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

* 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

Eurochild

* Respondent's first name:

Reka

* Respondent's surname:

Tunyogi

* Respondent's email address:

reak.tunyogi@eurochild.org

* Postal address of your organisation or institution:

500 character(s) maximum

Eurochild AISBL
Hallepoortlaan 27
1060 Brussels
Belgium

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

79360311166-84
*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- **Cannot be published - keep it confidential** (The contribution will not be published, but will be used internally within the Commission)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

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?

2000 character(s) maximum

• Addressing the unacceptable and continually high levels of child poverty across the EU and the cycle of disadvantage facing over 1 in 4 children, and targeting the persistent levels of inequality in our societies, by investing in children. This is arguably the most effective route towards creating inclusive, resilient and sustainable societies and economies in Europe and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

• Taking a holistic, child-centred approach based on the rights of children as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

• Prioritising full implementation of the 2013 European Commission Recommendation on Investing in Children (it’s 3 pillars are access to adequate resources; access to adequate and affordable services and child participation) to ensure that its integrated approach becomes part of national policy-making & budgeting, guaranteeing all children the right start to life in order to fulfil their potential.

• Developing routine child budgeting at all levels guided by the 2016 General Comment 19 to the UNCRC on public spending.

• Ensure that resources and inclusive social protection and social services are focused primarily on children and families in vulnerable situations, such as children living in poverty, children in alternative care, refugee & asylum-seeking children, children with disabilities and Roma children.

• Reducing the gap between decision-makers and children’s lives by promoting child participation at all levels in decisions that affect their lives, with all children.

• Progressing the de-institutionalisation of children; increasing the support for young people transitioning from alternative care.

• Addressing the large and continuing influx of refugee children to Europe & working to remove the barriers they face in accessing their rights.

• Giving much greater attention to social priorities and Europe 2020 targets, recognising that more inclusive and equal societies are essential for a strong economy.
2. How can we account for different employment and social situations across Europe?

As Eurochild’s recent 2016 European Semester Report indicates, the varying levels of investment in children can help us to account for the differing employment and social situations across EU Member States. Weaker social services and social protection in the early years are linked to high levels of poverty and social exclusion and unemployment. Unemployment can be a consequence of a lack of support and services to help break the cycle of disadvantage. The degree of and impacts resulting from austerity measures, such as the reduction/streamlining of social protection systems. Austerity measures have negatively impacted on children’s access to their rights and many examples can be offered of where children’s social situations have deteriorated due to such measures. The recent financial and economic crises and state responses to them have had significant detrimental effects on children’s enjoyment of a wide range of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Living in poverty does not simply affect children’s experience during childhood, it also frequently serves to curtail the life chances available to them as adults. It is therefore highly likely that the austerity decisions already made will have long-term negative influences on employment in the future. Some countries have national anti-poverty strategies and in some instances, corresponding implementation plans, and the degree to which these are implemented in practice ranges significantly. Government commitment to implement the 2013 EC Recommendation on Investing in Children varies across countries and can change according to political and other changes/demands within countries. Action plans to monitor and assess implementation in practice and accountability measures to hold governments to account in their duties remains a large gap in the majority of European countries.
3. Is the EU "acquis" up to date and do you see scope for further EU action?

The EU ‘acquis’ is extremely broad in scope regarding both hard and soft law. Therefore it is challenging to assess the extent to which it is up to date across all topics.

• Eurochild believes that there are many policies in place for employment and social development in the EU, but little translation into practice.

• We appreciate the role this initiative could play in emphasising how Europe helps citizens exercise their social rights. However, as the proposal is referring to rights it risks giving a narrower interpretation of existing rights enshrined in the Council of Europe, EU and United Nations conventions and laws. All these existing bodies of law have their enforcement mechanisms which the Pillar would not - and could not - have. Instead, the Pillar should be promoting the enforcement of these rights through the available EU acquis, which children’s rights are part of.

• Eurochild believes the European Commission Recommendation on Investing in Children provides an up-to-date initiative in which to progress implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

• Regarding scope for further action, Eurochild considers that an updated EU Agenda on the Rights of the Child is missing from the current EU ‘acquis’. At the end of 2014, the previous EU Agenda came to the end of its term, and follow-up is a vital component to honour the EU’s commitment to promoting and protecting children’s rights. A new EU framework on children’s rights should endorse the UNCRC principles and put forward a programme for action, including specific actions, mainstreaming, and monitoring and evaluation, bridging actions between the different directorate-generals and by the Member States when implementing measures stemming from EU policies.

• There is further scope for EU action regarding the SDGs and an Agenda 2030. The Pillar should contribute to the implementation of the 17 goals and targets across Europe.

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

Please specify:

Rising levels of child poverty. Children have been disproportionately affected by the financial crisis and austerity measures. Budget cuts are preventing the design or implementation of policies that could help alleviate poverty. Child poverty levels have been around 27-28% in the EU as a whole over the past five years, higher than the poverty rate of the total population.

Increasing numbers of refugee and migrant children in Europe. Europe continually fails to meet the needs and promote the rights of refugee and migrant children.
5. What would be the main risks and opportunities linked to such trends?

2000 character(s) maximum

• Everyone has human rights and those in vulnerable situations face many more barriers to accessing these. Risk of violating obligations to protect, respect and promote human rights.
• Increased chronic health problems, such as anxiety and obesity.
• Unequal societies erode trust and cohesive community life.
• Outcomes are significantly worse in more unequal countries: More equal societies work better for everyone. Child well-being is proven to be higher in countries with greater equality.
• Inaction to address child poverty - continued cycles of disadvantage, unequal societies
• Not meeting obligations under the UNCRC.
• Growing divides in society as efforts as not made to build inclusive societies to integrate refugees and migrants.
• Unaccompanied children more likely to end up in institutions, impacting on efforts regarding deinstitutionalisation.

Opportunities:
• More equal, strong societies which are more resilient to shocks and culturally rich.
• Employment opportunities, fair working conditions and building more stable economies.
• Fulfilling obligations of ensuring fundamental rights for all and in particular those who are most vulnerable.
6. Are there policies, institutions or firm practices – existing or emerging – which you would recommend as references?

2000 character(s) maximum

1. Recommendation on Investing in Children. It outlines a holistic approach for tackling child poverty and promoting child wellbeing based on 3 pillars: a. access to adequate resources – including parents’ participation on the labour market, promoting work-life balance, as well as adequate social protection levels; b. Ensuring equal access to quality affordable services for all children – including education, early childhood & health care services; c. The participation of children and young people in the community and in decisions affecting their lives.

2. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that “States parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international cooperation”. The recently adopted General Comment 19 on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights provides more guidance for the implementation of this article.

3. The recently adopted Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016–2021) which has five priority areas: a. equal opportunities for all children; b. participation of all children; c. a life free from violence for all children; d. child-friendly justice for all children; e. rights of the child in the digital environment.

4. The European Social Charter of the Council of Europe is the European treaty guaranteeing fundamental social and economic rights. For existing or emerging practices in targeting child poverty, please refer to the Dutch Presidency document “Integrated approaches to combating poverty and social exclusion: Best practices from EU Member States” and the Alliance for Investing in Children Implementation Handbook: Putting The Investing in Children Recommendation into Practice http://bit.ly/2g5J0tc

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:

Eurochild welcomes the European Pillar of Social Rights as it acknowledges the importance of sound social policies and social protection systems in making our societies and economies more resilient. Indeed by providing the opportunity to facilitate a common approach at the EU level, the Pillar of Social Rights has the potential to advance our common goal to progress the rights of all children, all of the time, in Europe. We welcome renewed discussions on social rights across Europe: Why are we not meeting existing obligations and what can be done to resolve this?

We are concerned however that the initiative is overshadowed by a macro-economic perspective. The assessment of social policy is based on its ability to increase productivity and the current proposals are biased towards boosting employment to serve the economy, rather than achieving social progress. It is clear from the wording of the proposal that the Social Pillar is seen as an economic necessity rather than a social imperative.

The Social Pillar should respect, protect, promote and seek to fulfill the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights treaties to which their Member States have become a party. Such should be the foundations of a Social Pillar and not just a basis of inspiration. The new initiative should build on and reinforce existing principles that have been established in the Recommendation on Investing in Children. To ensure that children are visible throughout the Social Pillar, the child rights-based preventative approach needs to be mainstreamed across each policy domain.


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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>I strongly agree</th>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>I disagree</th>
<th>I strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Skills, education and life-long learning</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Flexible and secure labour contracts</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☘</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Secure professional transitions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Active support for employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Gender equality and work-life balance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Equal opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Conditions of employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Wages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Health and safety at work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Social dialogue and involvement of workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Integrated social benefits and services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Health care and sickness benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Pensions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Unemployment benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Minimum income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Disability benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Are there aspects which are not adequately expressed or covered so far?

2000 character(s) maximum

The key concerns for a deeper and fairer Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) should include promoting equality and breaking the cycle of disadvantage at an early age. The background document to the consultation mentions that the pillar would address key concerns of the EMU – such as the need to boost competitiveness, increase participation in the labour market, develop adequate social protection floors, etc. By failing to recognise poverty as a major obstacle to deeper and fairer growth, promoting equality will remain on the margins of EU policy making rather than being fully integrated into it. Eurochild reiterates its argument that investing in children will strengthen society and the economy in the long-term. Therefore we believe that investing in children, promoting children’s rights and well-being has to be one of the principles of the Social Pillar framework itself.

The purpose of the Social Pillar goes beyond trying to offset the damage caused by economic and monetary decisions. It has to make sure economic decisions strive towards a more equal society in the future. Despite years of economic crisis spiralling into social crises, the EU still pushes strongly on fiscal and macroeconomic coordination. Whilst it is useful to have a reference framework to monitor Member States’ performance on social and employment indicators, unless it is at the same level as macroeconomic coordination – and hence binding – it will not be effective. The Social Pillar should also aim at strengthening the social dimension of the existing European Semester process and help achieve the Europe 2020 targets on education, employment and poverty.

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17. Long-term care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Childcare</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Housing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Access to essential services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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*

- [x] 1. Skills, education and life-long learning
- [ ] 2. Flexible and secure labour contracts
- [ ] 3. Secure professional transitions
- [x] 4. Active support for employment
- [x] 5. Gender equality and work-life balance
- [x] 6. Equal opportunities
- [ ] 7. Conditions of employment
- [ ] 8. Wages
- [ ] 9. Health and safety at work
- [ ] 10. Social dialogue and involvement of workers
- [x] 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
- [x] 18. Childcare
- [ ] 19. Housing
- [ ] 20. Access to essential services
Eurochild welcomes that the 20 policy domains resonate with Pillar 1 (access to adequate resources) and Pillar 2 (access to affordable quality services) of the 2013 European Commission Recommendation on ‘Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage’. The Recommendation recognises the importance of integrated strategies to tackle child poverty and social exclusion and a focus on children who face an increased risk due to multiple disadvantage such as children within households at particular risk of poverty, Roma children, migrant or ethnic minority children, children with disabilities, children in alternative care and children of imprisoned parents.

The policy domains also focus on education and skills, work-life balance and minimum income. With EU level benchmarks and indicators in these areas, the Social Pillar has the potential to strengthen national efforts towards the Europe 2020 targets to reduce poverty and social exclusion and early school leaving. Yet children and preventative approaches are not mainstreamed across the other policy domains included in the proposals, which is absolutely crucial if we are to break the cycle of disadvantage. Whilst intervening to support social rights is important across the life cycle, Eurochild is clear that we must focus investment in the first years of life to meet our social and economic goals.

Eurochild regrets that more emphasis is not given to Pillar 3 of the Recommendation on Investing in Children; children’s right to participate. The policy domain of social dialogue does not mention the participation of children and young people and it is not extended to strengthening participatory democracy more generally. The current proposals lack ambition in progressing Article 12 of the UNCRC at national level and in promoting a children’s rights approach which recognises children as equal rights holders.
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

We see the added value of reference benchmarks in the Social Pillar for all EU policy, legislative and funding activities. Through benchmarking social impact assessments could improve and help prevent trade, fiscal and finance policies from undermining social efforts. The monitoring and delivery on the benchmarks should happen through the European Semester. That would not only strengthen the social dimension of the existing European Semester process but also help achieve the Europe 2020 targets on education, employment and poverty. The aim should therefore be that all EU Member States participate in this scheme and not just the Eurozone countries. The current scoreboard of social and employment indicators lacks “teeth” as it is not binding. Yet, to deepen the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union a system of integrated performance indicators is needed which result in strong policy recommendations of equal weight for social policy measures.

More specifically, the European Commission should include
- a benchmark on childcare in line with the Barcelona targets, ensuring a focus on flexibility of childcare and provision for under 3s.
- a benchmark of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion
- and develop child well-being indicators. The Commission Recommendation on Investing in Children set up a portfolio of child well-being indicators, however the indicators portfolio is incomplete due to the lack of availability of robust, comparable and timely data across the European Union. The development of specific indicators on children will be crucial within the integrated performance indicators of the Social Pillar to assess whether and how policies are impacting on children’s lives.

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

5. Gender equality and work-life balance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I strongly agree</th>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>I disagree</th>
<th>I strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you agree with the challenges described?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the principle addressing those challenges in the right way?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should the EU act to put in reality this principle?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

Whilst we agree with the goal to improve work-life balance arrangements for all, the purpose of this goal is much more than increasing women’s employment. Safer and more adequate leave arrangements (maternity, paternity and parental) for parents and access to high quality early childhood education and care services need to go hand in hand. They are crucial for children’s development, especially in their early years. Reconciliation policies must absolutely take a child-centered approach, and take the best interests of the child as primary consideration in their development, monitoring and implementation.

Eurochild welcomes the attention to improving the quality of early childhood education and care, yet emphasises that it must be for the benefit of children’s well-being rather than as primarily a support for labour market integration.

We encourage the European Commission to present a comprehensive package of legislative and non-legislative measures on work-life balance, based on a child-centered approach.

11. Integrated social benefits and services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I strongly agree</th>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>I disagree</th>
<th>I strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you agree with the challenges described?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the principle addressing those challenges in the right way?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should the EU act to put in reality this principle?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

- The adequacy, coverage and take-up should be considered for ensuring adequate living standards through benefits, complementing cash income support with in-kind benefits in key services.
- Eligibility to family benefits should not be based on the need of the labour market or education system but rather on the needs of the child. Children’s rights and best interest should be kept in focus.
- Incentivising parents to return to work, investing in skills development and training should be an encouragement but never a punitive approach as it could drive families and children further to the margins of society. All financial incentives must avoid any form of stigmatisation, segregation or discrimination. The way in which financial incentives are both delivered and accessed needs careful consideration in advance.
- There needs to be a holistic policy approach to policies and programmes that confront poverty and social exclusion including the reduction of income poverty along with ensuring access to health care, childcare, education, housing, etc. If conditional cash transfers are used they must be linked to other social inclusion policies, with additional funds or other resources provided to local authorities, child welfare services, schools, or professionals working with families and children affected by the change in policy.
- Families should be helped and empowered to make changes themselves, with additional and appropriately tailored support, information and/or knowledge, with the overarching aim of improving their overall well-being outcomes.
- Particular attention needs to paid to the most vulnerable children, including refugee and asylum-seeking children and children in institutional care and children who might not appear in statistics. It requires strengthening both universal as well as targeted benefits and services.

18. Childcare

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I strongly agree</th>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>I disagree</th>
<th>I strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you agree with the challenges described?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the principle addressing those challenges in the right way?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should the EU act to put in reality this principle?</td>
<td>●</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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?

Investing in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is a social investment to address inequality, ensuring affordability and adaptable provision. ECEC services contribute to the social and personal development of the child to give the child a good start in life. The 2013 Recommendation on Investing in Children highlights that services provided must be of high quality, inclusive and affordable – and importantly – must reach those from disadvantaged backgrounds. ECEC services need to be available to all children, independently of the parents’ labour market situation.

The Social Pillar proposals make no reference to the Barcelona targets which would help to strengthen the recommendations by grounding them in existing obligations. In many Member States, much of the childcare currently provided is on a part-time basis which does not allow for full-time working hours for parents. A lack of flexibility of childcare is a major barrier to full-time employment across Europe and particularly for women, which is not addressed in the Social Pillar. In addition, childcare entitlement in many countries begins after 3 years or age, and data suggests that demand in childcare for children under 3 continues to be largely unmet. Efforts need to be stepped up to promote access to childcare from birth to 3 years, which could be addressed using the Social Pillar. Benchmarks within the Social Pillar should therefore echo the Barcelona targets.

The Social Pillar must promote high quality ECEC services, which a.o. requires highly qualified workforce, skilled in effective methodologies that promote children’s social and emotional development and learning. Member States need to make use of the European quality framework for ECEC, spearheaded by the Commission, for developing and reforming their early years’ systems.

Contact

EMPL-EUROPEAN-PILLAR-OF-SOCIAL-RIGHTS@ec.europa.eu