



For a strong social Europe: The European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan

Editorial

Demographic change, digitalisation, climate change and the social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic pose major challenges for the people of Europe, the European Union and its Member States. The developments also highlight with urgency a growing need to consider and address socio-political challenges on a Europe-wide scale.

With the proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its 20 principles in 2017, the European Union has set guidelines for a strong social Europe that is just and inclusive and offers opportunities for all. In order to translate these principles into concrete actions, the European Commission adopted an Action Plan to the European Pillar of Social Rights in March 2021. In an **introductory contribution**, [Katrin Lange](#), Project Coordinator at the Observatory, presents these two milestones in recent EU social policy. The core of this contribution is an overview of selected socio-politically relevant principles within the European Pillar of Social Rights and related measures of the European Commission in the fields of gender equality, reconciliation of employment and private life, care and support for children and long-term care. [Nicolas Schmit](#), EU Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, addresses in his **statement** the three core objectives of the European Union in the areas of employment, skills and social protection as declared in the Action Plan, which are to be achieved by 2030.



These two contributions on the EU perspective are complemented by perspectives from civil society organisations and national governments. In an **interview**, [Alva Finn](#), Secretary General of Social Platform, and [Alfonso Lara Montero](#), Chief Executive Officer of the European Social Network, are asked about the relevance of the Eu-

ropean Pillar of Social Rights and the Action Plan for their own work in the two largest civil society organisations focusing on European social policy. In her closing **contribution**, [Sarah Molter](#), Research Officer at the Observatory, examines national perspectives from Germany and France regarding a strong and just Europe, focussing in particular on the current state of national implementation of the European Child Guarantee.

Content

Editorial	1
European Perspectives	
Introduction: The European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan.....	2
Statement of the European Commission	5
Civil Society Perspectives	
Interview with Alva Finn, Social Platform, and Alfonso Lara Montero, European Social Network	6
National Perspectives	
Social Rights in France and Germany	11
Publishing information	14

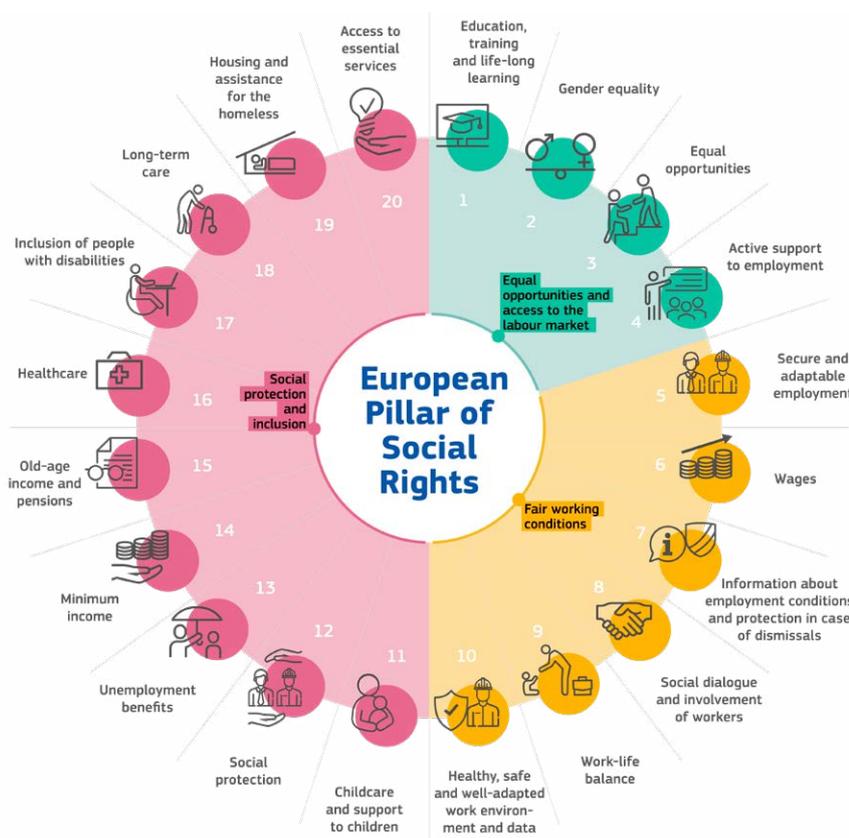
Introduction: The European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan

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“The Union shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child.”
(Preamble of the European Pillar of Social Rights)

European Pillar of Social Rights

The **European Pillar of Social Rights** was proclaimed on 17 November 2017 at the Social Summit in Gothenburg by the European Commission under then President Jean-Claude Juncker, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament.¹ In addition, all EU Member States expressed their support (→ [Milestones](#)).



Source: [European Commission](#)

The Pillar is intended to provide a guideline for a strong social Europe that is fair and inclusive and offers opportunities for all. It aims to strengthen the social rights of citizens in the European Union in the form of 20 principles in the three areas of equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions as well as social protection and inclusion. The overall aim is to support labour markets and welfare systems in the EU Member States and thus to contribute to a social Europe. Some principles reaffirm rights already contained in EU law, for instance in the → [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#); others set goals for a fairer and more social Europe in the face of social, technological and economic developments. The European Pillar of Social Rights does not

¹ European Commission: *European Pillar of Social Rights: Proclamation and signing*, Press release, 17 November 2017 with further information.

Milestones of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan

- **September 2015:** First outline of the European Pillar of Social Rights by the then President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker
- **March 2016:** First draft by the European Commission
- **17 November 2017:** Proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights at the Social Summit in Gothenburg
- **March 2018:** Introduction of a socio-political scoreboards aimed at documenting the implementation status of the Pillar
- **14 January 2020:** Announcement of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan by the European Commission
- **14 January to 30 November 2020:** Public consultation and submission of proposals for the further implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and for the preparation of the Action Plan
- **4 March 2021:** Presentation of the Action Plan by the European Commission
- **7/8 May 2021:** Porto Social Summit and Declaration of Porto
- **2025:** Evaluation by the European Commission into how far the core objectives have been reached
- **2030:** End of the Action Plan

Charter of Fundamental Rights

The **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union** defines the rights and freedoms of people living in the European Union. These rights are binding on the EU institutions and must be respected and safeguarded by the Member States when they implement EU law. The Charter was signed and formally proclaimed at the Nice European Council on 7 December 2000. It entered into force on 1 December 2009 alongside the **Treaty of Lisbon**. The Charter of Fundamental Rights comprises six major chapters: Dignity, Freedoms, Equality, Solidarity, Citizens' Rights and Justice.

European Social Policy

Social policy is legally anchored in articles 151 through 161 of the **Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)**. Article 151 sets the following common objectives for the European Union and its Member States: the promotion of employment, improved living and working conditions, so as to make possible their harmonisation while the improvement is being maintained, proper social protection, dialogue between management and labour, the development of human resources with a view to lasting high employment and the combatting of exclusion. The European Union can now take initiatives to coordinate the social policies of the Member States (Article 5 TFEU) and thus support the social policy cooperation of its Member States as well as set minimum standards across the EU.

give the European Union any additional competences in → [European Social Policy](#). The Pillar is a non-binding political instrument and depends on the support of the Member States. Thus, concrete initiatives and measures are needed to legally implement the Pillar.

European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan

To strengthen the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Commission under President Ursula von der Leyen on 14 January 2020 announced an Action Plan for the Pillar’s implementation.² At the same time, a public consultation was launched to shape the design of this Action Plan. Until 30 November 2020, proposals for the further implementation of the Pillar and for the preparation of the Action Plan could be submitted via the consultation [Have your say on reinforcing Social Europe](#). In total, the Commission received more than 1,000 responses from EU Member States, regions, cities, social partners (management and labour), businesses, think tanks, civil society organisations and EU citizens.³

Finally, on 4 March 2021, the Commission published the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#).⁴ In it, the Commission under von der Leyen sets three core targets for the European Union in the areas of employment, skills and social protection that are to be reached by 2030 (→ [Statement of the European Commission](#)).

In addition, the European Commission proposes a range of initiatives at EU and Member State level for the coming years. Below, four selected socio-politically relevant principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and related measures of the European Commission, which are also reflected in the Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights, are briefly outlined:⁵

Principles	Measures (Date of notice)
<p>Principle 2: Gender Equality</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Women and men have the right to equal pay for work of equal value.</p>	<p>Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 (March 2020)</p> <p>→ LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025 (November 2020)</p>
	<p>Member States lifting blockade against the Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges and related measures (November 2012)</p>
	<p>Action Plan to boost the social economy and to create jobs, aimed at high-quality jobs in particular, and to contribute to fair, sustainable and inclusive growth (December 2021)</p> <p>→ European Care Strategy (3rd quarter 2022), here: reducing gender gaps in employment, increasing women’s participation in society and promoting gender equality</p>

2 European Commission: *Commission presents first reflections on building a strong social Europe for just transitions*, Press release, 14 January 2020 with further information.

3 With the exception of the responses from EU citizens, the Commission has published all responses on its website.

4 European Commission: *Commission presents first reflections on building a strong social Europe for just transitions*, Press release, 14 January 2020 with further information.

5 Further initiatives within the Action Plan will be presented throughout this newsletter, in particular in respective infoboxes.

Directive on work-life balance

The **Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers** entered into force on 1 August 2019. It implements Principle 9 of the European Pillar of Social Rights (work-life balance or reconciliation of employment and private life), and in addition to supporting women in the labour market is intended to allow fathers, or the second parent, more time for family and with their children.

It sets the following European standards for Member States’ reconciliation policy:

- Ten days of paid leave for the second parent around the birth of the child. In lieu of wages, at least the amount of sick pay must be guaranteed.
- Four months parental leave for each parent, two months of which are paid and not transferable to the other parent.
- Five days of time for care per year.
- Right to apply for flexible working arrangements for parents and family carers.
- Better protection against dismissal for parents and family carers.

The EU Member States have to incorporate the Directive into national law by 2 August 2022.

European Care Strategy

In the priority aspect “Promoting our European way of life” within the **Commission work programme 2022**, a new **European Care Strategy** has been announced. This strategy aims to cover the different needs and requirements of both people with care responsibilities and people in need of care, from childcare to long-term care. The aim is to strengthen gender equality and social justice. A **public consultation** on this issue was held from 1 to 29 March.

The Care Strategy links two projects of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. The first project is the **Revision of the Barcelona objectives**: In 2002, the European Council meeting in Barcelona stipulated that Member States should remove barriers that prevent women from pursuing employment/paid work. In addition, Member States should by 2010 provide childcare facilities for at least 90 percent of children between the age of three and the mandatory school age, and for at least 33 percent of children under the age of three. Two reports were published in **2013** and **2018** to review the attainment of these targets.

The second project is the **initiative on long-term care**, which was also announced in the Action Plan. This initiative aims in particular to improve access to high-quality services for people in need of care. Separate consultations on both projects (**Barcelona objectives** and **long-term care**) were held in March 2022, in addition to the consultation on the Strategy itself.

Principles	Measures (Date of notice)
<p>Principle 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.</p>	<p>Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms (March 2021) → Directive on work-life balance (July 2019, implementation into national law by 2 August 2022) Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 (March 2020) and → European Care Strategy (3rd quarter 2022), here: reducing gender gaps in employment, increasing women’s participation in society and promoting gender equality – for instance in the framework of a revision of the Barcelona objectives for the expansion of early childhood care facilities</p>
<p>Principle 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.</p>	<p>Strategy on the Rights of the Child (March 2021) and → Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee (June 2021), to ensure that children at risk of poverty and social exclusion have effective access to essential services such as health care and education → European Care Strategy, here: focus on the upbringing, education and care of children, with particular attention to children with disabilities and children from disadvantaged groups (linked to the Child Guarantee)</p>
<p>Principle 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.</p>	<p>Green Paper on Ageing (January 2021), which sets out the challenges of demographic change and aims to support European policy coordination → European Care Strategy, here proposal for an initiative on long-term care</p>

Source: [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), author’s research

With the aim of strengthening the commitment of EU Member States, EU institutions, social partners and civil society to the implementation of the Action Plan, the **Social Summit in Porto** took place on 7-8 May 2021. It was the second of its kind after the Social Summit in Gothenburg in 2017.⁶ The [Porto Social Commitment](#) was adopted at this summit.⁷ In it, the EU Member States commit themselves to the national implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, and in particular the three core objectives.

The European Pillar of Social Rights is monitored by means of a [social scoreboard](#) and the European Semester. Developments and progress in the Member States are record-

⁶ European Commission: [Porto Social Summit: all partners commit to 2030 social targets](#), Press Release, 7 May 2021 with further information

⁷ In the run-up to the Social Summit, eleven Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands and Sweden) published a joint declaration in the form of a *non-paper* in which they express their support for the new Action Plan and the EU Social Summit, but take an explicitly critical position on a possible extension of the European Union’s competences. These eleven Member States around the so-called “Frugal Four” – Denmark, the Netherlands, Austria and Sweden – made it clear that targeted action at EU level should merely complement national measures and respect the division of competences between the European Union, its Member States and the social partners. Furthermore, it must be ensured that any EU initiative respects the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, the states argued, however adding that the setting of core objectives is appropriate to guide national debates, policies and reforms. See also POLITICO’s [coverage on this issue](#).

LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025

The European Commission has adopted the first **LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025** on 12 November 2020. This strategy is the result of calls from Member States¹ and the European Parliament², with strong support from the Intergroup on LGBTIQ Rights³ and civil society, to take action. The strategy is based on the **List of actions by the Commission to advance LGBTI equality 2015–2019**.

It comprises four pillars: 1. Tackling discrimination against LGBTIQ people, 2. Ensuring LGBTIQ people’s safety, 3. Building LGBTIQ inclusive societies, and 4. Leading the call for LGBTIQ equality around the world. Concrete goals and proposals for action are named for each of the individual pillars, which are to be achieved by 2025. The implementation of the strategy in National Action Plans is the responsibility of the Member States.

Together with other strategies, such as the **Gender Equality Strategy** or the → **Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy is part of the idea of a Union of Equality coined by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

- ¹ *Joint non-paper of 19 European Member States, 6 December 2018.*
- ² *Report on the EU Roadmap against homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity (2013/2183(INI)), 7 January 2014.*
- ³ *Official definition of LGBTIQ people in the strategy (see footnote 2 therein): “LGBTIQ people are people: who are attracted to others of their own gender (lesbian, gay) or any gender (bisexual); whose gender identity and/or expression does not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth (trans, non-binary); who are born with sex characteristics that do not fit the typical definition of male or female (intersex); and whose identity does not fit into a binary classification of sexuality and/or gender (queer).”*

ed in the three areas of equal opportunities, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion. Most of the 20 principles are represented by at least one indicator. As part of the Action Plan, the European Commission has announced a revision of the scoreboard and the addition of new lead indicators aiming to monitor progress towards the Pillar's principles more comprehensively.⁸ For instance, for Principle 11 on childcare and support to children, an **AROPE indicator (At risk of poverty or social exclusion)** which has been modified in 2021, will be compiled.

The Commission intends to review the extent to which the three core objectives have been achieved in 2025.

Statement of the European Commission on the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan

Nicolas Schmit, EU Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, among other things responsible for the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, the European Social Fund Plus as well as for the Child and Youth Guarantee.

In a recent Eurobarometer survey⁹, when respondents were asked what they thought was the biggest challenge for the EU, their number one answer was social inequalities, with unemployment coming in at number three. As we emerge from the health crisis that caused huge loss, instability and precarious situations for many, the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan is more essential than ever. We have to be serious about building an inclusive and sustainable recovery, and stamping out entrenched inequalities.



The first target in the Action Plan is for at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 to be in employment by 2030. People in Europe should have equal access to good quality, secure jobs with decent pay. Special attention needs to be devoted to young people and the low skilled, who are more vulnerable to the fluctuations in the labour market. Member States should implement the reinforced → **Youth Guarantee** and the upcoming **ALMA programme**¹⁰, to give young people opportunities and hope.

The Commission has proposed three directives in this area: on → **adequate minimum wages**, on **pay transparency**, on **pay transparency and on improving the working conditions for people working through digital labour platforms**. It also presented the new **Occupational Safety and Health Strategic Framework 2021–2027** to keep workers in the EU protected. By the end of 2022, the Commission will present the → **European Care Strategy** which will include measures to strengthen the early childhood education and care offer in the EU. In doing so, more women will be empowered to enter or return to the labour market, boosting employment levels across Europe.

⁸ See also Annex 2. *The revised social scoreboard in the action plan.*

⁹ The European Commission and the European Parliament published a special Eurobarometer on 26 January 2022, focusing on the future of Europe, in line with the priority themes of the → *Conference on the Future of Europe*.

¹⁰ **ALMA** ("Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve") is intended to offer young adults who are not in employment, education or training the opportunity to gain work experience in another Member State.

European Semester

Since 2018, the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights have been consistently taken into account throughout the cycle of the European Semester. Member States report on the implementation of the Pillar in their national reform programmes.

The **European Semester** is the coordination cycle of the EU Member States for the joint alignment of their labour market, economic and fiscal policies, with objectives and rules agreed annually at EU level. The process always follows the same procedures and logic (**timeline**).

The **Recovery and Resilience Facility** is at the heart of the **Recovery Plan for Europe** and aims to cushion the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, to make the EU economies and societies more sustainable and resilient, and to better prepare them for the new challenges and opportunities of environmental and digital transformation.

The European Semester is currently being adapted to take into account the establishment of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the implementation of which is to shape the Member State's reform and investment agenda in the coming years.

Youth Guarantee

The Youth Guarantee was established 22 April 2013 in the form of a **Council Recommendation**. It should ensure that all young people receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months after becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

To enrol in the Youth Guarantee, young people have to register at a local contact point. Since its establishment the Youth Guarantee helped over 24 million young people.

The Member States documented the main infrastructure for the Youth Guarantee at national level in **Youth Guarantee implementation plans** and named a **Youth Guarantee coordinator**.

Based on a Commission proposal, the **Council Recommendation** from 30 October 2020 on a reinforced Youth Guarantee broadened the age limit from 25 to 30 years. Furthermore, an emphasis is laid on avoiding any forms of discrimination and to make the Youth Guarantee future-proof with a view to the digital and green transitions.

The Youth Guarantee is part of the **Youth Employment Support package** of the EU and is financed by the **Recovery Plan for Europe** and the future EU budget.

The second target is for at least 60% of all adults to participate in training every year. The economy is going through huge transformations, and we must adapt with it. This means that lifelong learning and the need to regularly acquire new skills is more relevant than ever. The [European Skills Agenda](#) includes many ways to help Member States achieve this goal: from the Pact for Skills to Microcredentials to boosting Vocational Education and Training. Member States recognise this urgent need and have included several skills policies and investments in their → [national recovery plans](#).

The third target is for the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion to be reduced by at least 15 million by 2030. The COVID-19 pandemic stopped the downward trend in poverty levels, but we are committed to getting it back on track. The EU is working on several strands to coordinate efforts across the EU: for example with the → [European Platform on Combatting Homelessness](#), the → [European Child Guarantee](#) to break the cycle of disadvantage, and with the → [upcoming initiative on Minimum Income](#).

We are living in turbulent and fast-changing times, and it is critical that these changes happen in a socially fair way. It will take a concerted, collective effort to build the strong social Europe set out in the Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. Together we can make it happen.

Civil society perspectives in interview: The role of social rights in Europe for civil society organisations

Alva Finn is the Secretary General of Social Platform – the largest civil society network fighting for social justice in Europe. Social Platform has strength in numbers and puts power back into people’s hands who want a more Social Europe. Collectively with their 44 members, they unite and give a voice to tens of thousands of organisations at local, regional, national and EU level and hundreds of millions of people in Europe in all their diversity. Alva Finn has over ten years of experience in human rights, development and social policy at UN, EU and national levels. You can follow Alva and Social Platform on Twitter @alvfinn and @social_platform.

Alfonso Lara Montero is the Chief Executive Officer of the European Social Network (ESN), founded in 1992, and which brings together more than 160 social services organisations and millions of professionals in national, regional and local authorities responsible for the design and delivery of public social services in 35 countries. Working closely with these, ESN promotes social inclusion and better life chances through the delivery of quality public social services. Alfonso has over 15 years of experience in public policy at international level, has advised governments on the development of community care and has led ESN’s thematic work on mental health, children’s services, integrated services and evidence-based social services. You can follow Alfonso and ESN on Twitter @A_LMontero and @ESNsocial.

What role do the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan play in your work in a civil society organisation?

Finn: The European Pillar of Social Rights is basically our compass at Social Platform. It is the overarching social agenda that we had been asking for many years. We believe that the Social Pillar and its Action Plan¹¹ show us the way to a decent life for all people living in Europe in all their diversity. It underpins all of our work, and Social Platform coordinates the civil dialogue and monitoring of the Social Pillar with our vast membership. We also recently started a → [Group of Social Pillar Champions](#), composed of Members of the European Parliament who are the most vocal and visible supporters of social rights, and look forward to working with them on the implementation of this social compass!

¹¹ Social Platform (2020): *Contribution to the Consultation of the European Commission on the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.*

Proposal for a directive on adequate minimum wages

There are large differences between EU Member States in the proportion of workers covered by collective bargaining agreements as well as in the level of minimum wages. This is due, among other things, to the vastly different labour market models in the individual countries. Fair wages that provide for a decent standard of living are stated as Principle 6 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The European Commission submitted a **Proposal for a directive on adequate minimum wages** in the European Union on 28 October 2020. On 6 December 2021, the Council of the European Union agreed on a **mandate for negotiations**, signalling support in principle and willingness to negotiate with the European Parliament. Now these two institutions need to agree on a final text.

European Platform on Combatting Homelessness

In the subsection “Social Protection and Social Inclusion”, the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan proposes the establishment of a **European Platform on Combatting Homelessness** in the second quarter of 2021. This Platform is to support Member States, cities and service providers in sharing best practices and in identifying efficient and innovative approaches. The project is in line with Principle 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights: Housing and assistance for the homeless.

The implementation of this project was launched at a **high-level conference** in Lisbon on 21 June 2021 with the signing of the **Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness**. The Declaration commits the participating EU institutions, EU Member States and civil society organisations to work towards the elimination of homelessness by 2030. On 28 February 2022, the Platform’s **work programme** was endorsed at another high-level conference.

Social Platform: Group of Social Pillar Champions

As part of Social Platform’s work on the Social Pillar, they created a new **Group of Social Pillar Champions**. This group brings together Members of the European Parliament who have expressed their particular interest and commitment to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Civil society organisations and the European Parliament working more closely together will help build momentum for stronger, more sustainable and inclusive social rights for all people in the EU. It will also help raise awareness of the Social Pillar, the importance of social justice, and the vital role that the European project has in protecting and promoting human rights. The foundation of the group was stated during an **event** on 30 November 2021.



Montero: The European Social Network (ESN) is a network of more than 160 public authorities and organisations with responsibility for social services at local, regional and national level. These organisations are instrumental in the planning, development, financing, delivery and monitoring of social services. Due to the nature of their

work, social services are in regular and close contact with all population groups and are best placed to guarantee the implementation of the social rights enshrined in the Pillar. Therefore, public social services authorities should be fundamental partners in the implementation to ensure success of this European initiative. For example, on the development of Child Guarantee National Plans, public social services need to be consulted in identifying areas of reform and investment in care and support programmes for children and families. In this way, the work of ESN and its members, with statutory duties for social services, is interconnected with the Social Pillar but also with its accompanying Action Plan and initiatives.

How exactly does your organisation work with both instruments? Which target groups and topics are particularly important in your work?

Montero: Both instruments are strongly present in the work programme of ESN. In practice, this means that spreading knowledge and incorporating the principles of the Social Pillar are central to how we organise our activities. In the past, we have actively engaged with the instruments to help shape them. In 2016, as part of the consultation of the Commission on the Pillar, we made recommendations on how to implement the Pillar.¹² We then followed these up with our recommendations in the consultation for the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan in 2020.¹³ In fact, one of our proposals in 2016 was the establishment of a roadmap with steps for implementation. We were thus glad to see this being taken up in 2020.

We work closely with public social services to bridge the gap between local and European policies through expertise, knowledge and practice-sharing and -building. Our members have a statutory duty of care towards all populations throughout the life course. This means they are responsible for the care and support of all individuals that may need care. ESN promotes community- and home-based care approaches in innovative ways and forms to address the individual needs of all population groups, and therefore ensure the implementation of the Action Plan and the Pillar principles.

Finn: If the Social Pillar is our compass, the Action Plan is the roadmap. Through our members, Social Platform represents Europe in all its diversity – men and women, the young and old, families, people with an ethnic, migrant or religious background, Roma, LGBTI people, people with disabilities, people with care responsibilities, people experiencing poverty and discrimination and the people that provide invaluable services for a more inclusive society and work in social enterprises that want to create a better world.

That is why the entire Social Pillar is important for the target groups we work with. There is no one single silver bullet to inclusion and ending poverty. The 20 principles are a recognition that not everyone can have a decent life through employment alone.

¹² European Social Network (2016): *Contribution to the Consultation of the European Commission on the European Pillar of Social Rights.*

¹³ European Social Network (2021): *Contribution to the Consultation of the European Commission on the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.*

Equal Treatment Directives

The following four anti-discrimination directives have been adopted in the European Union:

1. **Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000** implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin,
2. **Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000** establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation,
3. **Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004** implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services,
4. **Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006** on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast).

In Germany, these directives have been transposed into national law as part of the **General Act on Equal Treatment Act (Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz)**.

A **fifth Anti-Discrimination Directive**, which would have created EU-wide rules to protect against discrimination on the grounds of disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, has been blocked in the Council of the European Union since 2008. According to her **political guidelines**, President von der Leyen and her European Commission intend to propose new anti-discrimination legislation.

As part of the projects within the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, the Commission has already published a report on the implementation of the **Employment Equality Directive and the Racial Equality Directive** in 2021. In addition, various legislative proposals are to be presented by 2022 – for instance with the aim of strengthening equality bodies. A **consultation** on this has already been carried out from December 2021 to March 2022.

Many people are not in employment due to discrimination, health issues or disabilities, or lack of skills. Without equal opportunities, social protection, supportive services as well as decent living and working conditions, we can't have a socially fair society.

Which measures of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan do you see as particularly conducive to a strong and equal Europe? Where do you still see gaps in the Action Plan?

Finn: For Social Platform, the work on adequate minimum wages is crucial to make work pay. There are millions of people in work who are still experiencing poverty. A strong → [minimum wage directive](#), without exceptions, can make sure that people are properly rewarded for their hard work and that they can make ends meet.

We would love to see more work on equal opportunities, which has stalled at EU level as the → [Equal Treatment Directive](#) is blocked in the Council.

The pandemic has shown that proper social protection ensures that people can live a decent life, even when the world is changing. We would like to see more and legally binding action on adequate minimum income, including through better pensions and unemployment benefits.



Many of Social Platform's members represent people who benefit and are supported by not-for-profit social services or are service providers themselves. Our service provider members tell us time and again that they lack the resources to make sure they can deliver quality, affordable and accessible social, health and care services to everyone who needs them.

We would also like to see the European Union taking on a greater role in ending the housing crisis in many Member States. There is not much on housing in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, apart from the → [European Platform on Combatting Homelessness](#) and the [Affordable Housing Initiative](#) which is a pilot project funded by the EU.

Montero: Since the launch of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, the Commission has rolled out significant initiatives such as the → [Disability Platform](#) and the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness, which bring together key stakeholders to make the Action Plan a reality and ensure it works for the people it will impact. ESN is participating in both Platforms as the voice of social services that work directly with these populations. We will continue to highlight the essential role of social services to ensure equal opportunities for everyone – from children to adults with dependency needs.

The launch of the → [Child Guarantee](#) and the Long-term Care Guarantee are promising measures to ensure equal opportunities for all children and access to long-term care for everyone with dependency needs. Likewise, the European Commission's proposal for a → [minimum income initiative](#) should contribute to making social rights a reality. However, for these ambitions to be fully realised, ESN feels the essential role of public social services needs to be recognised as equivalent to health or education services. This sta-

European Child Guarantee

The EU Member States adopted a **Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee** on 14 June 2021. The aim of the Child Guarantee is to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing access for children in need to a range of essential services such as early childhood care, education, healthcare or healthy nutrition and adequate housing. This is to contribute to the protection of children's rights by combatting child poverty and promoting equal opportunities. The European Child Guarantee complements the second pillar of the **Strategy on the Rights of the Child**, adopted by the European Commission on 24 March 2021. It includes the right of children to realise their full potential regardless of their social background.

Member States are called upon to appoint, with consultation and involvement of stakeholders, a national Child Guarantee Coordinator, and within nine months of the adoption of the Recommendation to submit to the European Commission an implementation Action Plan for the period up to 2030. In March 2022, the European Commission published a **Child Guarantee Coordinators list**. However, by the deadline of 15 March 2022, merely one National Action Plan and three drafts had been submitted to European Commission. By now (20 May 2022), the National Action Plans of Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden have been published on the **Commission's Child Guarantee website**.

From 2017 to 2022, the European Commission had a preparatory action carried out in several phases to test the feasibility of an EU-wide Child Guarantee. The third and final phase with **pilot projects in seven countries** was carried out by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

Resources for the implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Germany

- Deutsches Kinderhilfswerk: **Implementation of the European Child Guarantee in Germany – Children's Rights Key Issues Paper on the National Action Plan** of 10 February 2022 (in German).
- Eurochild Child Guarantee Taskforce (2022): **Country Report Germany. Recommendations for the Child Guarantee National Action Plan in Germany.**
- Save the Children (2021): **Guaranteeing Children's Future. How to end child poverty and social exclusion in Europe.**
- UNICEF (2021): **Undertaking a synthesis of policies, programmes and mechanisms addressing the social exclusion of children in Germany.**

tus should translate into a proposal for a care guarantee for all, which would safeguard adequate resourcing and funding for implementing their social protection duties as well as essential services like family care for children, day or home care for people with disabilities or older people.

What impact do you hope the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan will have? What should be achieved in three years?

Montero: If all Member States get fully behind the Pillar, this could have an enormous impact on the promotion of social inclusion, alleviating poverty and reducing inequalities in Europe. The most vulnerable in society would have adequate safeguards to prevent them from harm and exclusion. However, mechanisms need to be in place to ensure the holistic and integrated implementation of the Pillar at national level. The mechanisms put in place until now have not always been successful. For example, by 1 April, just three national governments had submitted their national plans for the → [Child Guarantee](#). At European level, the Social Scoreboard should provide specific data by age, gender and disability to offer precise and relevant information to assess the state of implementation.



At ESN, we believe that ultimately the social inclusion and protection objectives can only be realised through a Care Guarantee for All. Why? A cross-cutting element across the twenty principles of the Pillar is the provision of support to different vulnerable populations. Therefore, having a guarantee to care for those who need

it is the first step to ensure quality in social services and social care as well as adequate resourcing and support for the workforce. The guarantee would complement other initiatives like the Child or Long-Term Care Guarantee or the → [Disability Strategy](#). Looking at the future → [European Care Strategy](#), we recommend this includes a guarantee to care for all who need social support in line with statutory duties for social protection in countries across Europe.¹⁴

Finn: If we keep up the momentum, we could see the EU taking on a role in adequate minimum income and more investment in quality essential services like social services, housing, healthcare and education. We are calling for a strategy on social services and hope that the European Commission will add this to its agenda when it reviews the Action Plan in 2025 or even earlier.

It is also going to be exciting to see where the → [European Care Strategy](#) takes us. For so long, care has been considered a luxury or something for the family to take care of. Now, there is a recognition that everyone needs care across their lives, from childhood into our later lives. There is also a recognition that care work can be empowering for society and for women in particular so that their contributions are recognised and balanced with their work lives.

¹⁴ European Social Network (2022): *Contribution to the Consultation of the European Commission on the European Care Strategy* (in English).

Recommendation on Minimum Income

In the subsection “Social Protection and Social Inclusion” of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, a Council Recommendation on minimum income is announced for 2022. This is intended to complement existing measures by the Member States to ensure a minimum income across the EU which protects against poverty and social exclusion. This is in line with Principle 14 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which states that every person 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 are able to work, minimum income benefits are to be combined with incentives for (re)integration into the labour market. A **public consultation** on this was held in March/April 2022.

Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030

On 3 March 2022, the European Commission adopted – together with the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan – a new **Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030**. The Strategy aims to ensure that all persons with disabilities in Europe are free to choose their lifestyle and place of residence, to participate fully in all areas of society and to move freely within the EU, and that they are guaranteed respect for their human rights. The implementation of the Strategy in National Action Plans is the responsibility of the Member States.

One undertaking of the Strategy is the establishment of a Platform for People with Disabilities. On 13 December 2021, the European Commission announced that 14 civil society organisations had been selected as **members of this new platform**. Together with the EU institutions and the Member States, which had proposed their respective representatives in advance, this expert group is to support the implementation of the Strategy.

European Green Deal

With the **European Green Deal**, the European Commission under Ursula von der Leyen has from the very start of its term in office outlined a holistic scenario that combines technical, economic and social aspects of sustainability and contains a roadmap to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. In June 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament adopted the **European Climate Law**.

From a socio-political perspective, the **Just Transition Mechanism** is an essential financial instrument to ensure that the transition to a climate-neutral economy is fair and no one is left behind. It provides funding of around 55 billion euro over the period 2021–2027 to cushion the socio-economic impacts of the transition in the most affected regions.

What should follow the Action Plan after 2030?

Finn: That is a very good question! Last time around, we didn't reach the 2020 target on poverty. With several crises hampering social progress in Europe, we will need to see where we are on the new headline targets on employment, skills and poverty reduction in 2030. First feedback on the national targets set by Member States to implement the



EU headline targets is mixed and there are concerns that they lack ambition. The world is always changing and there are always new challenges and opportunities that come from technology, geopolitical dynamics, the list goes on. On top of that, we know that → **socially just twin green and digital transformations** are a massive project that will take generations. Hopefully, the next Action Plan will look at how we move to the next stage of the transformation in the next decade. A Social Europe needs to be a priority to ensure a decent life for all.

Montero: It will be key to assess whether the three headline objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan have been achieved by 2030, particularly the one on lifting 15 million people out of poverty and social exclusion, including five million children (→ [Statement of the European Commission](#)).

Looking back at the 2020 strategy, there was no joint assessment of the European Commission and national governments, but we know this target was missed. It is very important that there is a joint effort to assess whether the objectives set out by the Pillar and its Action Plan are achieved and to build on the learnings of working together to draft a post-2030 strategy, which should be based on positive implementation to continue advancing social inclusion.

The European Commission should coordinate national government programmes in the form of enhancement of productive capacities, adequate social protection and improved access to quality social services which are crucial to achieving socially inclusive, broad-based and sustainable development in our societies. They must ensure that no one is left behind.

Conference on the Future of Europe

The Conference on the Future of Europe was proposed by France and launched on 9 May 2021 by President Emmanuel Macron together with the Presidents of the European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission.

The conference is intended to offer a new space for debate among the European population and to empower citizens to help shape the future of Europe.

Wishes and expectations can be expressed on a multilingual **online platform** and through national as well as four **European Citizens' Panels**¹. These contributions were consolidated and discussed in the **Conference Plenaries**² of the conference. The final plenary of the conference took place on 29/30 April 2022 in Strasbourg. There, the consolidated proposals were endorsed by the plenary by consensus and then included in the **Conference Final Report**, which was presented to the Joint Presidency (composed of the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission) on 9 May in Strasbourg for the formal closure of the conference. The three institutions, within their respective spheres of competence and in accordance with the treaties, are now to consider in a timely manner how to effectively follow up.

- 1 *The topics of the panels are 1. "Stronger economy, social justice, and jobs / Education, culture, youth and sport / Digital transformation, 2. "European democracy / Values and rights, rule of law, security", 3. "Climate change and the environment / Health", 4. "EU in the World / Migration".*
- 2 *The plenary assembly is composed of representatives of the European Parliament, the Council of the EU, the European Commission, national parliaments and citizens.*

Perspectives from Germany and France regarding a strong and just Europe – focusing on the current state of national implementation of the European Child Guarantee

Social scientist **Sarah Molter** is Research Officer at the *Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe*. She works on issues in the fields of children and family, among others, and analyses developments on European and national level.

The implementation and realisation of the European Pillar of Social Rights can only succeed if the Member States' national governments are also committed to a strong and just Europe. Germany and France have long maintained close → [cooperation](#) in the field of social policy, including family and youth policy. At European level, the two countries want in 2022 to focus in particular on socio-political issues, such as the participation of children.¹⁵

France and the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan

At the Porto Social Summit on 7-8 May 2021, French President Emmanuel Macron emphasised the social dimension of the European Union and of European values: “As Europeans, we are shaping the answer to the crisis we are facing: a social response, in line with our values.”¹⁶



France holds the → [Presidency of the Council of the European Union](#) from 1 January to 30 June 2022. The Presidency's programme includes, among other things, the objective of a humane Europe: „A humane Europe that listens to the concerns expressed by its citizens through the → [Conference on the Future of Europe](#); that defends the rule of law

and upholds its values; [...] is committed to fighting discrimination and securing a future for the next generation.”¹⁷ The Presidency's programme furthermore emphasises that France will follow up on the European Pillar of Social Rights and the commitments made at the Porto Social Summit in order to strengthen a social Europe. The country supports the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan's measures.

The significance of the Action Plan for Germany

The German government under Chancellor Olaf Scholz has included a commitment to a social Europe in its coalition agreement. The European Pillar of Social Rights is to be implemented and social inequalities are to be fought. To this end, the → [European Semester](#) and the → [European Social Fund](#) shall be used as important instruments, the agreement reads.¹⁸

15 Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth on the occasion of the German-French Day on 22 January: 2022 as a special year in German-French cooperation, press release of 21 January 2022 (in German).

16 Website of the European Commission on the European Pillar of Social Rights.

17 Recovery, Strength and a Sense of Belonging. Programme for the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 1 January to 30 June 2022, p. 3.

18 Mehr Fortschritt wagen. Bündnis für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit (Daring to make progress. Coalition for freedom, justice and sustainability). Coalition agreement 2021–2025 between the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the Greens (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN) and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), p. 134 (in German).

Franco-German cooperation

The bilateral reconciliation and unification process between Germany and France after the Second World War, especially within the framework of the 1963 Treaty on Franco-German Cooperation (or **Élysée Treaty** for short) was once a driving force for European unification and integration. Among other things, the treaty called for regular meetings at all political levels and coordination in foreign, European, defence, youth and cultural policy.

In 2019, the commitment to close cooperation was supplemented by the **Treaty of Aachen**. This treaty is intended to strengthen collaboration in the area of economic integration and cooperation between the civil societies of both countries. Gender equality is also explicitly mentioned as a priority. In this regard, both countries vow to be a driving force in Europe to combat violence against women and to promote equal pay and parity.

Trio presidency of France, Czech Republic and Sweden

From 1 January 2022 to 30 June 2023, France (1st half of 2022), the Czech Republic (2nd half of 2022) and Sweden (1st half of 2023) form a trio presidency of the Council. In their **trio programme**, the three countries attach great importance to strengthening the European social model. Relevant legislative and non-legislative measures are to be taken forward at EU level, at Member State level and within the framework of the European Semester, paving the way for the further implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth likewise pointed out at the launch of a series of events on the European Pillar of Social Rights¹⁹, organised jointly with the Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe: “The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan has a special political significance for Europe. And: It matches the objectives of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs in many areas. [...] equality of women and men on the labour market, combatting child poverty and promoting LGBTIQ* equality.”²⁰

In January 2022, Germany took over the presidency of the Group of Seven (G7). It has set itself the goal of further strengthening the core values of the G7 and thus democratic values, rule of law and the protection of human rights, and to anchor human rights issues even more firmly. Among other things, the focus will be on the commitment to open, resilient, gender-equitable societies and human rights, the defence of liberal democracies as well as social participation.²¹

Fighting child poverty and focusing on children’s participation: On the state of implementation of the Child Guarantee in Germany and France

An important field of action towards promoting a Europe that offers opportunities for all is fighting and preventing child poverty. Principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights states that children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality as well as to protection from poverty. The European



Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan includes the goal of reducing child poverty in Europe by at least five million children by 2030. An important instrument in this context is the → [Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee](#) which was unanimously adopted by the EU Member States on 14 June 2021.

Germany and France are intensively engaged – also within the framework of their respective EU Council Presidencies – with the implementation of the measure to reduce child poverty and social exclusion initiated by the European Commission.

Germany: Creating opportunities through education

In its coalition agreement, the German government states that child poverty should be combated, and that special focus should be placed on opportunities and participation/inclusion of children and youths.²²

The Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Ekin Deligöz, has been appointed as national coordinator for the implementation of the European Child Guarantee. Within the framework of the European Child Guarantee, the German government particularly wants to ensure more equality in education. Early support for children is considered an important contribution to equal opportunities. Therefore, the **Good Daycare Facilities Act**

¹⁹ *Observatory’s website of the series of events on the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.*

²⁰ *Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth: Für ein starkes und gerechtes Europa. Die Europäische Säule sozialer Rechte stärken (For a strong and just Europe. Strengthening the European Pillar of Social Rights). Release of 22 February 2022 (in German).*

²¹ *Policy Priorities for Germany’s G7 Presidency, p. 3.*

²² *Mehr Fortschritt wagen. Bündnis für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit (Daring to make progress. Coalition for freedom, justice and sustainability). Coalition agreement 2021–2025 between the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the Greens (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN) and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), p. 134 (in German).*

European Social Fund

The European Social Fund (ESF) has since 1957 been the main instrument for promoting employment and social inclusion in the European Union. The Fund aims to improve employment opportunities of people in the EU Member States by promoting better education, by providing support for training and skills development and by reducing disadvantages in the labour market. To this end, the ESF supports projects at local, regional and national level.

In 2021, the current funding period (2021–2027) of the new **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**, which replaces the ESF, started. However, since the expenditure for the funding programmes of the eighth ESF funding period (2014–2020) can be accounted for until 2023, the former ESF is still relevant beyond 2021.

The new ESF+ will be even more focused on the vision of a more social Europe and will bring together the existing European Fund for Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and the EU programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) under one umbrella. The ESF+ has a budget of almost 99.3 billion euro.

The ESF+ aims to contribute to the economic and societal recovery of the European Union from the pandemic, and in particular to

- improving access to employment, education and training,
- promoting active inclusion,
- strengthening socio-economic integration of third country nationals,
- fostering equal access to high-quality social protection systems,
- promoting social inclusion of disadvantaged people and
- basic material assistance for the most disadvantaged.

The ESF is one of five **European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds)** that have been grouped together since 2014 under a common strategic framework in order to jointly support job creation as well as a sustainable and healthy European economy and environment.

(Gute-KiTa-Gesetz) is to support the Länder in further developing the quality of child-care as well as to support and relieve parents regarding the fees charged. The federal government has made 5.5 billion euro available for this purpose; the 16 Länder decide for themselves which concrete measures they will take locally. In order to strengthen the participation of children and families, certain success has already been achieved with the Federal Foundation for Early Childhood Intervention²³ and the two federal programmes for early education, **Stepping into Childcare (Kita-Einstieg)** and **Language Daycare Centres (Sprach-Kitas)**, the government states. The latter of the two programmes promotes (German) language education in daycare centres with a high proportion of children with language support needs by providing more staff; the former is to create better access for children and families who have not yet been reached by institutional daycare, by offering low-threshold services such as playgroups for children and targeted getting-to-know-each-other projects in cooperation with the daycare centres. Moreover, the **legal right to full-day care** is intended to improve educational equality and participation opportunities for children and to make it easier for parents to reconcile family and employment.²⁴ The reform of the parental allowance in September 2021 furthermore enabled more part-time work opportunities, additional parental allowance months for premature babies and less bureaucracy by simplification and legal clarifications.²⁵ In addition, the introduction of a **14-day leave after birth for the second parent** is planned, the government says.

As a participating country in the pilot project of phase three of the European Commission's Child Guarantee feasibility study, a → [summary report](#) on the current situation in Germany with regard to combatting the social exclusion of children was published in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This report is also to form the basis for the National Action Plan. The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth hosted the digital kick-off for the National Action Plan "New Opportunities for Children in Germany" (Neue Chancen für Kinder in Deutschland) on 5 and 6 May 2022. The Action Plan is to be published in the second half of 2022.

France: Focus on the first 1,000 days

In its programme for the Council Presidency, the French government states that France intends to focus on an exchange about the European Child Guarantee and especially on the topic of children's and young people's → [mental health](#).²⁶ On 4 March 2022, at a conference under the French Council Presidency, the respective ministers of the EU Member States discussed the European Child Guarantee in this regard. Due to the Russian aggression in Ukraine, special attention was drawn to the situation of → [children from Ukraine](#).²⁷

In France, the implementation of the European Child Guarantee is the responsibility of Virginie Lasserre, Director General for Social Cohesion at the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. France was one of the first EU Member States to submit its National Action Plan on the European Child Guarantee to the European Commission.²⁸ In this Action Plan, the French government underlines that it aims to take even stronger preventive action against social inequalities. Central to this is the **National Strategy for Preventing and Combatting Poverty**²⁹ which was launched in 2017. Like the European Child Guarantee, the strategy is to focus on ensuring access to basic services for children and families. Some measures have already been implemented in the areas of childcare facili-

²³ The *Federal Foundation for Early Childhood Intervention (Bundesstiftung Frühe Hilfen)* supports expectant and young parents in difficult situations. The focus is on a healthy and violence-free upbringing of children.

²⁴ More information about the measures in Germany can be found at the [website of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth](#) (in German). Additional information can also be found in the *note* (in German) on the meeting of the EU Member States' ministers on the European Child Guarantee of 4 March 2022.

²⁵ Further information about the reform can be found at the [website of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth](#) (in German).

²⁶ *Recovery, Strength and a Sense of Belonging. Programme for the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 1 January to 30 June 2022*, p. 42.

²⁷ *Declaration of the European Ministers in charge of children on the situation in the Ukraine, 4 March 2022.*

²⁸ The submitted National Action Plans can be accessed at the [European Commission's website](#).

²⁹ *Interministerial Delegation on Poverty Prevention and Reduction (2018): Poverty Prevention and Reduction Strategy* (in French). Further information about the strategy as well as progress reports can be found at the [Ministry for Health and Social Affairs' website](#) (in French).

Mental health of children in Europe

According to a report by UNICEF¹, about 16 percent of 10- to 19-year-olds in Europe suffered from mental illnesses in 2019. This corresponds to about nine million children. Anxiety disorders and depression accounted for roughly 55 percent of mental illnesses. About 1,200 children committed suicide in 2019.

The pandemic and the ensuing containment measures such as school closures and isolation have further exacerbated the strain on children's mental health. The measures hit children in disadvantaged circumstances particularly hard. In many countries, mental health support systems were found to be fragile and inadequate.

Reliable comprehensive data on the impact of the pandemic on children's mental health is still lacking. However, individual studies show a significant increase in anxiety disorders and depressive symptoms, for instance.²

¹ UNICEF (2021): *The State of the World's Children 2021. On My Mind: Promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health.*

² Racine, Nicole/McArthur, Brae Anne/Cooke, Jessica E./Eirich, Rachel/Zhu, Jenny/Madigan, Sheri (2021): *Global Prevalence of Depressive and Anxiety Symptoms in Children and Adolescents During COVID-19. A Meta-analysis.*

Children fleeing from war in Ukraine

7.5 million children were living in Ukraine when the war escalated in February 2022. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and UNICEF, half of all refugees from Ukraine are children – about two million individuals (as of 30 March 2022). So far, more than 1.1 million children have arrived in Poland. Hundreds of thousands others have fled to Romania, Moldova, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic or to other European countries.¹

¹ UNICEF: *Zwei Millionen ukrainische Kinder in die Nachbarländer geflohen (Two million Ukrainian Children already fled to neighbouring countries), press release of 30 March 2022 (in German).*

ties, education and adequate nutrition, such as compulsory pre-school attendance from the age of three as well as free breakfast at school.



Secondly, the government refers to the **Pact for Children**³⁰, launched in 2019, the first of three pillars of which (**"The First 1,000 Days"**³¹) focuses on increased support for parents from the beginning of pregnancy until the second year of the child's life. In 2021, another set of measures was created, which includes the improve-

ment of medical and psychosocial care for parents and children, especially around the time of birth, the improvement of the quality of early childcare and further support programmes as well as low-threshold offers for young parents, such as a website with information and videos as well as an app. Furthermore, in 2021, **leave after birth for the second parent** was doubled to 28 days as a reconciliation policy measure. Seven of these 28 days are compulsory.³²

In addition to an outlook on the thematic measures in the five areas of the Child Guarantee until 2030, the French National Action Plan also addresses measures to monitor the success of the Action Plan, measures to improve children's participation as well as the development of indicators and the use of statistical sources.

About the Observatory

The **Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe** is a project by the **Institute for Social Work and Social Education (ISS)**. The team of the Observatory analyses sociopolitical developments in Europe and their potential impact on Germany. We publish working papers on relevant sociopolitical topics, monitor European social policies and organise European Expert Meetings. The aim of our work is to connect key sociopolitical actors across Europe, promote the exchange of expertise and foster mutual learning. The Observatory is funded by the **German Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ)**.

Publishing Information

Publisher:

Institute for Social Work and Social Education
Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe
Office Address: Zeilweg 42
D-60439 Frankfurt am Main
Germany
+49 (0)69 - 95 78 9-0
Berlin location: Lahnstraße 19, D-12055 Berlin
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The German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 11018 Berlin, provides funding for the project "Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe". This publication does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany. The publishing institute and/or the authors of individual articles bear responsibility for its content.

The agency responsible for the Observatory is:

Institute for Social Work and Social Education

Design: www.avitamin.de

Translation: Tim Steins

Date of publication: June 2022

This is a publication of the Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe and may be downloaded at: www.sociopolitical-observatory.eu.

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³⁰ Further information about the Pact for Children is available at the website of the French Ministry for Health and Social Affairs (in French).

³¹ Press kit of 26 October 2021 about the programme "The first 1,000 days" (in French)

³² Further information about the reform is available at the respective website of the French government (in French).