

European Pillar of Social Rights – ESIP response to the consultation on the Action Plan

Preliminary remarks

The European Social Insurance Platform, is a strong supporter of the goal of achieving renewed convergence of a high level of social protection, as enshrined in EU treaties¹. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, national social security schemes have again proven their key role in supporting the EU's population and its economy. While the organisation and financing of social security schemes is a Member States' competence, there is an important supportive role that can be played by the European Union's action². In particular, efficient coordination between social security institutions is key to help tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

ESIP welcomed the proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights in 2017 and now takes the opportunity provided by this consultation to put forward further proposals to implement its principles. In accordance with our field of expertise, we will focus on **principles 9 and 10** under chapter II Fair Working Conditions and **principles 11 to 18** in Chapter III Social Protection and Inclusion, as well as some general recommendations.

Disclaimer

ESIP members support this position in so far as the subject matter lies within their field of competence.

General recommendation: Putting the European Pillar of Social Rights into action

- As part of the European Union's response to the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, encourage Member States to explain how **reforms and investments listed in each component of their Recovery and Resilience Plans might contribute to economic strength**, production potential and productivity, and at the same time towards the implementation of **a specific principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights**, and, where relevant, of the Recommendation on access to social protection³

¹ In accordance with Article 3 paragraph 3 of the Treaty on the European Union & articles 9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

² In accordance with article 153 & 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

³ Council Recommendation of 8 November 2019 on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed 2019/C 387/01

Chapter II: Fair working conditions

Principle 9: Work-life balance

Proposals

- Ensure the **implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive**, especially the EU minimum standards it sets in the field of paternity, parental and carers' leave
- Encourage the **exchange of best practices between national experts on the design of family policies** to ensure they provide positive incentives and do not have unintended negative effects on work-life balance and gender equality. This is one of the key messages of an ESIP event on gender equality and social security⁴, on the basis of a study conducted by our member CNAF⁵.

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

Proposals

- Launch a **review of the existing EU framework on health and safety at work** and consider **revising certain pieces of legislation** that might no longer be up to date with the current organisation of workplaces, such as Directive 90/270/EEC on the minimum safety and health requirements for work with display screen equipment.
- **Assess the applicable EU legislation on health and safety at work applicable to remote work**, due to its increased use in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Emphasise more strongly, **the advantages of prevention also from an economic point of view**. The aim of occupational safety in terms of the "Vision Zero" must be a no tolerance for fatal and serious accidents.

Chapter III: Social protection and inclusion

Principle 11: Childcare and support to children

Proposals

- Provide EU support to Member States to **develop early childhood education and care (ECEC) of high quality**, accessible to all children and with sufficient flexibility to adapt to the needs of all children and their families⁶.
- Foster the exchange of best practices on national initiatives to **tackle the non-take-up of rights**.

⁴ For more information see the [outcomes of the ESIP event](#)

⁵ International Social Security Association (ISSA) - Technical Commission on Family Benefits "[Gender equality and family policies: factors and implications](#)";2019

⁶ For further information, see the [ESIP feedback on the European Child Guarantee roadmap](#)

Principle 12: Social protection

Proposals

Ensuring adequate social protection regardless of type of employment

- Continue to support Member States and **monitor the implementation of the Council Recommendation on access to social protection**⁷.
- Continue the **mutual learning exercise** already launched with ministry representatives and **extend it to national social security experts** to facilitate the exchange of best practices on the practical implementation of national reforms.
- Ensure **sufficient EU funding is available and easily accessible**, specifically under the Technical Support Instrument to **facilitate the implementation of national reforms** and to further communicate on how to benefit from support.
- Conduct an **assessment of the social protection coverage of platform workers in each Member State**, depending on their work status, building on the existing data in the field⁸.
- Facilitate the **exchange of national best practices on the inclusion of platform workers within social security schemes**.

Ensuring adequate social protection for mobile persons

- ESIP would **encourage the European Commission to pursue its efforts in reaching a compromise solution on modernised rules for social security coordination**. This includes reducing bureaucratic burden regarding applications for A1 documents as well as introducing flexible digital tools, developed with national social security experts as a way to facilitate fair mobility and ease communication between national administrations.
- Support the **full and timely implementation of the Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information** with sufficient EU funding to ensure the viability of the project in the long-term. Therefore, the envisaged 'RINA Handover' must not lead to unreasonably high costs especially for smaller institutions jeopardising the rights of insured persons in the EU.
- Support Member States and national social security institutions in **providing links to necessary information, and online procedures on the Single Digital Gateway**, and provide technical and financial support for the translation of key information.
- Develop **an impact and cost-benefit assessment on the development of a European Social Security Number**, including a tool for the quick verification of coverage in real time, in comparison to other possible solutions. National social security experts as well as experts in data protection law should be involved in its design to ensure its benefits outweigh its implementation costs and its feasibility in

⁷ Council Recommendation of 8 November 2019 on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed (2019/C 387/01)

⁸ See for instance the [ESIP study on the social security coverage of platform workers](#)

accordance with European and national data protection law. A clear goal should be defined prior to developing a new tool to prevent additional administrative and financial burden ensuring compatibility with already existing systems.

Principle 13: Unemployment benefits

Proposals

- ESIP welcomes the introduction of the **European Instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE)** as a way to support the extensive use of short-time work schemes that has been made in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Further investigate the **possible design of a permanent European Unemployment Reinsurance Scheme**, while ensuring this instrument would in no way affect the Member States' competence in the design and financing of unemployment benefit schemes.

Principle 15: Old age income and pensions

Proposals

- To tackle the impact of demographic change on pension systems, an **assessment of lifelong learning best practices** should be carried out. The increase of retirement ages as well as **measures facilitating the extension of working lives** should be considered.
- Foster **exchange of national best practices to tackle the gender pension gap**, including ways to take into account assimilated non-work periods such as maternity, paternity or parental leave.
- Continue to **provide support to the European Tracking Service** project to allow mobile workers to track their acquired rights and improve their pension literacy.

Principle 16: Healthcare

As representative of social health insurers, ESIP has a long history of EU-level advocacy to improve the quality, affordability of and timely access to healthcare and at the same time ensuring the sustainability of healthcare systems as highlighted in the **Commission's initiative for a Pharmaceutical Strategy**⁹.

Proposals

Ensuring timely access

- **Linking centralised marketing authorisation for medicinal product with the obligation to market the product in all EU 27 Member States.**
- Consider the **introduction of a unitary Supplementary Protection Certificate**¹⁰, to put an end to the misuse of the current fragmented system, delaying entry of generics and biosimilars on the market.

⁹ For further information, see [ESIP's reply to the public consultation](#)

¹⁰ For further information, see [ESIP's statement on Supplementary Protection Certificates](#)

- Ensure **swift implementation of the revised Regulations on medical devices and in vitro diagnostics** in line with the new deadlines adapted following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Establish a **common EU-level reporting system** on the availability of medicinal products as well as a **stockpiling system for essential medicines** in order to prevent and better manage shortages. Additionally, introduce measures to **foster joint procurement procedures**.

Ensuring affordability of healthcare

- Enhance collaboration and cooperation between national pricing and reimbursement (P&R) authorities by **providing support for discussion and exchange of best practice in the field of novel P&R and procurement practices**.
- **Revise the Orphan Medicinal Products Regulation¹¹** to address misuse of the current framework.
- Ensure **public return on public investment** in research and development through the **introduction of conditionality clauses** in EU-funded research programmes

Ensuring a high quality of healthcare

- Introduce **new targeted incentives to encourage the development of priority medicines** such as new antimicrobials¹² and in areas with a high unmet medical and societal need.
- Embrace opportunities to monitor and improve the quality of care through digital solutions, for instance the development of a **regulatory framework on a European health data space** and the creation of a coordinating body supervising the application of quality standards, in compliance with the principle of Open Science and the GDPR¹³.

Promoting prevention

- Ensure full implementation of a **'Health in all policies' approach¹⁴** across all policy fields and in overarching EU initiatives such as Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and the Green Deal.
- Continue the EU's action to reduce exposure to carcinogenic substances in the workplace and **ensure continued screening and diagnosis** in cases of work-related cancers that have a long latency period. Regarding the future Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, **high quality cancer screening programmes should only be extended to other cancers if there is a proven added benefit**.

¹¹ For further information, see [ESIP's position on orphan medicinal products](#)

¹² For further information, see [ESIP's position paper on antimicrobial resistance](#)

¹³ For further information see [ESIP's feedback to the roadmap on EU common data spaces](#)

¹⁴ For further information, see [ESIP's feedback on Europe's Beating Cancer Plan](#)

- Support prevention programmes promoting healthy habits, early detection in everyday life as well as at work.

Principle 17: Inclusion of people with disabilities

Proposals

Return to work strategies (RTW)¹⁵

- Reinforce the focus on rehabilitation and return to work strategies (RTW) to strengthen employability throughout the working life and to therefore generate a real return on investment for social security and companies.
- Develop a **study on the current situation of RTW policies** in the EU's Member States, including a literature review of best practices
- Develop **operational guidelines on RTW for people suffering from chronic illnesses**
- Disseminate the results of both projects in the EU
- Promote the **exchange of best practices** among Member States

Disability Strategy¹⁶

- Add **the early childhood education and care (ECEC) dimension to the next Disability Strategy** as it is essential to support children with disabilities, allow for an early inclusion into society and foster their future employability and autonomy.
- Promote accessible, affordable and quality ECEC open for all children with priority access for disabled children, **backed by funding for ECEC receiving disabled children.**
- Promote **the right to work**, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment, as a way to enable persons with disabilities to attain maximum of independence as well as a full inclusion and participation in societal and professional life.
- Further **support the implementation of the right to work in the next Disability Strategy**, including for those who acquire a disability during their work, as enshrined in the UN CRPD. Discrimination based on disability related to employment, including recruitment, career advancement and safe and healthy working conditions must be prohibited.

¹⁵ For further information, see [ESIP's position paper "Good and sustainable work is the best medicine!" Return to work of people with disabilities and chronic disease in the European Union](#)

¹⁶ For further information, see [ESIP's response to the public consultation on the evaluation of the EU Disability Strategy 2010 – 2020](#)

Digital inclusion

- Include **the digital inclusion of vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities as a horizontal principle** in all relevant policies and programmes as it is key to ensure that all can contribute to and benefit from the EU's digital transition.

Filling the data gap

- **Improve the collection of data** as well as the reporting and assessment of results of the implemented initiatives to allow for an adequate monitoring and evaluation of the next Disability Strategy, in accordance with the Commission's own findings of a strong link between the Disability Strategy and the effective improvement of the life of persons with disabilities.

Principle 18: Long-term care

Proposals

- Continue to promote national **best practices encouraging the continuity of care** through better integration of health and social services.
- **Healthy ageing and long-term care should be an overarching aim** of all EU initiatives. More healthy life years allow for a longer participation in society and reduce the impact of ageing on healthcare systems. Healthy ageing measures should also be included in the EU and national recovery plans.
- The EU long-term vision for rural areas should **address the specificities of rural areas**, ranging from ageing and depopulation to limited access to healthcare ("medical deserts"), services and social protection.

Conclusion

ESIP will continue to inform and engage with EU decision-makers on the way national social security institutions provide support to the EU's population, possible challenges in a cross-border context and the support that can be provided at EU level. ESIP stands ready to support EU institutions in the development of its Action Plan and its implementation at national level.

About the European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP)

The **European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP)** represents over **50 national statutory social insurance organisations** in **17 EU Member States, the United Kingdom and Switzerland**, active in the field of health insurance, pensions, occupational disease and accident insurance, disability and rehabilitation, family benefits and unemployment insurance. The aims of ESIP and its members are to preserve high profile social security for Europe, to reinforce solidarity-based social insurance systems and to maintain European social protection quality. ESIP builds strategic alliances for developing common positions to influence the European debate and is a consultation forum for the European institutions and other multinational bodies active in the field of social security.

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