

The European Pillar of Social Rights and its relevance for health and social equity

POLICY PRÉCIS

What is the European Pillar of Social Rights?

The European Pillar of Social Rights was first introduced by European Commission (EC) President Jean-Claude Juncker in September 2015, in his State of the Union speech. It is foreseen as a self-standing reference framework document of legal nature which “takes account of the changing realities of the world of work and which can serve as a compass for the renewed convergence within the Euro area”¹.

On 8 March 2016, the European Commission put forward a **first, preliminary outline** of what should become the **European Pillar of Social Rights**. The aim is to build on, and complement, the EU social “acquis” and guide social and employment policies which are essential for well-functioning and fair labour markets and welfare systems.

The Pillar will serve as a reference framework to screen the performance of employment and social policies in member states and help drive reforms at national level. The initiative is targeted at Member States from the Eurozone countries, but others in the EU Single Market may also adopt measures.

The EC has launched a **consultation process on the European Pillar of Social Rights**, running until 31 December 2016, in which public authorities, social partners and civil society play a central role.

The final version of the European Pillar of Social Rights will be presented in the **beginning of 2017**.

Why a European Pillar of Social Rights?

European governments are experiencing high pressures on public finance and macroeconomic imbalances between countries. The work on the European Social Pillar is part of the solution presented by the Commission for a deeper and fairer Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)². Tackling poverty and other social issues are integrated in the agenda for economic development and growth.

Social inequalities persist across EU countries and have in recent years increased. In 2014, every fourth citizen of the EU, i.e. 122 million people³, was at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

There are also significant differences between EU Member States, with more than a third of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Romania and Bulgaria (40 %) and Greece (36 %), and much fewer in Finland (17 %), Sweden (16 %), and the Czech Republic (14 %)⁴. Almost every fifth young person under the age of 25 (i.e. 4.4 million people) and almost 21.7 million men and women (8 % of the labour force) are unemployed in the EU⁵ (fig. 1). Moreover, 26 million children in the EU live in poverty and are at higher risk of poor health, of not finishing school, of inadequate peer support and of not being able to reach their full potential in life⁶.



AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION

European Union (EU28)

● employed	69%
● unemployed	8%
● inactive	23%

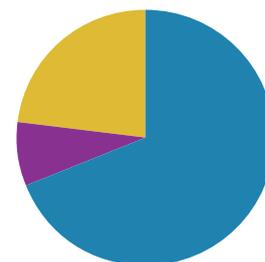


Figure 1 - % of total population aged 20-64 who were employed, unemployed or inactive in 2014 (Data source: Eurostat)

The preliminary outline of the European Pillar of Social Rights⁸

1. **Equal opportunities and access to the labour market**, including: skills, education and lifelong learning, flexible and secure labour contracts, secure professional transitions, active support for employment and gender equality and work life balance;
2. **Fair working conditions**, including: conditions of employment, wages, health and safety at work, social dialogue and involvement of workers;
3. **Adequate and sustainable social protection**, including: integrated social benefits and services, healthcare and sickness benefits, pensions, unemployment benefits, minimum income, disability benefits, long-term care, childcare, housing and access to essential services.



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Why is the European Pillar of Social Rights relevant to tackling health inequalities?

The focus on social and employment policies is highly relevant for addressing structural determinants of health and inequities.

EuroHealthNet experience and research work⁹ shows that:

- Policies which **help re-integrate vulnerable groups** into the labour market result in important results in health and well-being (fig. 2).
- **Improvements in the quality of work**, particularly for people in lower occupational groups contribute to a significant healthier and more productive Europe;
- **Promoting affordable, high quality pre-natal and early years' services** alongside supportive employment policies and parenting and family support services is crucial for fighting child poverty and disadvantage.

Employment and social protection policies affect key social determinants of health, by influencing socio-economic position as well as its consequences on health. Integrated and holistic approaches are needed to tackle health inequalities, one of the main European challenges. Therefore, the European Pillar of Social Rights has an important potential role in addressing health inequalities.

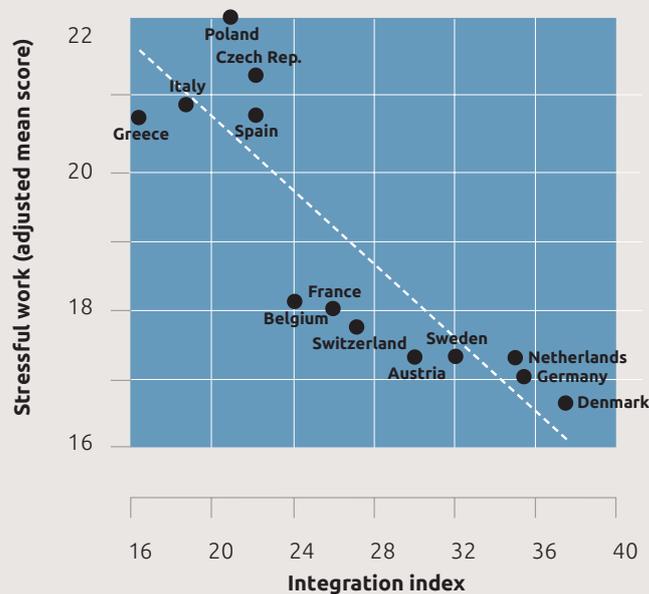


Figure 2 - Level of national labour market integration and work stress score

Join us in the consultation process

The EC has made available the following ways for participating in the consultation:

- a website with a questionnaire to be completed until 31 December 2016 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=699&consultId=22&visib=0&furtherConsult=yes>;
- all the input can also be sent directly via e-mail or by post to the Commission: Empl-european-pillar-of-social-rights@ec.europa.eu, European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Rue Joseph II, 27 – 00/120, B-1049 Bruxelles;
- structured dialogues organised in the member states by Commission representations - the upcoming events can be found on a dedicated website http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/towards-european-pillar-social-rights_en#whats-next

EuroHealthNet will respond to the Consultation and provide information for all our members and partners to fully engage in this process.

FOOTNOTES

1. European Commission (2015) State of the Union 2015: Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity. European Commission, Press Release Database, Press Release Details, State of the Union 2015: Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity. Accessed 29/03/2016, available [\[online\]](#)
2. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-545_en.htm
3. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion
4. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics
5. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics
6. <http://www.eurochild.org/projects/investing-in-children/written-declaration-on-investing-in-children/>
7. Eurostat (2016) Labour Market Statistics. European Commission, Eurostat, News Themes in Spotlight, Archive, Employment 2014. Accessed 29/03/2016, available [\[online\]](#)
8. European Commission (2016) Towards a European Pillar of Social Rights. European Commission, Priorities, A Deeper and Fairer Economic and Monetary Union. Accessed 29/03/2016, available [\[online\]](#)
9. Goldblatt P, Siegrist J, Lundberg O, Marinetti C, Farrer L & Costongs C (2015). Improving health equity through action across the life course: Summary of evidence and recommendations from the DRIVERS project. Report produced as part of the 'DRIVERS for Health Equity' project, <http://health-gradient.eu/>. Brussels: EuroHealthNet.