

socialplatform

Social NGOs ready for the post-Lisbon:
From 'Growth and Jobs' to 'Sustainable and Social'

Recommendations to EU decision makers
on how to address social and demographic change

FOREWORD

European societies are changing fast. Unprecedented trends such as globalisation, rapid technological change, demographic shifts, as well as growing inequality, migration and family diversity are just some of the challenges for the 21st century.

The Social Platform has selected social and demographic change as its annual theme for 2007 to better respond to the political reflection launched by European Commission president, José Manuel Barroso, with the consultation on the social reality stocktaking.

In this paper, European Social NGOs set out their own social reality stocktaking and advance concrete recommendations for the EU for the period from 2010 to 2020.

European Social NGOs do not attempt to cover all areas of the debate, but rather base our assessment and proposals upon the areas of expertise of our members, making proposals on issues where Social NGOs are involved in terms of EU-level processes, national needs and policy content.

The position outlines a wide range of recommendations on managing social and demographic change, for implementing a more human and constructive rationale for reforms, including labour market reforms.

Those who are to propose, shape and decide on actions for the adoption of a renewed EU long-term agenda, such as the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs and the Strategy for sustainable development, are asked to view these recommendations creatively and perhaps use them as inspiration for new ideas. Indeed, the well-being of people living in Europe must be clearly at the heart of every future European strategy. Economic growth cannot be an end in itself, but only one of the means to achieve a more human and caring society, and prosperity for Europe's citizens.

This common position was prepared by the members of the Social Platform. Discussion groups produced initial ideas, which were then discussed at the annual conference in November 2007. A draft version was circulated to the full membership and time given for debate with their networks. Following an amendment procedure, the final version was adopted on the 18th of December 2007 by the Steering Group of the Social Platform, in which every member organisation is represented.

INTRODUCTION

Social and demographic change challenges European leaders and NGOs to think long-term. Yet the Lisbon agenda runs until 2010. For a decade (2000-2010), it has defined the overarching priorities of the EU and directed all EU actions towards the same goal: *"to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion."*¹

Has 'Lisbon' delivered its promises? And above all, what should be the next decade-long EU priorities and objectives?

According to Social NGOs, the well-being of people² living in Europe must clearly be back at the heart of any future European Strategy. Actually, part of the EU legitimacy and *raison d'être* comes from its capacity to improve its citizens' well-being and build a society based on solidarity and social justice.

We regret that Lisbon hardly took people's every day reality into account and focused mainly on growth. In 2005 European Social NGOs reacted to the revision of the Lisbon Strategy³ and it concluded that *"greater social cohesion does not result automatically from increased economic activity alone. A strong economy can have a positive effect on poverty, but securing such positive benefits requires effective social and economic policies. The same goes for issues like equality between men and women, the fight against discrimination, the integration of migrants, the access to child and elder care and the promotion of public health, which require pro-active policies from governments."*

For Social NGOs, the well-being of people living in and outside Europe must be at the heart of any future strategy. **It is our collective duty to ensure a future in which every person can participate, in which every person can live in dignity and in which the fundamental rights of every person are respected.**

The 2010-2020 EU priorities must be grounded on those principles.

Social NGOs present with this document recommendations for action to tackle social and demographic challenge and ensure a sustainable development for the EU: *"meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs"*⁴.

Our recommendations draw on a vision of the society we want to live in by 2020 and on values that need to be put into practice (point I). They are based on an assessment of the social reality of the EU nowadays (point II) and define how we can move on from today's situation towards a fairer and more socially inclusive European Union (point III).

¹ Conclusions of the European Council, Lisbon, 23-24 March 2000.

² When using the word "people", the Social Platform does not only think of white-collar, middle aged men. The reality in Europe is much more diverse and this diversity must be taken into account in all policy areas. Social NGOs pay for instance specific attention to women and men, as well as people with disabilities, children, people living in poverty, Roma community, migrants, young people, older people, gay, lesbian, bisexuals and transgender (lgbt) people. This approach ensures that all people living in Europe are treated equally and can fully participate in society.

³ See Social Platform resolution for the Spring Summit 2005 adopted on 21 February 2005

⁴ Definition of sustainable development, quoted from the 'Brundtland report'

I. THE EU IN 2020: WHAT SOCIETY DO WE WANT TO LIVE IN?

Social NGOs are convinced that European societies and the European Union are equipped with the necessary rights and values to address social and demographic change. Building on, implementing and developing these commitments will ensure sustainable and long-term actions to respond to social challenges, while not reinventing the wheel.

Implementing these rights and values, with adequate resources is clearly one of the greatest challenges for the so-called European social model.

➤ **2020, a reinforced and vibrant European Social Model**

The European social model represents an understanding of society shared by all EU Member States and enshrined in the existing EU Treaties.

While each EU country has its own arrangement of social, economic policies and structures, serving to help implement this common vision, all 27 countries have affirmed their commitment to the same key values and objectives based on fundamental rights for all. The Treaties specifically commit Member States to working for '*a high level of social protection*', '*equality between women and men*', '*the raising of the standard of living and quality of life*', '*social cohesion*' and '*the combating of exclusion*', among other objectives. **It is now time to make these commitments a reality and live up to the standards.**

The future of the European social model depends on a collective will to implement these same principles, values and objectives within each of the national systems.

➤ **European decision-makers must therefore ensure that the following principles⁵ are put into practice**

Fundamental Rights - Guaranteeing fundamental rights, as enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and other international instruments, must be at the heart of all policies. Fundamental rights are violated when people are unable to live in dignity due to poverty, social exclusion, discrimination or inequality.

Solidarity and equality - The wealth which is created in the European Union must be shared and redistributed to ensure that everyone can have a decent quality of life, opportunities and chances to participate fully in society.

Democracy and Participation - The demands of accountability, transparency and democracy require an effective participation in decision-making by all relevant stakeholders. Public authorities must be proactive in engaging civil society in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies through an appropriate and effective involvement.

⁵ Those principles were adopted by the Social Platform on the 10 October 2005: [Social NGOs call for shared European values to be put at the heart of social model debates.](#)

Responsibility and sustainability – The development of the EU must respect the rights of the future generations and ensure that their ability to decide for themselves, and live freely and happily is not undermined.

Those values are at the core of the European project. In a changing environment, they remain fundamental guiding principles for decision makers and must form the base of European policies and actions.

II. EUROPEAN SOCIAL REALITIES IN 2008: A SOCIAL NGOs STOCK TAKING

Social NGOs are at the fore-front of experiencing social changes. Working with or voicing concerns of people experiencing poverty, exclusion and inequalities, they draw from their experience of community, neighbourhood or local social work. Before proposing necessary changes and evolutions, Social NGOs have used their unique strength to assess the current trends that will inevitably modify the environment we live in and challenge the strength of the European Social Model.

➤ **European wealth is not equally distributed**

The EU 27 with nearly 500 million inhabitants is one of the world's largest economic area in the world. According to the World Bank⁶, the EU Member States accounted for 30.3% of the world's total GDP in 2005.

And yet, this is not equally shared by all in Europe. In fact, social inequalities and poverty are increasing in the EU: 78 million people are living in or at risk of poverty in the EU27 Member States⁷, among them 1 child out of 5 aged 0 to 15⁸. Some of these people have a full-time job or receive retirement, unemployment or disability benefits but this is not enough to protect them from poverty and exclusion. The inadequacy of social assistance payments and the increasing conditionality attached to receipt of such payments is also driving people deeper into poverty and leads to the growing stigmatization and a denial of fundamental social rights of people experiencing poverty. Too often, poverty and inequality are still largely inherited from past generations: an individual's socio-economic status at birth is still one of the most important determinants of future well-being and life chances as an adult.

Currently, in many European countries, there is a re-mergence/growth of extreme forms of poverty and social exclusion, such as homelessness. Some of Europe's richest countries (such as Ireland and the UK) have the highest levels of child poverty.

Services of general interest (e.g. education, health and social services, public transport) which traditionally play a key role in promoting a cohesive society are undergoing important transformations. Opening these markets to competition and increasingly disengaging public authorities from providing services necessarily impact on the universality, availability, accessibility, affordability and quality of these services. This in turn affects their capacity to contribute to fighting exclusion.

⁶ World Bank Development Indicators, 2006

⁷ In European Commission, *Joint Report on social protection and social inclusion: supporting document*, 2007

⁸ UNICEF, *Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries*, 2007

The contradiction between increasing inequalities and economic growth questions public authorities' capacity and responsibility to redistribute fairly and effectively wealth. Are Member States becoming poorer? What impacts fiscal and social dumping have on public finances? Does the privatisation of state-owned companies of general economic interest bring any added-value and benefits to people? Has an increased competition in the provision of public services helped improve their accessibility, affordability and quality? What solidarity mechanisms do we need for more social cohesion within and between Member States? How does one diversify the funding of social protection budgets?

➤ **Outside the European bubble: How does globalisation impact on people and what role for businesses?**

The economic environment policy makers use to generate well-being is tailored by globalisation. This impacts on employment rates, social standards, taxation rates, prices of basic necessities such as energy and food.

As a matter of fact, companies are under increased shareholders' pressure to maximise profits. Restructuring, delocalisation, mass layoffs, reduced investment in training and R&D are used to maintain high-stock options' rates - at the expense of long-term trade strategies, sustainable development and the well-being of workers and consumers. Persistent unemployment, as well as the issue of quality and decent jobs have to be assessed against an international perspective.

Although globalisation increases pressure on companies to maximise profits, the very same companies do benefit from the European Social Model with highly-educated and healthy workers. The Social Platform is convinced that all players have to take responsibility for maintaining a high level of well-being, including businesses, rather than crying wolves when they must share some of the costs. Globalisation shall not be used as an alibi to force people into poor quality jobs and unhealthy working conditions.

This raises the question of corporate responsibility and solidarity of all players in promoting general interest, including enterprises. How can global rules on trade strengthen a rights based approach based on a social and sustainable development? How to integrate social and environmental costs in GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and economic calculations? Why doesn't growth produce more and better jobs within and outside Europe? Are there other forms of entrepreneurship more respectful of people? Would an international taxation system help to ensure a more equal distribution of wealth?

➤ **Towards a more diverse Europe and a better recognition of rights**

Living in Europe today means a Europe of people with diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnic origins, people with disabilities, different sexual orientations, different ages, different religions... While these differences are increasingly recognised and valued, too many people still suffer from discrimination. The Roma community, for instance, are subjected to racist attack including from the highest political spheres. This impinges on Europe's abilities to make a full use of increasingly diverse societies and to ensure equality for all: too many opportunities are wasted for people to take part in society and to reach their full potential.

Diversity in Europe is not only about individuals. It also implies recognising that the EU was not shaped in one go and benefits from different traditions. The various waves of enlargement have brought in new Member States with different cultures, economic and social systems. These different background calls for more in-depth dialogue to build a union of shared values and rights and to avoid "opt-outs" that undermine this unity.

What policies are needed to better integrate European diversities? What incentives are needed to remove barriers for all people to fully participate in society? What measures should be taken to bridge the gap between 'old' and 'new' Member States and take their specificities into account? Do policy makers make full use of existing tools (e.g. positive actions) to reinforce equality and fight discrimination?

➤ **Migrating to and within the EU: how civilised is our continent?**

Migration is a natural and global phenomenon which is as old as humanity. People migrate for many reasons. Based on personal aspirations, it could be for family reunification, employment, or willingness to live in a different country. However, it can also be due to poverty, war, violation of human rights, inequalities, environmental disasters, violence and discrimination.

How Europe is affected by this global phenomenon? Out of the 175 million people who have migrated in 2000⁹, the vast majority of migration flows from developing countries to developing countries and only a drop of it converged to Europe. More than 85% of refugees from developing countries seek protection within their own region.

Migrants have made rich contributions not only in an economic way, but also in a social and cultural ways to their host society as well as to their country of origin. Without underestimating the challenges set forth by migration, it remains fundamental to develop a positive approach to it. Migration should not be demonised and treated with the prism of security and law enforcement. It should be viewed and treated as a natural phenomenon that needs to be assisted, structured and channelled.¹⁰

Meanwhile, thousands of people die every year in trying to reach the EU. An estimated 8 million undocumented migrants¹¹ live and work in the EU, most of them facing everyday violations of their fundamental rights. Yet many of them contribute actively to our economy and perform very needed tasks. For example, our social and health care services are increasingly dependant on migrants, especially migrant women. This trend is likely to increase with an ageing European population and with it more demand for social and health services.

The EU does recognise that larger migrant flows may be needed in the future¹². However, too often migration is seen as a utilitarian and short-term solution to demographic change whereby migrants will come to Europe for a few years, contribute to the economy, and leave before they become a 'burden'. This approach, which treats migrants as economic units and not as human beings, is not consistent with European values.

Positive integration measures are also undermined by a discourse centred on control of "illegal immigration" that sees migration (and migrants) as a problem to be solved. Added to this, a link has been forged between restrictive immigration policies and counter-terrorism by policy makers, media and public perception. This has led to increasingly restrictive and intrusive policies impacting negatively on ethnic and religious minorities. Hence, migration policies limiting or denying access to fundamental rights, hereby undermining efforts to achieve social inclusion.

The two tired rights for free movement of people within the EU, introduced as part of the recent enlargement, and the negative discourse and actions associated with immigration from new Member

⁹ According to the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights.

¹⁰ This idea was developed by Louis Michel, EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, during the EU-Africa Ministerial Conference on Migration and Development, Tripoli, 22-23 November 2006

¹¹ See report by the Global Commission on International Migration October 2005.

¹² See for instance Commission's communication on demographic change (2005)

Sates have undermined the achievement of enlargement and have opened up many new challenges that need to be met.

Are EU migration, immigration, integration and asylum policies adapted to these challenges? What lessons have we learned from the first waves of immigration to Europe and the failures/ successes of many integration policies? How does EU policy in other areas respond to these challenges? How is the right to equal treatment guaranteed to all? What measures need to be taken to ensure that counter-terrorism measures are conducted within the framework of human rights and non-discrimination? How can it be assured that Member States protect fundamental rights in implementing the 'external dimension' of migration and asylum polices?

➤ **A success: people live longer and healthier. Is that gained once for all?**

Not all trends are negative. Thanks to National and European social and health policies, quality of life and life expectancy have steadily increased in the EU since 1950: babies born in 1960 could expect to live 70 years. 40 years later (2000), life expectancy at birth has risen to 78 years¹³. However, the World Health Organisation (WHO) balances this result with raising levels of inequalities and living conditions. For instance, the obesity bomb could make life expectancy drop in 50 years time. Mental health problems are also increasing and affect more and more people across Europe. More than 27% of adult Europeans are estimated to experience at least one form of mental ill health during any one year, and the number is on the rise.¹⁴

In addition, we are not all equal when confronted to diseases: poor people are much more likely to live in unhealthy environments, work in unsafe conditions, miss out on educational opportunities, all of which means they are more likely to develop chronic diseases, suffer from injuries and die early as a result. Quite strikingly, obesity is more prevalent among children living in poorer households. Similarly, men and women from poorer backgrounds are more likely to smoke and less likely to give up the habit. Women in addition have less access to education, meaningful work and health services.

Ethnic Minorities tend to have a poorer health status than majority populations. Specific health problems can affect ethnic and religious minorities disproportionately or arise out of specific experiences such as migration. There is evidence that in some countries ethnic minorities have a lower life expectancy and higher infant mortality rates. Limitations are frequently placed on migrants' access to healthcare. Migrants with temporary forms of residency experience limited entitlements to healthcare.

Children also pay a high price: air and water contaminants, pesticides in food, lead in soil, as well many other environmental threats may cause or induce developmental problems. Over 30% of the global burden of disease in children can be attributed to environmental factors¹⁵. Likewise, there are growing problems with low fertility rates and reproductive health problems affecting an increasing number of people. Infertility today is partly due to the wide range of chemical exposures present at home, on the workplace, as well as lifestyles such as smoking and alcohol consumption.

What public health measures are necessary for an EU population to stay healthy? How can social, environment and health policies be better coordinated? What can be done to reduce health inequalities? How can universal access to healthcare be achieved?

¹³ The data applies to the EU15. Source: Eurostat, Health statistics – Key data on health 2002 – Data 1970 – 2001, 2004.

¹⁴ Wittchen HU, Jacobi F: Size and burden of mental disorders in Europe: a critical review and appraisal of 27 studies. *European Neuropsychopharmacology*, Volume 15 (2005), Number 4, pp. 357-376. Percentage values based on Commission's own calculations

¹⁵ WHO Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE).

➤ **Facing demographic change: Towards a society for all ages**

Demographic changes in Europe are a consequence of two main patterns: longer life expectancy and low birth rates¹⁶: In 1950, 44% of Europeans were under 25, 30% in 2005 and this figure will continue to decline towards around 20% in 2050¹⁷.

If after the Second World War, older people were confronted with very high social risks and poverty, social protection systems were designed to respond to those needs. In today's Europe, social risks are affecting more and more young people who often depend on their families' resources and are not given any public support to lead an autonomous life. Younger generations of Europeans are concerned with unequal access to education, decent work and housing.

Young people are not the only group in society whose situation will worsen due to social and demographic change in Europe. Poverty and social exclusion among older people, as the gap between women and men in old age narrows, is likely to increase in the future, as many people, especially women, will continue to be excluded from full pension rights due to the male life-cycle approach to career structures that give access to this right and for reasons of unemployment, part-time work, atypical work patterns, family/career breaks, forced inactivity, etc.

An ageing population means that many infrastructures must be adapted to the needs of elderly people in order for them to fully participate in society or to be able to live in dignity. This challenges public authorities to think long-term: an impoverished youth generation cannot support adequately its elderly and are likely to be poorer when growing old.

What strategies are needed at EU, local, national and regional levels to implement solidarity between and within generations? Which services need specific support to respond to a society inclusive of all ages? How to challenge age related stereotypes and promote a society where everyone's contribution is valued?

➤ **Diverse family patterns: new roles and responsibilities for women and men**

Families are changing and so are the roles and responsibilities of women and men. Next to the dominant "male-bread winner" and "two incomes, two kids" family models on which most of employment and social policies are based, there exists a diversity of family structures: single parent families (85% of single parent families are headed by women), "blended families" or same-sex families. Regarding the latter, a lot has to be done to achieve its full recognition, given that only a few EU member states provide legal framework to same-sex families and their children.

Families with disabled people also need to be better taken into account as they are often "discriminated by association" i.e. lack of quality care for dependent people, forced unemployment of one of the parents (often women), high costs to pay for special equipments and treatments etc... It is also important to note that increasingly restrictive family reunification policies undermine the right to family life, and have a detrimental effect on the integration of migrants.

Family life remains a fundamental value for the vast majority of people living in Europe. It represents the closest solidarity between and within generations. However, living conditions are changing due to evolutions in society (e.g. divorce and separation, job loss, professional and personal mobility): this leads to families with less time and resources to compensate for the gaps of the welfare state and at the same time not enough additional "care" infrastructure or support for individuals with caring responsibilities.

¹⁶ Commission Staff working Document, Europe's Demographic Future: Facts and Figures, p.9

¹⁷ Ibidem

Employment patterns are not gender neutral. 80% of part time employment is carried out by women and 90% of parental leave is taken by women. Women continue to be the prime care takers and carry out most of the work in the familial where there are other adults and this on top of their professional occupation. In most cases this is not a choice but a constraint often leading to further precariousness in employment, inequality in salaries and pensions. Strikingly, it is worth noting that countries with the highest fertility rate also have the highest women's participation in the labour market. This would indicate that care policies and the provision of care services are intrinsically related to the achievement of equality between women and men.

What measures are necessary to reconcile work and family commitments? Is sufficient attention paid to the increase demand of care and personal services? How to ensure the quality of these care services? How can family, social, employment and migration policies address the diversity of family forms in Europe and promote their rights? How can men's share of family tasks and responsibilities be increased? How can new roles and responsibilities in families be better supported?

➤ **Counting on an ignored driving force: active and engaged citizens**

According to the first European Quality of Life Survey: "participation in civil society" (Eurofound), a total of 95% of Europeans participate in either voluntary or informal organisations, or both. A very small percentage of Europeans are actually completely excluded from participating in one or another civil society organisation.

At a time when citizens are increasingly disengaged from formal political processes and feel distant from European politics, non-governmental and voluntary organisations have clearly a role to play in making sure citizens' concerns are taken into account in decisions that affect directly their lives, especially social protection and living standards.

People and NGOs are also crucial actors in the provision of services of general interest: not only are they services providers but also unpaid care-givers and volunteers. They are at the fore-front of caring for others and therefore participate fully to building a more cohesive society. And yet, the Lisbon agenda focuses only on paid employment, as if unpaid caregivers and volunteers were neither a productive nor an important pillar of society. The role and contribution of these people needs a proper re-assessment.

What structures are needed at local, regional, national and European level to implement an effective engagement with NGOs and engaged the un-engaged? What are the driving principles of effective civil dialogue? How can we assess the economic impact of volunteers? How can unpaid care givers be equally taken into consideration as a driving force of European growth?

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None of these trends can be addressed independently of one another. Focusing on selected aspects at the expense of the others will simply not work. And yet, over the last ten years, all EU policies have been organised around the **too-narrowed objectives of 'growth and jobs'**. This has meant focusing on economic and employment policies at the expense of a more inclusive approach to policy making. It prevented from dealing with health, economic, social and environmental policies in a mutually reinforcing way.

It is well established that economic growth does not automatically lead to reduce social exclusion and poverty. Paradoxically, there is no measurement of how the Lisbon strategy has succeeded in achieving its social objectives: qualitative indicators were not developed and

therefore, the impact of growth on the environment, poor quality jobs, health, public expenditures, and redistribution of wealth has not been assessed.

The Social Platform therefore urges European decision-makers to shift their focus from 'growth and jobs' to 'sustainable and social' priorities.

III. FROM 'GROWTH AND JOBS' TO SOCIAL AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Against this assessment, how can we walk the talk and gear up towards a more cohesive and inclusive EU in 2020?

Social NGOs believe that the EU is equipped with the necessary rights and values to do so. However our social reality stock taking clearly demonstrates that a new mix of policies going beyond the present narrow integrated Lisbon guidelines is necessary to address social and demographic challenges.

The Social Platform therefore calls for a re-direction of those resources and values towards the following pillars:

- Social and sustainable development as overarching EU priorities;
- Making fundamental rights a reality through a better distribution of wealth, increased solidarity and universal quality services of general interest;
- Adapting policies to the life course of people;
- Living together in Europe: equality in diversity;
- Participatory democracy to empower people to take an active role in building a better future.

1. Social and sustainable development as overarching EU priorities

In the renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy, Heads of States and Governments committed to *"create a socially inclusive society by taking into account solidarity between and within generations and increase the quality of life of citizens as a precondition for lasting individual well-being"*.¹⁸

To achieve this requires effectively tackling social and demographic change in a cross-cutting approach to all European policies: employment, pensions, social inclusion, public health, transport, urban development, housing, research, education, citizenship, economy, public finances etc. need to be better coordinated to develop an accurate policy response promoting fairness, solidarity and sustainability.

And yet, the EU and Member States have not shown political commitment to deliver their promises: the sustainable development strategy has been subordinated to 'growth and jobs', clear objectives and measurable targets are blatantly lacking, the strategy is not visible and the monitoring/implementation process weak. The revised Lisbon strategy still prioritises 'growth and jobs', introducing a distinction between short term (economic growth and employment) and long

¹⁸ Conclusions of the Council of the European Union, 15/16 June 2006, *Renewed EU sustainable development strategy*.

term objectives (social and environment) in total contradiction with EU's own commitments on social and sustainable development.

The Social Platform has repeatedly called on the EU not to design policies at the expense of a sustainable development strategy. We strongly regret our calls were not heard.

Should decision makers be serious about improving people's well-being, we expect leadership from all EU institutions to take an active part in the review of the Lisbon strategy both in 2008 and in the post Lisbon stage. The objective of this review should be to provide the right economic, political and legal incentives for social and sustainable development and reversing existing unsustainable trends.

Social NGOS call on the EU to:

- Use the mid-term review of the Lisbon strategy in 2008 to: clarify the overall objective of the strategy (i.e. "growth and jobs at the service of social cohesion") and the link with the EU sustainable development strategy, strengthen the social objectives in the economic and employment guidelines, improve the coordination with the Open Method of Coordination on social protection and social inclusion and analyse how the strategy contributes to more social cohesion;
- Take the lead in moving from a "growth and jobs" approach to a truly social and sustainable development approach. To promote at the European and international level an alternative to the "neo liberal model" by advancing a development model based on a green and social market economy, high levels of social protection and a human rights' driven approach to policy making;
- Use the clauses with a general application ¹⁹ provided in the new EU treaty to reinforce the social dimension of the EU and to include more systematically social actors in impact assessment and the preparation of new EU initiatives;
- Become a pioneer in adopting and applying indicators of development that go beyond the limitations of GDP calculation and better evaluate progress towards social and sustainable development.

2. Making fundamental rights a reality through a better distribution of wealth, quality jobs and services of general interest

Respecting the rights of all people living in Europe is not a utopia. Social protection systems, solidarity mechanisms, financial market regulation, labour law or universal public services are concrete political responses to putting values and rights into practice. This legacy is extremely precious but is today under increased pressure: atypical work, "working poor", the conditionality of social benefits, the new competition rules affecting public services, risk eroding these social achievements. This calls for a renewed commitment to social objectives at EU level.

¹⁹ Article 9 new EU Treaty: "In defining and implementing its policies and actions, the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health."

Existing and future people's needs for services of general interest have to be better anticipated by public authorities and debated with all actors. At the moment there are no services or support systems able to cope with this increase in demand.

The financial sustainability is also at stake and calls for a better understanding of how wealth is created and distributed in society and of trends affecting public finances (in particular in relation to mobility of capital, taxation and fiscal dumping). The Social Platform believes that sustainability of the social model should not rest on individuals' shoulders only but should remain a clear collective and public responsibility.

Social NGOS call on the EU to:

- Ensure high level of social protection, adequate minimum income and universally available, accessible and affordable quality services of general interest;
- Create inclusive labour market, free of discrimination based on quality jobs for all;
- Ensure the financial sustainability of the European Social Model and actively monitor the creation and distribution of wealth in society, the impact of fiscal dumping and the evolution of inequalities;
- Strongly encourage Member States to pay special attention to those most at risk of discrimination, social exclusion and poverty and to existing inequalities between women and men when reforming social protection and pension systems and the provision of services of general interest;
- Ensure that the consultation on the future EU Budget framework leads to a real debate on how to reinforce social cohesion in Europe.

3. Adapting policies to the life course of people by building a "caring" society

Concretely addressing longer life expectancy and low birth rates means targeted and adapted actions across the lifespan of individuals: enabling them to get a proper education and training, to take care of their family, to work and to fully participate in society as active citizen. These processes no longer happen in a succession of life phases but often simultaneously.

Quality care facilities, family-friendly settings, care leaves, flexible working hours and compensation policies for carers are key elements of any modern societies. They help reducing women/children/elderly poverty through enabling employment and work/life balance. However the support for people with caring responsibilities should not be limited to the employment field. They should also allow people to study, get training or engage in volunteering activities.

Moreover, people, primarily women, working in the care sector must be employed under decent conditions in terms of training, salaries, social protection, time schedules, etc., not to replace inequalities between men and women by inequalities amongst women.

Social NGOs call on the EU to:

- Ensure the individualisation of social protection rights and an evolution of the provision of services of general interest to respond to new needs;

- Develop an action plan outlining how EU macro-economic policies can contribute to increased investment in care services and increased support to individual with caring responsibilities. Recognise the economic value of care services provided by family members;

4. Living together in Europe: Equality in diversity

Respecting diversity must be based on fundamental rights and more particularly on the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and other European and International Human Rights instruments. This wider reference is important in order not to limit the actions of the EU to Article 13²⁰.

The Social Platform firmly believes that the integration of a gender, equality and non discrimination dimension in all policies is the only way to ensure equality in practice and to make our societies more inclusive. The lack of an equality approach appears as a key factor for both economic and social exclusion. Beyond employment, discrimination still all too often occurs in the provision of goods, facilities and services that are key to an effective inclusion of all people into society. Discrimination in these fields needs to be urgently tackled through specific legislative proposals.

In addition, the Social Platform believes that the EU's approach towards migration must not be driven solely by the needs of the labour market or by "security" considerations. Creating conditional rights and categories of migrants will unavoidably lead to less favourable conditions for third-country nationals who are considered to be less qualified when in fact they are often highly skilled but their qualifications are not recognised. This rights' gap will reinforce existing inequality patterns and discrimination in society. This may have ultimately damaging effects on the integration of all third-country nationals.

Social NGOs believe that all migrants residing within the EU and their families should be treated equally and that the fundamental rights of "undocumented" migrants needs to be respected. This is key to build an inclusive European society, free of sexism, racism and discrimination.

Social NGOs call on the EU to:

- Play a leading role in reinforcing a "human rights and equality culture" by promoting and ensuring the signature, ratification and implementation by Member States of key International and European Human Rights instruments;
- Use the full potential of the gender and equality clause of general application²¹ provided in the new EU Treaty to frame all EU policies on equality and non-discrimination principles and to directly involve groups discriminated on particular grounds in EU policy making and in impact assessment of future initiatives;
- Implement effectively legislation and policies on non-discrimination, equal opportunities and equality between men and women;

²⁰ Article 13 of the EC Treaty states that "Without prejudice to the other provisions of this Treaty and within the limits of the powers conferred by it upon the Community, the Council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation".

²¹ Article 8 new EU Treaty: "In all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities and to promote equality between women and men."

Article 10 new EU Treaty: "In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall aim to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion and beliefs, disability, age or sexual orientation".

- Adopt new legislation on the basis of Article 13 to ensure that all grounds covered by this article benefit from an equal level of protection;
- Adopt a holistic and rights' based approach to migration.

5. Empowering people for a better future by developing a participatory approach to democracy

Citizens' associations draw from community, neighbourhood, social and other connections to input in decision-making and to provide effective services. They have become an increasingly common channel through which people seek to exercise citizenship and contribute to social well-being. As correctly stated by the European Commission in the White Paper on Governance 2001 *"many NGOs have an ability to reach the poorest and most disadvantaged and to provide a voice for those not sufficiently heard through other channels."*

NGOs are driven by values rather than profit, they are committed to act in the public interest, they represent citizens' as opposed to clients/consumers and they also aim at engaging citizens in the public sphere. European networks are important players in monitoring and evaluating the application of Community Law and European strategies at national level. They report back on gaps and propose ways to improve the situation based on field experience.

The Social Platform favors a political framework in which NGOs are genuinely recognized as partners by decision makers at all stages of the decision-making process. This implies a shift from a top-down to a bottom-up approach to policies that ultimately aim to enhance the well-being of citizens.

Social NGOs call on the EU to:

- Ensure an effective implementation of the future EU treaty provisions on participatory democracy to stimulate a strong civil society involvement in EU policy making;
- Recognise and support the work of European networks of NGOs in connecting local/regional/national actors with EU policy makers and shaping a European public sphere;
- Work on a statute for European NGOs and on indicators to measure civil society participation in European strategies and in particular the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) both at national and European level;
- Recognise the importance of volunteering in promoting a cohesive society and in strengthening solidarity.

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