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## TOWARDS AN NEW ACTION PLAN TO IMPLEMENT THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

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## CONTRIBUTION TO PUBLIC CONSULTATION

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*The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is a confederation of more than 40 national and European trade union organisations from over 20 European countries, with a total of more than 6 million individual members. Founded in 1990, CESI is a recognised European sectoral social partner and advocates improved employment conditions for workers in Europe and a strong social dimension in the EU.*

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CESI welcomes the European Commission's initiative to update the Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights. CESI stresses that the Action Plan must become the backbone of a social Europe that guarantees fair working conditions, quality jobs, strong social protection, and inclusive labour markets while supporting Europe's competitiveness and resilience. At the same time, any renewed Action Plan must respect national competences, especially concerning the organisation and financing of public services, which remain the sole responsibility of Member States.

The European Pillar of Social Rights embodies binding principles that must be translated through effective implementation and strong accountability mechanisms. While CESI supports strong enforcement and monitoring, it must be ensured that reporting obligations do not lead to unnecessary bureaucracy for administrations. Monitoring mechanisms should be efficient, proportionate and focused on tangible outcomes.

In a context of global economic competition, geopolitical uncertainty, and ongoing digital and green transitions, a renewed Action Plan must prioritise social progress alongside economic resilience, not least to implement a new EU Quality Jobs Roadmap. At the same time, social justice must go hand in hand with fiscal sustainability. Ambitious social goals must remain financially realistic and implementable. Where required, additional public funding could be raised through adjusted taxation of large corporate profits.

Trade unions must be structurally involved in the further design, implementation and monitoring of all Action Plan measures. CESI remains committed to supporting the European Commission and Member States in this endeavour and stands ready to contribute as a European social partner to building a stronger Social Europe.

For CESI it remains a priority to bring the Pillar closer to national legal systems, national social dialogues and national trade unions and employer organisations. As a set of principles that are not directly enforceable and which to a considerable extent span to subject matters that are outside the scope of EU competence, it is vital that the EU and national level political agendas actively refer to the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights as a basis for (and to strengthen) their collective bargaining power. EU and national level social partners must use the Pillar of Social Rights as a reference compass for their activities and claims, not least when negotiating new collective agreements. EU promises must be turned into real tools for workers, otherwise there is a risk that it will not meet the expectations that citizens and workers have placed in it.

As such, it will be imperative that the Action Plan will (1) span across implementation and enforcement tools and combine hard law and soft policy instruments as well as funding to be effective:

- Legislative initiatives and infringement procedures where Member States fail to uphold EU social rights.
- Country-specific recommendations under the European Semester to ensure social objectives are integrated into EU economic governance.
- Reinforced use of EU structural and investment funds and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

According to CESI, the following core priorities should feature high in the new Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights:

**1. Strengthening social dialogue and trade union pluralism.** A renewed Action Plan must ensure that all workers have a strong voice in shaping the future of work, regardless of the trade union they are affiliated to. A genuine strengthening of social dialogue requires balanced participation of all representative unions at both EU and national level. The role of social partners must be reinforced in practice to this end.

- Fully implement the 2023 Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue to render trade union pluralism and inclusive social dialogue a reality at EU and national level.
- Revise Commission Decision 98/500/EC on European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees to guarantee access for all representative trade union organisations identified by Eurofound representativeness studies.
- Provide proportionate funding for capacity building for all trade union organisations at the EU level.

**2. Ensuring fair wages and decent working conditions.** Despite economic growth, too many workers continue to face poverty wages and precarious conditions.

- Guarantee the full and effective implementation of the EU Minimum Wage Directive 2022/2041, promoting collective bargaining as a key driver for upward wage convergence.
- Ensure strict enforcement of the EU Pay Transparency Directive 2023/970, with adequate resources for labour inspectorates and strong worker representation in monitoring processes.
- Step up action to eliminate precarious work and unfair contracts, notably via the EU Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive 2019/1152, ensuring that all jobs in Europe meet minimum standards of decency and security.

In implementing measures such as minimum wage and pay transparency, trade union pluralism, inclusive social dialogue in national collective bargaining systems must be respected.

**3. Tackling precarious employment and abusive practices.** New and atypical forms of employment must not be loopholes to circumvent workers' rights.

- Revise the Directives on Fixed-Term, Part-Time, and Temporary Agency Work to close gaps that permit discrimination vis-à-vis permanent employees.
- Introduce a ban on unpaid and exploitative traineeships, ensuring that at least all post-curriculum traineeships are fairly remunerated.
- Include binding social clauses in EU public procurement and state aid rules, ensuring public funds only benefit companies that respect workers' rights, apply collective agreements and guarantee minimum wages.

**4. Managing the digital and green transitions responsibly.** The twin transitions must be shaped to benefit workers and society as a whole.

- Adopt a dedicated EU Directive on a Right to Disconnect, which includes provisions for fair digitalisation of workplaces.
- Establish a Directive on Artificial Intelligence (AI) at Work, ensuring democratic oversight of AI systems, fair algorithmic governance and full worker representation in related processes.
- Ensure just transition mechanisms with strong EU and national funding for reskilling, upskilling and adequate social protection for those unable to transition into new jobs, especially in sectors undergoing rapid decarbonisation.

**5. Public services as a cornerstone of social and economic resilience.** Strong public services are essential to both social cohesion and economic competitiveness.

- Further recognise public services as essential infrastructure underpinning Europe's economy and resilience.
- Promote investment in public service jobs and working conditions across education, health care, justice, post and telecoms, defence and overall public administrations to attract qualified staff and enable it to perform well.
- Modernise public services with ICT and AI tools to improve efficiency, while safeguarding personalised, accessible, on-site services and ensuring that technology complements, not replaces, workers.

**6. Training and lifelong learning.** Europe must invest in people at every stage of their careers, from the young to older workers.

- Step up measures to reduce school dropouts and strengthen apprenticeships and vocational education and training (VET), with structured pathways into quality jobs.
- Support a right to lifelong learning, with frameworks that allow workers to adapt their skills and remain employable throughout changing career trajectories. This concerns in particular training and re-qualification programmes to adapt to digital and green transitions.
- Develop policies for older workers to ensure safe and healthy working conditions until retirement age, with adapted job profiles that account for physical capacities.

**7. Combating violence, discrimination and inequality at work.** The future of work must be inclusive and free of violence and discrimination.

- Ensure full transposition and enforcement of the EU Directive on Combating Violence against Women 2024/1385.
- Step up measures against third-party violence in public-facing professions, particularly in health care, education, law enforcement and public administrations.
- Promote inclusive workplaces and collective agreements that actively fight discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, disability or age.