

Proposals for a more social Europe

Inputs from Catalan social action organisations to the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights

September 2020

DIPLOCA  Public Diplomacy Council
of Catalonia



Executive summary

While we know that most of the instruments addressing social rights are handled by Member States, European Union institutions can nevertheless help to lay down guidelines and recommendations on these policies, especially ones tackling poverty and social exclusion associated with employment.

Against this background, the European Commission has invited national, regional, local and European institutions and European citizens to provide their input during the process of drawing up the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which is to be presented in 2021.

In response to this European initiative, **this document compiles the inputs from ECAS, a Federation of Catalan Social Action Organisations** dealing primarily with groups in a situation or at risk of social exclusion, by leveraging the direct channel of communication for citizens who wish to help towards the shared construction of a more social Europe.

The proposals put forward are in part the outcome of the ideas which emerged during the workshop entitled **Poverty and Employment 'What do Catalan social action organisations want to say to Europe?'** which was held on 8 July 2020.

The event was hosted in conjunction by **ECAS** and the **Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia (Diplocat)**, a public-private consortium that aims to connect Catalonia with the world and promote the country's image abroad, creating links and relationships of trust with the people and institutions of other countries. Diplocat also encourages civil society and Catalan organisations to become involved in and contribute to the main global challenges and debates. It fosters their ability to be major players on the international stage in order to build long-lasting bridges of dialogue over time with the aim of listening and being heard.

The workshop can be viewed [here](#).

As the **European Pillar** says, social dialogue plays a central role in reinforcing social rights and enhancing sustainable and inclusive growth. Social partners at all levels have a crucial role to play in pursuing and implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The event was designed as an opportunity for European policymakers and Catalan social leaders to share ideas about a common core issue: social transformation towards improving people's quality of life against the backdrop of a pandemic crisis which has further heightened the need to implement new emergency measures in the areas that concern us.

Proposals for the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights

The European Pillar of Social Rights is anchored in twenty principles arranged in three categories: equal opportunities and access to the labour market; fair working conditions; and social protection and inclusion.

Based on this classification, below are the proposals that the Catalan Social Action Organisations (ECAS) address to the European Commission as part of the consultation process for drawing up and implementing the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Chapter I: Equal opportunities and access to the labour market.

Principle 1: Education, training and life-long learning.



Proposals:

Many jobs are going to change, others are already changing in the wake of the pandemic, many tasks will have to be performed by telecommuting, and a significant generation of people will have to retrain if they are to adapt to this new environment. Some of the training proposals which should be emphasised and promoted are:

- Training in **ICT skills (digitalisation)** to combat the digital divide;
- **Language skills** for a more global world: many face-to-face activities will now have to be conducted online and it will be much easier to connect from anywhere, so our language proficiency will have to be enhanced;
- **Online training:** turning contents and methods which until now were classroom-based into e-learning is critical in order to continue training our participants with the same quality and effectiveness;
- **Vocational training:** training plans closely tailored to the profiles of unemployed people.

Principle 2: Gender equality.



Proposals:

Women are still one of the groups which have been hardest hit by the COVID-19 crisis since most of the profiles with the greatest needs at present concern women: the digital divide, more temporary and part-time work contracts, higher numbers on furlough, the rise in domestic violence during lockdown, etc. Accordingly, the following is proposed:

- Measures implementing positive discrimination for women in the labour market: **recognition of skills versus CVs by requirements or duties.**

Principle 3: Equal opportunities.



Proposals:

This crisis has exponentially increased inequalities between countries and between groups within each one. It is not only an economic crisis due to a slump in business activity but also losses at the personal level in terms of self-esteem, security, confidence, etc. Hence the following measures are proposed for the most vulnerable groups:

- **Outplace people coming from the underground economy** with prior training to enable them to compete with the rest of the people who are looking for a job in the regular labour market;
- **Empowerment actions - specification of work goal and life project:** get back cross-cutting and personal skills, self-esteem, interpersonal skills, strength, etc. In general, the person's recovery through psychological support as an add-on to social and labour integration pathways;
- **Processing permits to regularise the situation of immigrants – programmes for first job and vocational training:** this is crucial as during the pandemic period, people seeking legalisation were greatly hampered by the disruption of appointments in offices handling legalisation cases and registration of residency in large towns and cities such as Barcelona; all these procedures had to be done online and many people in this group were unable to access them.

Principle 4: Active support to employment.



Proposals:

Member States and regions need to step up support for employment with genuinely proactive policies tailored to the current needs of workers and enterprises:

- **New job opportunities in the same industry:** grants for innovation in the industries which have been hardest hit yet have the potential to reinvent themselves;
- **Redirecting towards new industries which can create jobs** with appropriate training (skills recycling for professionals): the fact that telecommuting is becoming more widespread may open up new employment, business and economic opportunities since other needs will emerge (fitting out homes for telecommuting, greater local spending as there will be less travel, etc.);
- **Comprehensive empowerment projects** identifying skills and designing and implementing the life project (coordinated with the proposal made in measure 3);
- **Fast-track careers guidance services** both online and blended: many of the people who are currently on furlough or unemployed are in this position because of the COVID-19 crisis and not because they do not have the skills or resources needed to rejoin the labour market. For these people, a fast-track guidance service which shows them alternative options with small, very specific training capsules will be sufficient for them to find work;
- **Youth employment programmes:** incentives for hiring, one-off programmes, vocational training and new opportunity schools, as young people are still one of the groups worst affected by unemployment;
- **Driving direct recruitment:** many businesses and organisations will need financial support for job creation until the labour market and economic growth start to get back to normal;
- **Public and universal support resources bank.**

Chapter III: Social protection and inclusion.

Principle 11: Childcare and support to children.



Proposals:

In the children and young people group, young people who are or have been in care are particularly vulnerable.

- **Support for the unstable situation of young people who have been in care:** at the moment we have a major problem with unaccompanied minors who have arrived in Catalonia in recent months, who have been under the guardianship of the government and therefore have gained a residence permit, but who cannot renew it because current immigration law does not allow renewal unless a number of economic conditions are fulfilled which these young people cannot meet. Soon there will be a high percentage of undocumented young people from third countries living in flats paid for with public funds and without any prospect of a feasible life project.

Principle 14: Minimum income.



Proposals:

Universal Basic Income is not yet being considered at the European level, yet in the social realm, it is seen as one of the key points in considerably reducing the level of poverty in Europe.

- **Basic citizenship income** as a starting point for addressing processes for enhancing skills and labour market integration; a review of the funds allocated to this measure since at present and at least in Spain, both the national and Catalan minimum living allowances are below the minimum level of income and therefore do not allow people who receive them to lift themselves out of poverty.

Principle 17: Inclusion of people with disabilities.



Proposals:

Another of the groups hardest hit by the post-pandemic crisis are people with disabilities, as in many cases the current situation does not allow them to perform activities and jobs they were previously able to do. For some specific disabilities (such as visual impairment, for instance), COVID-19 prevention measures leave them unable to use their sense of touch which is essential for them.

- Support for **tailoring resources** and communication and information channels to the various needs of people with disabilities, greater accessibility, training in the use of the new channels, etc.

Principle 20: Access to essential services.



Proposals:

The minimum income designed to ensure that no one is excluded from essential services has to be fully effective. Consequently, **these essential services need to be guaranteed in each Member State**. Social organisations are committed to continuing to provide support through their mechanisms, but they also require effective resources and channels to assist the people they work with.