large extent covered through the **Social Economy Action Plan**, which we have very much welcomed. We hope that the Social Economy Action Plan will support the creation of a positive ecosystem for well-funded, accessible, affordable and adequate social services. Therefore, it needs to effectively address the sustainable financing of social services, legal frameworks, employment and work

¹Social Platform (2021), Quality social services for all. https://www.socialplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/social_platform_position_quality_social_services_for_all_2021.pdf

force challenges, legal instruments such as public procurement and state aid and how innovation in social services is developed. This should be accompanied by a review of the 2011 Voluntary Quality Principles for Social Services.

Commission initiatives are however not sufficient in themselves to effectively make social rights become a reality for everyone

2. IMPLEMENTATION AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Member States are the central actors for the implementation of the Social Pillar, as they have the competence on social policies and can make legislative changes in order to make change happen. They can also make the choice to increase budgets for social policies. Eurodiaconia calls on all Member States to increase efforts to implement all principles of the Social Pillar and ensure that those social rights are a reality for every person living in the EU. The European Commission should be thorough in its monitoring and ensure that it is systematically analysing implementation advancements of each Social Pillar principle in every Member State.

2.1 2030 Headline targets

The new Headline targets which are included in the Action Plan, cover each of

living in the EU. Implementation is overall needed at national and regional level. We therefore very much welcome that the European Commission has also included recommendations to Member States in the Action Plan. These recommendations need to be taken up and be integrated in the European Semester process, to ensure that Member States are taking them into account.

the three chapters/sections of the Social Pillar. They are clearly measurable targets which are valid for the entire EU. In addition, Member States have made their own national commitments, which allows them to have stronger ownership of the targets. We welcome this approach, as it allows to measure success not by looking only at policy initiatives, but at the change that is achieved for people. However, we regret that especially the Headline target on poverty is lacking ambition with its aim to lift 15 million people out of poverty by 2030. Furthermore, we regret that the European Commission has not chosen to develop targets for each pillar principle. This would have created easily measurable objectives towards which member states and all other actors could work.

2.2 Social Scoreboard

In June 2021, Member States agreed on the updated headline indicators for the Social Scoreboard as a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the Social Pillar. Eurodiaconia welcomes that new indicators were added on education and life-long learning, including indicators which reflect some aspects related to equal opportunities. Also, the indicators which were added in the area of social protection and inclusion are very welcome, as they help provide a more complete picture of the situation, in particular the indicators on child poverty, on disability and housing cost overburden, but also those relating to the coverage of care needs and the share of households unable to keep their home adequately warm.

Despite those new indicators having been added to the Scoreboard, we call on the European Commission and Member States to continue complementing the Scoreboard, in order to make it a comprehensive tool, effectively covering all 20 principles. Therefore, we suggest to use some additional indicators from the SDG monitoring: For better monitoring of Gender Equality, the SDG indicator 5.40 “inactive women/men due to caring responsibilities” should be added. Regarding equal opportunities, we would welcome if SDG

indicators 4.10a on early leavers by citizenship, 8.20a NEETs by citizenship and 8.30a employment rate by citizenship were added to the scoreboard.

Overall, and in order to better understand underlying structural problems, we believe however, that it is unavoidable to collect data disaggregated by ethnicity and disability. While we are aware of the reluctance to do so, this is the only possibility to make inequalities in those areas visible and address them accordingly.

Furthermore, we would encourage the European Commission and the SPC Indicators working group to consider developing additional indicators to measure the adequacy of social protection systems and minimum income schemes. It would also be relevant to measure the non-take up of benefits, as this has recently been recognized as a major problem by the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights². Finally, we would encourage collecting more data regarding homelessness, for example by collecting data on persons in emergency

² OHCHR (2022), Non-take up of rights in the context of social protection, A/HRC/50/38.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5038-non-take-rights-context-social-protection-report-special>

accommodation, temporary shelters or other forms of homelessness.

Regarding the approach used by the Social Scoreboard, Eurodiaconia has been concerned since its launch, that ranking Member States from best to worse performer is not the ideal way of tracking progress in the implementation of the Social Pillar. There is a considerable risk of promoting a race to the bottom. Therefore, agreed benchmarks and targets would be needed for all indicators. They are important because they give a sense of the ambition and what we are working towards. They incentivise innovation and decision-making as well as giving focus to where resources should be directed.

Finally, it needs to be recognised that quantitative methods will always only be able to catch certain aspects and with a certain delay. Therefore, we consider that it is crucial to combine those methods with qualitative analysis, looking in particular at quality, adequacy, accessibility and affordability of transfers and support services that are provided in the context of the Social Pillar.

2.3 Joint Employment Report

The Joint Employment Report, which is part of the Autumn package of the European

Semester, is the main monitoring document for the Social Pillar. As such it is supposed to have a “reinforced focus on the Pillar’s principles” as well as integrate the new headline targets and indicators of the revised scoreboard in its analysis. However, we observe that it keeps a strong focus on employment, analysing social issues mainly from an employment perspective and not from a social rights perspective.

Furthermore, our network regrets that the Joint Employment Report is not systematically addressing every Social Pillar principle. Instead, the pillar principles have been added to the pre-existing structure of the document.

In order to have a document monitoring consistently the Social Pillar, Eurodiaconia calls on the European Commission to change it into a Joint Social and Employment Report. Similar to the SDG Monitoring Report, we recommend to address every year all principles and to present them principle by principle. Furthermore, the report should take into account up to date quantitative and also qualitative data. Finally, the analysis should look at the EU trend, but also highlight the issues that are to watch in certain Member States.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A STRONGER SOCIAL PILLAR MONITORING

1. Ensure an ambitious implementation of the Social Pillar Action Plan and its initiatives at EU and Member State levels;
2. Add new indicators to the Social Scoreboard, such as the SDG indicators on inactive women/men due to caring responsibilities, early leavers, NEETs and employment rate by citizenship;
3. Develop additional indicators to measure the adequacy of social protection systems and minimum income schemes, the non-take up of benefits and collect more data in relation to homelessness, such as data on persons in emergency accommodation, temporary shelters or other forms of homelessness;
4. Disaggregate data by ethnicity and disability status to make structural problems visible and address them accordingly;
5. Develop benchmarks and targets for every indicator in order to clarify the direction and ambition;
6. Transform the Joint Employment Report into a Joint Social and Employment Report, which will systematically analyse the implementation of each pillar principle.



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Funded by the European Commission under the ESF+ programme 2022 – 2025.

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