



An ambitious ESF towards a strong Social Union

Declaration of EPSCO ministers – Adopted on 17 April in Sofia

We, PES Employment and Social Affairs Ministers, are convinced that social investment must be part of a real European social action plan. After proclaiming the European Pillar of Social Rights and endorsing the UN Sustainable development goals for 2030, the EU must provide itself with the means necessary to carry through its policies. Therefore a strong European Social Fund will be needed to further support employment, high level of education and training social inclusion, refugees' integration and poverty reduction all across Europe.

Since 1957, the European Social Fund acts as the bedrock of a European social Union. In the 2014-2020 European budget, our political family achieved an increase of the fund that allowed to broaden its scope from labour to social inclusion and poverty reduction. It also allowed to finance innovative policies such as the European Youth Guarantee, providing effective support to millions of young Europeans in accessing the labour market. The future European Social Fund must build on these successes. Here are our ten guidelines for the European Social Fund beyond 2020:

1. The ESF must address social issues beyond the labour market

The ESF must maintain a strong support for social inclusion. It is not only about human capital, it is about creating better jobs promoting decent conditions in all forms of employment and it is also about fighting poverty inequalities and social exclusion, taking into account active ageing and demographic challenges. This must be reflected in the programme's priorities.

2. Youth employment has to remain one of the fundamental priorities of the ESF

The Youth Guarantee demonstrated its efficiency, it must be further improved as a permanent feature of European employment policies. This implies sustainable and adequate funding from both European and national budgets.

3. The ESF must continue supporting workers in the changing world of work

In an ever more digital economy and a changing world of work, the EU should accompany and train workers. The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund must correspondingly be broadened and become a European Transition Fund, enabled to invest in the skills, competence and professional prospects of workers facing any kind of job destruction, may it be due to globalisation, digitalisation, environmental effects or territorial economic crisis. The ESF should also expand its support to the development of social dialogue, improving the capacity- building of social partners at all level and supporting sectoral collective bargaining in all Member States.

4. Further social innovation to meet the challenges of poverty and social inclusion

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived should continue to play its role to address extreme poverty and social exclusion. It must be complemented with the set-up of a Child Guarantee to specifically and effectively tackle child poverty in Europe. Social innovation



www.pes.eu



www.facebook.com/PES.PSE



www.twitter.com/PES_PSE



Party of European Socialists

10-12 Rue Guimard

B-1040 Brussels

Belgium

should continue as well with new initiatives to better integrate refugees in our societies and labour markets.

5. Make employment and social progress a budgetary priority too

Social investments with long-term return are key to the future competitiveness of the EU. Irrespective of the outcome of the discussions and the size of the future EU budget, the European Social Fund must play its role and reach the objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

6. A fund available to all Europeans

To better address social concerns in all Member States and to fight inequalities within European regions, the ESF must better take into account territorial fragmentation, and the striking gaps that can exist between two cities of the same region.

7. A governance serving solidarity, cohesion, employment and social inclusion

The European Social Fund should keep its autonomy in order to fulfil its policy mission and contribute to economic and social cohesion. Conditionality has proven useful to support the efficiency of the fund, but it should not drive the programme away from its objectives nor dilute the mandate of the fund. For us, conditionality must contribute to better reach the objectives set as priorities for the ESF. Employment, social and convergence criteria are the ones to be considered. Respect of the European code of conduct on partnership, which supports a strong involvement of social partners, must be considered too.

8. Long term social investment should prevail

The ESF and the European Semester are complementary tools to serve the EU's social objective and to turn the Pillar of Social Rights principles to reality, yet they both have distinct timelines. Social investment requires at least a medium term commitment to bear fruits and cannot be strictly linked to priorities set for a year within the Semester.

9. A fund equipped with tools and flexibility in order to suit its aims

Grants should remain the standard form of financing from the ESF, with loans and other financial instruments playing a limited complementary role, where they can bring proven added value. This is particularly important for the ESF to continue supporting small scale projects. Considering that complexity remains a concern for users and managing authorities at the local regional and national level, further efforts are needed to simplify the rules and to reduce the administrative burden linked to the Fund, in the application, implementation and evaluation phases. Also in such a long programming cycle, it is necessary to increase flexibility in the use of ESF in order to enable adequate responses to conjuncture developments

10. Social investment beyond the ESF

European structural and investment funds have been an essential tool of the EU's social investment and a driver for social cohesion. They should remain a major cornerstone of the EU budget. In addition, the European Fund for Strategic Investment's contribution to social investment must increase, with more investment in social infrastructure and in job creation.

The European Pillar of Social Rights states the ambitions of the EU in terms of social objectives. The next European Social Fund will be an essential tool to meet these ambitions.