

Informal meeting of the Members of the European Council on social issues:

the Porto Declaration

8 May 2021

1. We underline the importance of European unity and solidarity in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. These values have defined the response of European citizens to this crisis and also lie at the heart of our common project and distinctive social model. More than ever, Europe must be the continent of social cohesion and prosperity. We reaffirm our pledge to work towards a social Europe.
2. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, swift, critical and comprehensive action at EU and national level has protected millions of lives, jobs and businesses.
3. The same spirit of unity and solidarity inspired our historic agreement in July 2020 on the Multiannual Financial Framework and the specific Recovery effort under Next Generation EU. As we accelerate the green and digital transitions, this massive European investment and the associated reforms will set the Union and its Member States firmly on the path of reform towards a fair, sustainable and resilient recovery. A collective, inclusive, timely, and cohesive recovery will strengthen Europe's competitiveness, resilience, social dimension and role on the global stage.
4. We welcome the high-level conference organised by the Portuguese Presidency in the context of the Porto Social Summit [and take note of its outcome]. The European Pillar of Social Rights is a fundamental element of the recovery. Its implementation will strengthen the Union's drive towards a digital, green and fair transition and contribute to achieving upward social and economic convergence and addressing the demographic challenges. The social dimension, social dialogue and the active involvement of social partners have always been at the core of a highly competitive social market economy. Our commitment to unity and solidarity also means ensuring equal opportunities for all and that no one is left behind.

5. As established by the EU Strategic Agenda 2019-2024, we are determined to continue deepening the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights at EU and national level, with due regard for respective competences and the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. The Action Plan presented by the Commission on 4 March 2021 provides useful guidance for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, including in the areas of employment, skills, health, and social protection.
6. We welcome the new EU headline targets on jobs, skills and poverty reduction and the revised Social Scoreboard proposed in the Action Plan that will help to monitor progress towards the implementation of the Social Pillar principles, taking into account different national circumstances, and as part of the policy coordination framework in the context of the European Semester.
7. As Europe gradually recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, the priority will be to move from protecting to creating jobs and to improve job quality, where small and medium-sized enterprises (including social enterprises) play a key role. The implementation of the principles in the European Pillar of Social Rights will be essential to ensure the creation of more and better jobs for all within the framework of an inclusive recovery. In this respect, relevant legislative and non-legislative work should be taken forward at EU and Member States level.
8. We will put education and skills at the centre of our political action. The green and digital transitions will bring enormous opportunities for European citizens but also many challenges, which will require more investment in education, vocational training, lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling, so as to stimulate employment transitions towards sectors where there is a growing demand for labour. At the same time, changes linked to digitalisation, artificial intelligence, teleworking and the platform economy will require particular attention with a view to reinforcing workers' rights, social security systems and occupational health and safety.

9. We are committed to reducing inequalities, defending fair wages, fighting social exclusion and tackling poverty, taking on the objective of fighting child poverty and addressing the risks of exclusion for particularly vulnerable social groups such as the long-term unemployed, the elderly, persons with disabilities and the homeless.
 10. We will step up efforts to fight discrimination and work actively to close gender gaps in employment, pay and pensions, and to promote equality and fairness for every individual in our society, in line with fundamental principles of the European Union and principle 2 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.
 11. We will prioritise action to support young people, who have been very negatively affected by the COVID-19 crisis, which has profoundly disrupted their participation in the labour market as well as their education and training plans. Young people represent an indispensable source of dynamism, talent and creativity for Europe. We must make sure that they become the driving force of the inclusive green and digital recovery to help build the Europe of the future, including by using the full potential of Erasmus + to foster mobility across Europe for all students and apprentices.
 12. We stress the importance of closely following, including at the highest level, the progress achieved towards the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the EU headline targets for 2030.
 13. We welcome, as another success of European social dialogue, that the European Social Partners have made a joint proposal for an alternative set of indicators to measure economic, social and environmental progress, supplementing GDP as welfare measure for inclusive and sustainable growth.
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