

Review of the ETUC priorities to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights

The Social Summit in Porto, May 2021, is to be considered a milestone in the relaunch of social Europe. Two important documents were solemnly endorsed: the Porto Social Commitment engages EU Commission, Social Partners, the European Parliament and the Presidency of the EU and NGOS with the implementation of the Action Plan implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights. It is also important to stress the relevance of the Porto's Declaration subscribed by all Head of Government gathered in Porto the day after. A Declaration that engages all member states with precises social objectives and receives the proposal for an alternative set of indicators to measure economic, social and environmental progress, supplementing GDP as welfare measure for inclusive and sustainable growth.

The Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights ("EPSR") adopted in March 2021 sets a policy framework for the EU and its Member States to address the well-known challenges facing Europe (e.g., digitalisation, green transition, migration and demographic change). It provides direction and also suggests common legislation to be adopted based on common objectives within the framework of strengthened cooperation, coordination and solidarity. This framework should function as a compass also for countries that are part of the single market or are candidate to join the EU.

It is important that all member states will take factual measures to achieve the Porto's Targets on employment, training/education and fight against poverty. In this regard the ETUC proposals coming from trade union are crucial to ensure a prompt and progressive move toward such targets. The ETUC is also contributing to the policy design with regular reports on the RRF implementation and in the framework of the European Semester. All ETUC proposals are accessible on a dedicated website est1.etuc.org.

The EPSR was adopted in 2015. In these 7 years the world has deeply changed. The EU faced and is facing unprecedented challenges such as the sanitarian crisis, a war that directly threatens its geographical and political integrity, and the raising of anti-democratic regimes that deteriorate the global geopolitical landscape, including a breakdown of global trade and disintegration of well-established supply chains.

It comes along with a non-coordinated reaction in different parts of the world, causing undesired consequences for workers, such as speculations on energy and food supply, high and persistent inflation, over-indebthment of poor countries and lack of access to credit for SMEs and households. Still, the challenge related to climate change remain urgent. People ask for security and the EU is supposed to provide it against external threats, to ensure protection of health and shelter workers against unemployment and income losses.

Security for people means:

- Maintaining peace and protection against external factors, not only as an issue of defence strategy but also of reinforcing economic, energy and food autonomy (Open Strategic Autonomy).
- Reinforcing social protection and healthcare systems that are adequate to the needs of people, especially in case of pandemic or other sanitary crises.
- Social and territorial cohesion in the view of reinforcing democratic institution at national and European level, supporting inclusive and sustainable growth, and boosting upward convergence of living and working conditions.

A lot remains to do to make the EPSR and its Action plan a policy driver for national policies. For example, in response to the energy crisis and increasing of cost of living, member states have averagely mobilised a 1.5% of GDP with subsidies and incentives to businesses and workers. Such resources are not only insufficient to fill the gap of resources needed to implement the Action Plan but it has also been found that a very small part of such resources (less than 30%) are well-targeted and aligned with the EPSR principles. In the meantime, wages are progressing slower than an unexperienced high inflation, creating situation of unrest or poverty among wage earners and their families. This is announcing periods of wide social unrest in absence of adequate policy responses. The ETUC wants to give voice to such concern and advance solutions, including a quick transposition and activation of measures enshrined in the Directive on adequate minimum wages in the European Union.

Reassuring unemployment statistics cannot hide high social risks. Investment and reforms have to go together but their impact have to be measured through social indicators and not fiscal ones. Achieving an open strategic autonomy and conferring social resilience to the EU economy requires strong investment and a resurgent (and for many aspects unexperienced) European industrial policy. It means that resources must be better allocated to achieve specific objectives, privileging some sectors over others, creating new jobs although destroying many others, overvaluing certain competences while undervaluing some others. Some jobs may be found unexpectedly obsolete and some workers ousted from the labour market.

Accelerated change may cause a time misalignment with the education paths planned years ago, and young people may enter the labour market with competences that are not demanded on the labour market any longer (data on unfilled vacancies prove it). Still, migration flows can be less steerable in times of global turbulences and this requires better legal channels for humanitarian reasons. It means that the talent pool launched at EU level could result ineffective while extra efforts would be needed to integrate newcomers in the labour market as soon as possible after they have arrived. A “fair and just transition” would allow us to combine environmental and health protection with social justice and full-time quality employment. This starts with the preservation of employment. To support the digital and green transitions, and to adapt in a time of crisis, workers need to be reassured that they will continue to have a stable job or an income that is sufficient for preserving a good standard of living for them and their families.

Caution is needed on labour shortages resulting from poor working conditions, unfair wages, lack of active labour market policies or under-investment in education and training.

Concerning the Occupational Safety and Health (“OSH”), work should be a safe place. Nobody should have to die or fall ill because of their job. Yet, during the last years, there were some thousands of work-related deaths in the EU and too many people develop stress-related illnesses, suffers from accidents, sometimes incapacitating, and diseases because of their jobs. This has an economic repercussion, but, more importantly, the human costs of poor occupational health and safety are unacceptable. The OSH regulation should be enforced across the EU, with support to the labour inspectorate and OSH employee's representative bodies.

Finally, the duplication of the EU budget and the release of resources from governments' budget for investment and subsidies have too often fuelled criminal organisations and corruption that risk to exacerbate inequality, poverty and poor working conditions. Illegality destroys jobs and informal economy deprives workers and their families of social protection and public services.

The REPowerEU amending the Recovery and Resilient Facility (RRF) is an opportunity to more consistently respect and implement the European Pillar of Social Rights in the national Recovery and Resilience Plans, in order to create stable and quality jobs; to reduce inequalities; narrow the gender employment and pay gaps by reinforcing work-life balance, also by ensuring pay transparency and fighting against all kinds of segregation in the labour market; and provide protection for all workers in their workplace. Social objectives should be mainstreamed in all relevant legislation and regulations linked to the Recovery Plan, referring to the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Social dialogue is the cornerstone of the Recovery Plan creating ownership for reforms and investment, to ensure that labour transitions are fairer and that the recovery is a People's Recovery. Collective bargaining is key to provide for efficient employment and social outcomes when responding to current and future challenges which are directly aimed at fulfilling people's essential needs, and towards ensuring better enactment and implementation of social rights.

Digitalisation is also having a huge impact in the way we work and consume. We are not prepared as the legal framework adaptation is late comparing to the superfast expansion of digital work. Workers struggle to get organised in this new emerging and fast evolving digital world.

Presenting 100 proposals to implement the EPSR, the ETUC stresses that without a strong social anchorage, the costs of such economic turbulences will be transferred to workers, e.g., loss of purchasing power of wages, high interest rates, super-inflation and tax evasion. The ETUC proposals are also consistent with the SDG 8 centred-approach to the implantation of the entire UN2030 agenda. The ETUC #EU_SDG8index is able to catch the potential of member states to stay on sustainability patterns.

The EPSR is able to address these new challenges but its Action Plan has to be meant as a living policy framework. It needs to be able to adapt to changes and be a political platform to set new freedoms and rights for workers, strengthening their protection, and building a new economic and social model.

Our priorities in the review of the EPSR are :

- Reinforcing collective bargaining to set wages in order to improve conditions of all workers and their families
- Provide workers with rights and resources to acquire, update and upgrade their skills and qualifications,
- Promote Active labour Market Policies and Work Life Balance
- Ensure full social protection and access to affordable and quality public services
- A "just transition guarantee" for all workers involved in labour transitions
- Protect health of workers
- Ban discrimination and poverty from the EU economy.

It is crucial to continue translating the good principles of the EPSR in concrete actions. The Action Plan, and its revisions, could be the right tool to propose actions aimed at **setting a minimum floor of rights at EU level and providing the upward convergence of working and living conditions**. It means having the **social progress** as the compass for implementing the EU Recovery Plan, and undertaking the digital and green transitions in a fair, just, affordable and sustainable way.

The ETUC input identifies challenges and provides policy options for each of the 20 principles of the EPSR.

EPSR 20 Principles: Actions aimed at setting a minimum floor of rights at EU level and boosting the upward convergence

PRINCIPLE 4: Active support to employment

The labour market in Europe is showing signs of resilience (6.6% unemployment) but this figure hides huge social risks. This was initiated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the measures taken to prevent the contagion. A trade-off between boosting the economic activity on the one hand and creating quality jobs on the other should be avoided at all times. The failed policy responses to the economic crisis of 2008 is proof enough that putting forward a European agenda for quality jobs is not only a question of decency but due to the boost of the internal demand it is also good for the economy and therefore a key measure to exit this new crisis. ETUC has developed a definition of quality of work¹. Indicators for monitoring it should be aligned with this definition. European economic governance has repeatedly overlooked the quality of work, despite the reference made to it within the employment guidelines. Employment/unemployment indicators were the only ones showing upward convergence before the outburst of the crisis. The upward trend on equality and employment through the EU was hindered by Covid-19 in spite of the furlough schemes to cushion job losses, unemployment and inactivity rose.

Public employment services should be strengthened so as to contribute to the integration of the most vulnerable groups of society in the labour market; schemes for upskilling and reskilling should be established; and social partners should be involved in the design and monitoring of these policies. External flexibility approaches (easing redundancies or boosting temporary contract arrangements) in the current crisis will only put non-standard workers in a vulnerable situation. However, internal flexibility schemes (like the promotion of sound telework and flexible work arrangements through collective bargaining and social dialogue) can be an effective manner to protect employment and boost economic activity.

Reskilling and upskilling will be a key component for the labour market to adapt to the relocation of sectors as a result of the cost of living crisis and the recovery from Covid-19, but also to make sure that Europe emerges from this crisis stronger and more competitive. Member States should build up or strengthen job transition support mechanisms and systems, with the involvement of social partners according to their role at national level, and with support from the European Social Fund and European Structural and Investment Funds.

However, it should be noted that the number of people exercising their right to free movement has doubled since the crisis, sometimes exacerbating the brain drain crisis for some MS. These are mostly young workers who are employed (contributing to good employment levels) but underperforming when it comes to job-quality indicators. Eliminating bogus and unpaid internship and traineeship shall be framed in the actions against undeclared work, and the EU quality framework for traineeship must be strengthened and supported through an EU directive. Labour market performance in the Member States urgently needs to be harmonised through enhanced measurements that incorporate ETUC's definition of quality jobs. To this end, access to ALMP is crucial as

¹ The definition encapsulates the following points: i) Good wages; ii) Work security via standard employment and access to social protection; iii) Lifelong learning opportunities; iv) Good working conditions in safe and healthy workplaces; v) Reasonable working time with good work-life balance; vi) Trade union representation and bargaining rights

well as an increase in equal opportunities through more ambitious public investment targets for activation measures and infrastructure. Hiring incentives to companies must be strictly conditioned to the creation of quality jobs and diligent tax compliance. In this regard, the ESF+ resources should be better oriented towards these objectives. The application of the EASE recommendation by MS should also follow strict social conditionalities.

Imbalances in intra-EU mobility raise important questions about demographic change, including shrinking public revenues as a result in the affected Member States. This decrease also has an impact on the sustainability of social security schemes and the financing of public services.

Actions aimed at setting a minimum floor of rights in the EU, a level playing field in the Single Market	Actions aimed at establishing upward convergence in living and working conditions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a common understanding of actions and instruments that fall under the ALMP concept, with the aim of improving the collection of statistical evidence; monitoring government spending, investment and outcomes of activation measures. 2. The right to training entitlements, including qualifications, should be ensured (see Principle 1). 3. Short-time work schemes and income support 4. Monitoring and issuing specific recommendations to the member states aimed at implementing national plans to achieve Porto's targets on employment, with the support of social partners. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focus on labour market opportunities, job's quality and working conditions of young workers exercising their right to free movement. Strengthen the involvement of social partners in the Youth Guarantee. 2. Implementation of the Recommendation on Long-Term Unemployment. 3 New benchmarks to tackle the energy and price of living crisis relating to ALMPs to encourage labour market transitions and access to skills and training, delivered as well-financed public services in order to promote Euro Area Recommendations, CSRs and investment guidance for Member States. 4. Monitor and assess the impact of ESF+ based on the ETUC definition of quality jobs 5. The European instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) should be extended to help workers and companies to cope with the energy and cost-of-living crisis . Moreover, it is needed to enlarge the coverage of such measure to all categories of non-standard, self-employed, precarious workers, and for the improvement of the adequacy of income compensation

PRINCIPLE 8 Social dialogue and involvement of workers

At EU level, social partners are exploiting the leeway that the Treaty provides for social dialogue, including negotiations for autonomous European agreements in their working programmes. However, the lack of multi-employer collective bargaining in Member States makes it very difficult to implement autonomous European agreements (see also P6). This requires greater efforts to ensure the enforcement of autonomous agreements through enhanced capacity-building. In this regard, both resources and tools for capacity-building should be ensured (and not encouraged as stated in P8).

The social dimension of economic governance has somehow improved over the years, not only in the European Semester but also in other economic governance processes. Still, wide margins of improvement persist. Amid them measures to respond to economic shocks stand out as innovative and genuinely European and were put in place to react to the pandemic crisis, such as the Next Generation EU and the SURE. The social partners have actively contributed to realise such progresses and this should be a lesson to be followed up. In the Commission's proposal for the reform of economic governance,

published on 9 November 2022, there is no reference to social dialogue nor is there a proposal to better structured involvement of social partners either at national or European level. It is important to equip economic governance with a solid social dimension, using the proactive and operational power of social dialogue in the most effective way possible.

Employee involvement in company decision-making processes is at risk due to corporate mobility within the Single Market. Evidence shows that corporate decisions are often taken to avoid employee involvement. For example, flaws in national laws transposing EU directives and, in particular, the recast EWC Directive, impede rights to information and consultation. Sanctions provided in national laws are rarely proportionate, effective and dissuasive. Information and consultation rights do not allow for the involvement and protection of workers. EU legislation should trigger upwards convergence in Europe.

Under principle 8, a case should be made for the right of workers (independently of the nature of their work contract) to bargain collectively. The right to collective bargaining is a fundamental right and recognised as such by the EU. The societal benefits collective agreements bring in terms of fairness, level-playing field and social progress such agreements covering non-standard workers and workers in platform companies (including the self-employed), should be considered to fall completely outside the scope of Article 101 TFEU and national competition rules, in accordance with the EC guidelines on the application of EU competition law to collective agreements of September 2022. EU competition law and national competition rules must be interpreted in the light of fundamental rights, recognising the right to collective bargaining for all workers, atypical and platform workers (including the self-employed).

Actions aimed at setting a minimum floor of rights in the EU, a level playing field in the Single Market	Actions aimed at establishing upward convergence in living and working conditions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reinforced framework for social partners' involvement in the EU Semester, and in the implementation of the EU budget, including the RRF and the National plans for recovery and resilience, possibly via a legislative initiative that sets quality criteria for social partners involvement. 2. Revision of the EWC Directive in order to ensure that workers' right to establish an EWC and to be informed and consulted before relevant decisions are taken, are fully respected; as well as to ensure effective enforcement and dissuasive sanctions in case of violation of workers' rights. 3. Legislative initiative on information, consultation and participation, including legally-binding minimum standards on workers' board-level representation for European company forms (such as SE, SCE) based on the ETUC proposal for an escalator. It would also apply to companies wishing to use EU company law instruments enabling company mobility, such as cross-border mergers, cross-border divisions or cross-border transfers of a registered office. 4. Ratification of ILO Workers' Representatives Convention, 1971 (No. 135), and acceptance of Article 28 ESC on the right of workers' representatives to protection in the undertaking and facilities to be accorded to them by all Member States, and their effective implementation. 5. A European directive on due diligence, focusing on the respect, promotion and enforcement of human rights and responsible business conduct. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategic plan to create capacities and opportunities for social dialogue at national level (not connected to the Semester). Earmarking ESF+ resources by creating a dedicated EU fund or budget line for social partner capacity-building. 2. Support social partners for the implementation of autonomous framework agreements, especially in countries where it is lacking. This also includes targeted financial resources linked to implementation of the agreements in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. 3. Increase resources in the MFF for training of worker representative bodies. Increase resources for initiatives to support the establishment and the correct functioning of EWCs and other transnational bodies for worker information and consultation.

PRINCIPLE 10 Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment and data protection

COVID-19 has been one of the biggest health, economic and social challenge in the history of the European Union. The dimension of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) has proven to be a fundamental part of the European strategy for limiting the spread of the virus and for maintaining economic activities. Numerous national measures have been implemented to fight the spread of COVID-19, also including those appertaining to workplaces and commuting to work.

Occupational safety and health measures, through legislation or collective agreements, offered practical support for returning to the workplace. Appropriate preventive measures by employers, , often obtained after sound social dialogue or collective bargaining, have helped to achieve a safe and healthy return to the workplace, following the moderation of the containment measures, and in particular of physical distancing measures and availability of personal protective equipment. The pandemic has therefore shown the importance of placing OSH measures at the centre of the anticipatory strategies to prevent potential future pandemics.

Actions aimed at setting a minimum floor of rights in the EU, a level playing field in the Single Market	Actions aimed at establishing upward convergence in living and working conditions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognition of Covid-19 as occupational diseases in all sectors and to all workers regardless of their status, and not only to those from the care and health sectors.. 2. Monitor and reinforce transposition of the revision of the Directive on the protection of workers from the risk related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work (directives 2017/2398, 2019/130 and 2019/983). 3. EC Proposal for a fifth amending of the Directive on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to reprotoxic, carcinogens or mutagens at work.. 4. Develop and pursue our demands for zero work-related cancer, including the development of risk assessments and the ongoing work on the revision of the Asbestos Directive. 5. Continue the pursuit of EU Directives on psychosocial risks (PSR) and musculoskeletal disorders (MSD). This includes, among other things, the protection of workers against psychosocial risks arising from the use of new information and communication technologies in the workplace and recognising the impact of organisational factors at work that are at the source of such pathologies. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and pursue our demands for zero tolerance of fatal accidents and the prevention of accidents at work. The “zero fatal accidents vision” enshrined in the EU OSH Strategic Framework, should be monitored by an indicator on fatal accidents in the social scoreboard 2. Mapping the role of employee representatives and assessing effectiveness of trade union rights to ensure actual enforcement of EU legislation on H&S in the workplace. 3. Develop a uniform/single standard methodology and a common information system in the EU on: reporting occupational accidents, information on insurance systems for occupational accidents and diseases, and sharing of good practices.

PRINCIPLE 14 Minimum income

The EU shows limited and unstable progress in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and the pandemic unveiled the urgency to work for minimum dignifying floors

and aligning the EPSR and the SDGs approaches in addressing such issues. After slight improvements before the Covid-19 crisis, severe material deprivation has increased in 2020. In-work poverty rates have worsened during the pandemic. The majority of minimum income schemes across the EU are far from providing adequate protection and sufficient coverage, duration and accessibility of benefits or to prove to be non-discriminatory. This is resulting in growing social divisions and labour market and economic disruptions.

ETUC believes that European citizens and residents should also have the right to adequate and effective minimum income; schemes must provide support both in cash and kind, to meet their essential needs and those of their dependents and ensure them a life in dignity and full inclusion into the society. MIS shall be accessible to all people in need, irrespective of their age, nationality and capacity to work. This can be achieved through a combination of social protection tools and public investments: for those who can work, MIS must be combined with a series of public employment and training services and embedded within a broader EU and national policy response to active inclusion. EU standards for a minimum income cannot be seen as a disincentive to work. For those who cannot work, investments are crucial in public services, social services, long-term and health care.

The 2020 Council conclusions on MIS had empowered the EC to reinforce the EU framework to combat poverty and social exclusion. The ETUC has long advocated for a framework directive and still believes that a binding initiative would be the best way to achieve significant progress in combatting poverty and social exclusion and convergence in terms of national level performance. Instead, the implementation of the EPSR still relies on soft law and recommendation and not on binding initiatives. The recent proposal for a Council Recommendation on MIS addresses relevant demands, such as the complementarity with the Recommendation on access to social protection, the provision of public services including social services, the guarantee of adequacy, coverage, effectiveness, the need increase take-up rates, the need for regular indexation and revision of in-cash benefits.

However, effective steps are yet to come. A political agreement of December 2022 might be adopted only in one year. Such delay unveils the reluctance of some MS to act in a logic of solidarity and effectiveness rather than of subsidiarity and proportionality. **Instead, the ETUC demands that** economic policies must be consistent with such goals: MS must be pushed to increase budget allocations, also taking advantages from the resources made available thanks to the EU financial interventions on other headings. A deeper understanding is needed of the root causes of social exclusion and income inequality, of the weaknesses of our redistribution systems, of the effects of our production structures in this sense, of the sub-targets to address. The review of the MI benchmarking framework by the Social Protection Committee is needed and should consider these aspects among others. Such enhanced understanding of the reality must tie consequent economic and social policies to the achievement of social goals. Therefore, also reporting, poor so far, must lead to less descriptive and more substantial assessment, especially on adequacy of MI schemes. Stricter and more frequent monitoring must give concreteness to policy measures, structural changes and their impact. The key role of trade unions and social partners in the design, implementation and impact monitoring of policies must be enhanced and guaranteed by more effective involvement procedures and adoption of joint tools for social inclusion and protection of vulnerable categories.

In the current post-pandemic and conflict juncture, trade unions across the EU urge for addressing specific issues such as energy prices, the importance to raise wages, and thus to differentiate how to tackle in-work-poverty (ALMP, collective bargaining and unemployment regulation) and non-in-work-poverty (social benefits, and minimum income programs). Job creation and efficient employment services are also crucial to address poverty and increase the tax-based capacity to sustain adequate and highly inclusive MIS.

Actions aimed at setting a minimum floor of rights in the EU, a level playing field in the Single Market	Actions aimed at establishing upward convergence in living and working conditions
<p>1. Investigate characteristics and performance of national systems in order to define the necessary interventions for MIS to be effective against poverty and social exclusion embedded within a broader EU; national policy response to active inclusion, social cohesion and equality.</p> <p>2. Effective instruments to define and design the functions of MIS. Methodologies to assess adequacy of schemes must be developed and include indexation</p> <p>2. monitor and develop country specific recommendations aimed at implementing national plans to achieve Port's targets on poverty.</p>	<p>1. In connection with SDG 1 and, as part of the European Semester, Anti-Poverty Action Plan as in Principle 11.</p> <p>2. Elaborate a Social Dialogue framework for social partners and governments to assess coverage, adequacy and effectiveness of Minimum Income Schemes in combination with social benefit (in cash and kind) and activation policies; focus on conditionality.</p>

PRINCIPLE 16 Health care and PRINCIPLE 18 Long-term care

Access to health services and to long-term care is an EU permanent emergency. The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the several weaknesses of health and long-term care systems across Europe, revealing the need to redesign them deeply.

Austerity measures have drastically reduced the scope of public services, their accessibility and quality. This is the result of persistent EU Semester Recommendations until 2019, that prioritized fiscal sustainability of costs for health care and long-term care systems in the view of the increasingly ageing population. Consequently, people's rights and needs have been steadily compressed against the mantra of "rationalisation" and "cost-efficiency", implying drastic cuts in public expenditure and investments in care, aggregation of structures, diversion of already allocated resources to other priorities, de-hospitalisation – as well as marketisation and privatisation. Public spending in public health have lacked behind in GDP% with respect to other costs. While public structures set back, private options are extremely costly, inaccessible, ineffective and operating in breach of the rights of patients and care workers. Out-of-pocket expenditure for health, steadily concerning for years, has seen a reduction only in conjunction with the pandemic. Coverage and access to long-term care is still highly insufficient in several Member States. Informal care dominates the sector, to the detriment of declared - thus protected - employment, quality of services, women's participation in the labour market.

Increased investment in universal accessible and high quality care are crucial, not just to reverse years of underspending in many countries and cope with future demands. The care sector represents a crucial ground for societal wellbeing encompassing the quality of both care and employment.

Such consistent demands seem to have been partly taken into account by the 2022 policy proposals. The European Care Strategy and the proposal for a Council Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care acknowledge the

need to enhance adequacy, affordability and accessibility of care services and focus on the importance of improving the situation of both care givers and receivers. Enhancing social dialogue and collective bargaining to improve the conditions of workers in the sector and for establishing procedures to identify and support informal carers is also a positive achievement, just as the call for complementing the insufficient workforce (Europe had a shortfall of around one million health workers even before the COVID-19 outbreak- short-term contracts and precarious jobs in the health sector are not enough to tackle emergencies nor demographic trends). It is important to eliminate all areas of vulnerability for people working in this sector (women, migrant, often undeclared, and give workers the opportunity to improve their skills and their working conditions for their own benefit as well as the benefit of users.

However, a more comprehensive intervention of the EU must lead governments to radically change their approach to public care and health services. First of all it is necessary to acknowledge that the rights to health care and long-term care are strongly related and must be embedded by social protection systems across all EU. They respond to different social risks but must not be treated as separated. On the contrary, long-term care must be integrated in national social protection systems – as required by the Regulation of Social Security Systems - to guarantee a more equal, effective and timely access to it. Also the principles of the EPSR should be informed by this approach and consistently mention LTC among the rights to social protection just like healthcare (for example, in principle 12).

As health and long-term care are distinct needs respondent to intertwined rights, an efficient coordination of medical and non-medical services must be tailored on the need of people. An integrated approach must be affirmed to institutional care and home-care, in favour of independent, humane alternatives, made efficient by a combination of more expensive medical institutions and community-based support and services.

National authorities should be advised that exhaustive social protection for all means also to include long-term care for all, and the implementation of principle 18 will be a mainly national responsibility just as principle 16.

The integration of LTC in the national system should go hand in hand with the improvement of access to formal care. This requires in turn to make care jobs more attractive, improving the working conditions. Such steps would be useful also to avoid that unpaid family members provide the needed services.:

The EU should push for a rights-based approach and public investment in universal, solidarity-based and gender-responsive social protection systems at international, European and national levels. It should also pursue upward convergence goals and funding allocation in child, health, elderly, long-term, disability and dependency care in order to guarantee universal coverage and high-quality care. The European governing bodies and national governments should elaborate an integrated strategy, also dealing with it in the context of the European Semester; increase investments in this sector; and enact reforms to improve the quality of jobs and working conditions in the health care sector. In order to meet the current and future needs of an ageing population, greater public expenditure and investments on universally accessible, affordable and good-quality public services for health and long-term care must be undertaken and viewed as an investment. Preventive care must be enhanced through proper policies and funding. Professional development, training, education and career recognition are crucial in order to improve quality and coverage of care and provide quality job opportunities. Work-life balance policies should support workers with care responsibilities.

In this scenario it appears as a missed opportunity that the NRRP do not address the health needs as expected and prescribed by the objectives of REPowerEU. While many reforms impacting social protection are present in the negotiations, care and health investments seem to have almost disappeared from the horizon of the priorities that the EU should force MS to acknowledge and pursue.

Actions aimed at setting a minimum floor of rights in the EU, a level playing field in the Single Market	Actions aimed at establishing upward convergence in living and working conditions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Guarantee access to quality and affordable health and long-term care (LTC) in all MS. 2. Free movement: Revision of Regulation 883/2004 on coordination of social security systems to strengthen the coordination of such systems including health and LTC in order to improve the rights of mobile workers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen the EU Care Strategy, backed with national action plans through the European Semester, based on transparent and ambitious objectives (monitoring the right of access to free public health services). 2. Monitoring capacity, functioning and impact of occupational welfare, role that it plays in national systems, under what condition it is beneficial for people and role of collective bargaining. 3. EU initiatives to strengthen the resilience of publicly-funded, universal and accessible healthcare systems. 4. Monitor public investments in high level education and training in the sector and establish a link between job creation potential and plans and the care needs.

PRINCIPLE 19 Housing and assistance for the homeless - PRINCIPLE 20 Access to essential services

Public services represent the backbone of European provision of wide-ranging services and common goods to citizens and residents, whose provision is a fundamental right. They are essential in order to combat inequalities and social exclusion, to guarantee equal treatment and to tackle the social, economic demographic and environmental challenges facing Europe. Privatisation and marketization of public services, hence the adoption of service provision through paths that put profit above the interests of people, deprive society and most of the population of essential tools to meet their needs. Unmet needs, lack of affordable public structures, and too-costly private provisions are found in crucial sectors influencing Europeans' quality of life..

Local workers, mobile workers and migrant workers, irrespective of their immigration status or nationality, must have the same rights and should benefit from equal treatment, quality jobs and decent working conditions, while everyone should have equal rights to adequate, safe and affordable housing and social protection. In general, Principles 19 and 20 should be construed as a bridge between the UN2030 Agenda and the EPSR in order to prevent poverty, banish hunger and deprivation, promote good health, ensure equal opportunities and sustainable cities and agriculture. The human right to water and sanitation, recognised by the United Nations in the Social Development Goals (SDGs), must be backed by concrete proposals in order to be accessible to all. Principle 20 of the EPSR puts a renewed understanding of access to public services, on their quality, and on the impact on the overall prosperity level of the society, on poverty and inequality levels. The current crises, with skyrocketing energy prices, cost-of-living, stagnating wages, in-work poverty, increases the vulnerable groups that already faced transport and housing poverty, lack to sanitation and education, and confirm the importance of

ensuring tools accompanying a just transition, safeguarding vulnerable groups of the society.

Different definitions of and approaches to essential services among MS is indeed an obstacle that poses a risk of lack of coherence. Instead, there is a need to consistently analyse the reality and also to measure the effectiveness of the policies also during their progress.

The actual social and economic context is defined on the one hand by the energy prices and their effect on the costs of living. However, we need more and better data in all sectors and from more perspectives, more comparable and consistently collected. Otherwise the risk is to lose the knowledge of poverty pockets and miss the identification of vulnerabilities. It is also crucial to develop a consistent monitoring process including tools to actually measure access to essential services, efficiency of support mechanisms implemented by governments and the effectiveness of the policies. Indicators and data should reflect also the type of impediments for the effectiveness of support measures.

The final results of a comprehensive monitoring should result in more information for providers on the impact they can enact, and for policy makers on how to target investments and expenditure and with which results.

REPowerEU represents an opportunity to tackle the post-pandemic and trigger the transitions, but should not be limited to address few-years emergencies. At least, it is not the only tool to be put in place: the long-term availability of public budget for the maintenance of structural interventions and guarantee the right to essential services is crucial.

Social housing, and decent housing for all households, is a pillar of many social models across Europe. In this regard, and in conjunction with just transitions and the inclusion of the UN2030 Agenda, there should be more emphasis on combating household energy poverty. The latter being even more relevant now, given the rise of energy prices. The ETUC is part of the European Platform for Combatting Homelessness, established in 2021. Member States should take measures (also through the Semester) to intervene more actively in controlling and shaping the private housing market, e.g., through building permits, rent controls, tax on 2nd properties etc., and to prevent speculation.

Some priorities that may also be promoted through closer cooperation between Member States and, where necessary, leading to EU legislation:

- Promote universal social services as public services, organised collectively on the basis of public service principles and underpinned by clear legal frameworks.
- Fight against budget cuts in social services, and for adequate funding and staffing for social services. Support access to training and qualifications, higher levels of professionalisation, representation and defence of workers' rights by trade unions; and develop effective recruitment and retention policies at all levels.
- Pursue the professionalisation of these jobs for better collective guarantees. Increase collective bargaining coverage.
- Improve working conditions in the people care sector, especially filling the gaps between migrants and local workers for an effective equality of treatment.
- Advocate the development, implementation and monitoring of standards for the quality of services and jobs, building on the EU voluntary quality framework for social services of general interest (SSGI), which recognises the need for high-quality services and employment.
- Develop adequate indicators and establish clear common EU definitions for monitoring and comparing data on access to essential services and on the effectiveness of policies put in place.

- Link the discussion on access to essential services to the guarantee of a just digital and green transition and to economic frameworks that are supposed to fuel and coordinate them.

Actions aimed at setting a minimum floor of rights in the EU, a level playing field in the Single Market	Actions aimed at establishing upward convergence in living and working conditions
<p>1. Explore the viability of EU legal instrument(s) on public services, based on Article 14 of the Treaty to develop regulatory framework(s) for public service providers.</p> <p>2. Mainstream principle 19 in the EU Directives on access and working conditions for third country nationals for reasons of employment.</p>	<p>1. See also Anti-Poverty Action Plan. This principle will be an element of the Plan. It may include targets for public investment in social housing.</p> <p>2. Develop benchmarks for government expenditure within the Stability and Growth Pact to ensure necessary funding for universal, affordable and high-quality public services (e.g. through the “golden rule”). This would also support implementation of many of the SDGs of the UN2030 Agenda.</p> <p>3. Access to decent housing must be ensured.</p> <p>4. Support initiatives to integrate public service elements and fundamental rights in relevant EU sectoral initiatives (e.g. right to health, right to water, right to energy, right to good administration, right to public transport, right to internet access, etc.)</p>