



Briefing

European Pillar of Social Rights

On the 17th November 2017 the European Pillar of Social Rights was agreed as a means of strengthening the living and working conditions of people in the EU. On that day it was signed by the Presidents of the European Commission, European Parliament, European Council (representing the Governments of EU member states), and the heads of 27 EU Member states including then Taoiseach Leo Varadkar.

The Pillar was seen as a way to strengthen the protection of people's employment and social rights in a changing world with growing globalisation, new way of working, etc. It was also recognised that there was a need to re-balance economic and social rights following the years of the financial crisis where little consideration was given to the social impact of economic policies. This resulted in a lot of social damage and increased poverty and inequality, with 113 million people at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU.

The Pillar of Social Rights mainly pulls together the existing rights already in place in EU and adds some additional principles. It also includes proposals for four policy and legislative changes.

While the Pillar of Social Rights on its own falls short of what is needed for an integrated approach to address poverty and social exclusion, its implementation, and making these principles and rights real in the lives of people, will go a long way to doing so.

What is in the Pillar of Social Rights?

There are two main parts to the Pillar

- 1. Twenty Rights and Principles
- 2. Four policy initiatives

1. Twenty Rights and Principles covering three areas

i. Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

1. Education, training and life-long learning
2. Gender equality
3. Equal opportunities
4. Active support to employment

ii. Fair working conditions

5. Secure and adaptable employment
6. Wages
7. Information about employment conditions and protection in case of dismissals
8. Social dialogue and involvement of workers
9. Work-life balance
10. Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment and data protection

iii. Social protection and inclusion

11. Childcare and support to children
12. Social protection
13. Unemployment benefits
14. Minimum income
15. Old age income and pensions
16. Health care
17. Inclusion of people with disabilities
18. Long-term care
19. Housing and assistance for the homeless
20. Access to essential services

2. Four policy initiatives

Work-life balance Introduces changes to improve the minimum standards for parental, paternity and carer's leave. More here	Access to social protection Explores ways of providing as many people as possible with social security cover, including self-employed and workers who are working in growing numbers of non-standard type jobs or forms of employment. More here
Written Statement Directive Gives employees starting a new job the right to be notified in writing of the essential aspects of their employment conditions. More here	Working Time Directive Creating greater awareness and implementation of existing law on working conditions for employees, including on their working hours. More here

How is it being implemented?

Responsibility for delivering the Pillar is shared by the EU institutions, member states, social partners and other stakeholders, including civil society. However it also highlights that the majority of the powers to implement the 20 rights and principles lie with the Member State governments. The employment and social situation is very different across the Member states so the rights and principles are meant to set a common floor for the ambition of the EU and its member states, but member states are encouraged to also set even more ambitious social standards.

Therefore, while the delivery of the four policy and legislative initiatives is being led by the EU Commission it is mainly up to EU member states, to move forward in ensuring they are achieving the 20 rights and principles outlined in the Pillar.

The European Commission has responsibility for monitoring implementation of the Pillar. This is to happen mainly through the current process to monitor delivery on economic, environmental and social priorities, called the European Semester process. This is an annual process involving recommendations from the EU involving recommendations to member states and reports to and from the EU on progress on achieving these recommendations and on wider commitments. The EU semester process however is currently undergoing revision and moving forward it is due to focus on a post covid-19 recovery across EU member states. A [Social Scoreboard](#) has also been developed, involving a range of indicators, to measure each countries performance in relation to the Pillar of Social Rights. However, this scoreboard currently does not clearly link to the 20 rights and principles in the Pillar.

In July 2020, the EU leaders agreed on this recovery plan and the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027. The EU Social Fund Plus will focus on delivering the Pillar of Social Rights.

Throughout 2020 and across Europe, the EU has been engaging in a consultation process regarding the European Pillar of Social Rights. The aims of the consultation process are the following: The responses to the consultation process will inform an implementation plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights. You can find more information [here](#).

Further Information

- Watch EAPN Irelands [introductory video to the European Pillar of Social Rights.](#)
- European Commission – [European Pillar of Social Rights webpage](#)
- [Booklet on European Pillar of Social Rights](#)
- [EAPN \(Europe\) input](#) and [EAPN Ireland input](#) to the consultation on the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights
- [EAPN Europe position paper](#) on adequate income.
- EAPN Ireland policy Briefing- [“Rethinking a New and Inclusive Ireland in 2020 and Beyond”](#)

20 Rights and Principles in the European Pillar of Social Rights

Chapter I: Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

1. Education, training and life-long learning

Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.

2. Gender equality

Equality of treatment and opportunities between women and men must be ensured and fostered in all areas, including regarding participation in the labour market, terms and conditions of employment and career progression. Women and men have the right to equal pay for work of equal value.

3. Equal opportunities

Regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, everyone has the right to equal treatment and opportunities regarding employment, social protection, education, and access to goods and services available to the public. Equal opportunities of under-represented groups shall be fostered.

4. Active support to employment

Everyone has the right to timely and tailor-made assistance to improve employment or self-employment prospects. This includes the right to receive support for job search, training and re-qualification. Everyone has the right to transfer social protection and training entitlements during professional transitions. Young people have the right to continued education, apprenticeship, traineeship or a job offer of good standing within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. People unemployed have the right to personalised, continuous and consistent support. The long-term unemployed have the right to an in-depth individual assessment at the latest at 18 months of unemployment.

Chapter II: Fair working conditions

5. Secure and adaptable employment

Regardless of the type and duration of the employment relationship, workers have the right to fair and equal treatment regarding working conditions, access to social protection and training. The transition towards open-ended forms of employment shall be fostered. In accordance with legislation and collective agreements, the necessary flexibility for employers to adapt swiftly to changes in the economic context shall be ensured. Innovative forms of work that ensure quality working conditions shall be fostered. Entrepreneurship and self-employment shall be encouraged. Occupational mobility shall be facilitated. Employment relationships that lead to precarious working conditions shall be prevented, including by prohibiting abuse of atypical contracts. Any probation period should be of reasonable duration.

6. Wages

Workers have the right to fair wages that provide for a decent standard of living. Adequate minimum wages shall be ensured, in a way that provide for the satisfaction of the needs of the worker and his / her family in the light of national economic and social conditions, whilst safeguarding access to employment and incentives to seek work. In-work poverty shall be prevented. All wages shall be set in a transparent and predictable way according to national practices and respecting the autonomy of the social partners.

7. Information about employment conditions and protection in case of dismissals

Workers have the right to be informed in writing at the start of employment about their rights and obligations resulting from the employment relationship, including on probation period. Prior to any dismissal, workers have the right to be informed of the reasons and be granted a reasonable period of notice. They have the right to access to effective and impartial dispute resolution and, in case of unjustified dismissal, a right to redress, including adequate compensation.

8. Social dialogue and involvement of workers

The social partners shall be consulted on the design and implementation of economic, employment and social policies according to national practices. They shall be encouraged to negotiate and conclude collective agreements in matters relevant to them, while respecting their autonomy and the right to collective action. Where appropriate, agreements concluded between the social partners shall be implemented at the level of the Union and its Member states.

Workers or their representatives have the right to be informed and consulted in good time on matters relevant to them, in particular on the transfer, restructuring and merger of undertakings and on collective redundancies. Support for increased capacity of social partners to promote social dialogue shall be encouraged.

9. Work-life balance

Parents and people with caring responsibilities have the right to suitable leave, flexible working arrangements and access to care services. Women and men shall have equal access to special leaves of absence in order to fulfil their caring responsibilities and be encouraged to use them in a balanced way.

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

Workers have the right to a high level of protection of their health and safety at work. Workers have the right to a working environment adapted to their professional needs and which enables them to prolong their participation in the labour market. Workers have the right to have their personal data protected in the employment context.

Chapter III: Social protection and inclusion

11. Childcare and support to children

Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality. Children have the right to protection from poverty. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities.

12. Social protection

Regardless of the type and duration of their employment relationship, workers, and, under comparable conditions, the self-employed, have the right to adequate social protection.

13. Unemployment benefits

The unemployed have the right to adequate activation support from public employment services to (re)integrate in the labour market and adequate unemployment benefits of reasonable duration, in line with their contributions and national eligibility rules. Such benefits shall not constitute a disincentive for a quick return to employment.

14. Minimum income

Everyone lacking sufficient resources has the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life, and effective access to enabling goods and services. For those who can work, minimum income benefits should be combined with incentives to (re)integrate into the labour market.

15. Old age income and pensions

Workers and the self-employed in retirement have the right to a pension commensurate to their contributions and ensuring an adequate income. Women and men shall have equal opportunities to acquire pension rights. Everyone in old age has the right to resources that ensure living in dignity.

16. Health care

Everyone has the right to timely access to affordable, preventive and curative health care of good quality.

17. Inclusion of people with disabilities

People with disabilities have the right to income support that ensures living in dignity, services that enable them to participate in the labour market and in society, and a work environment adapted to their needs.

18. Long-term care

Everyone has the right to affordable long-term care services of good quality, in particular home-care and community-based services.

19. Housing and assistance for the homeless

- a. Access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality shall be provided for those in need.
- b. Vulnerable people have the right to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction.
- c. Adequate shelter and services shall be provided to the homeless in order to promote their social inclusion.

20. Access to essential services

Everyone has the right to access essential services of good quality, including water, sanitation, energy, transport, financial services and digital communications. Support for access to such services shall be available for those in need.