

European Pillar of Social Rights

REVES position

REVES, the European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy, is a unique European network that brings together local authorities and social economy organisations. Created in 1996, REVES today represents more than 60 local/regional authorities and social economy organisations from 18 EU Member States.

REVES members act together in order to promote social and solidarity economy, for a fairer, inclusive, participative and responsible society. In this context, partnership between local authorities and social economy is considered a driving force to build sustainable local communities and contribute, at the same time, to strengthen solidarity and responsible citizenship also at EU level.

1. General observations/Context

1. REVES members welcome the intention to give the EMU/EU through the European Pillar of Social Rights (hereafter referred to as “the Social Pillar”) a deeper social dimension and calls on the Member States and the European Commission to take *concrete* action and apply the values of the European Union such as they are expressed in Art. 2 TEU and in Art. 8-10 TFEU. Territorial, economic and social cohesion (Art. 3 TEU and Art. 174 TFEU) go hand in hand. One cannot be achieved without the other.
2. REVES recalls that a large part of the differences in Europe also regarding social policies and standard won't be eradicated as long as fiscal competition between Member States persists. Improving the social dimension of the EMU/EU won't be possible without joint economic and fiscal policies or at least their stronger coordination.
3. Moreover, REVES urges the European Commission and Member States to use an instrument such as the Social Pillar in a transversal way and to apply the principles developed *throughout all EU and national policies*. This means also, but not exclusively, to include social criteria more strongly in the European semester process. More than a pillar, this instrument should become an overarching umbrella or general fundament of the E(M)U. Human dignity, pursuit of the general interest and a guarantee of individual and collective social rights such as they are expressed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights have to be at the centre of all decisions taken in the EMU/EU.
4. REVES deplores the absence of an in-depth debate on the Social Pillar also and especially at local, regional and national level, including the lack of timely (and wider) announcement, by the EC, of public debates/consultation events of the EC in the Member States. This led to a feeling, among some, of this topic being discussed in (too) closed circles only and without the people (the public consultation being considered as too superficial for such an important topic).

Quotation Philippe Chesneau, former vice-president of PACA region (FR):

“Our model of thirty glorious years of post-war reconstruction is running out of steam. Another model of development has to be conceived – a development which is not measured with GDP, a development not based on a kind of growth that won't happen anymore, but on the sustainability of

activities (including solidarity with the poorest in each country, with the poorest on the other side of the planet and with the future generations). This sustainability has to be debated with everyone. »

II. On the content of the Social Pillar

Social rights not only for the employed, people at working age and EU citizens!

5. REVES insists on the fact that the human being as such, irrespective of whether he/she is an employee or not, has to be at the centre of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The Pillar should promote access of any kind of person on the territory of the EU (including disabled, refugees, long-term unemployed and others) to employment and social services and, in general, enable him/her to enjoy his/her fundamental (social) rights. This means dignity and equal treatment for all and ensuring that nobody in the EMU/European Union, irrespective of his/her status, is discriminated against. Inequality is at the core of a number of serious problems our society is currently facing. Its prevention and significant reduction, with the objective of complete eradication, has to become a priority!

6. The introduction of a minimum income is only one of the instruments that should be used here.
7. Moreover, REVES perceives, in general, an urgent need to reintegrate the inactive part of the population with appropriate (re-)insertion programmes *tailor-made to the person*. Such a necessary personalized approach also requires the adaptability of instruments and their use, including a de-institutionalization of social service provision.
8. Particular attention should be paid to some groups within which many nowadays do not find themselves in employment and have difficulties to find their place in society – among these groups figure young people, migrants/refugees and disabled persons.

Too many young people are left behind – without any opportunities even to have proper access to education and training, work orientation and related services. Many of those being in employment are exploited on the basis of new forms of contracts leading them even deeper in precariousness. The promise of traineeships and other forms of employment as springboards to the regular labour market too often turns out as a false one. Low salaries force youngsters, inter alia, to live with their parents. Long working hours and/or financial incapacity do not allow for a participation in training measures. Lack of any clear perspective is one of the reasons for an increasing radicalization among young people. Therefore, fighting the emergence of a whole “lost generation” has to become one of the priorities within the pillar.

Likewise, a number of Member States of the EMU and European Union – are currently recording a (high) number of refugees and migrants in general and are often still struggling to find the right way to integrate them well into society and the labour market. This situation also shed new light on failures in the past to successfully integrate previous generations of migrants. At the same time, a number of examples prove that migrants, including refugees, can significantly enrich our society from a cultural, social and economic point of view if given the right opportunities.

Quotation Region Örebro län (SE): “Inequality is a threat to security. We know that an equal society also is a more successful society. Inequality gives birth to frustration and hostility between groups. To fight inequality is necessary.”

Quotation Ana Umbelino, Councillor, City of Torres Vedras (PT): “Migrants may help to balance the European population pyramid, strengthening the working force of the different countries if opportunities of upskilling and reskilling were created. Migrants bring different cultural backgrounds and skills that add value to the host societies if opportunities to express their potential were enhanced.”

Employment: Taking into account different forms of employment and entrepreneurship! The importance of the social economy

9. With regard to promoting employment creation, a mere focus on self-employment should be avoided. It is vital to strengthen and develop a diversity of forms of **quality** employment and types of entrepreneurship to give persons the opportunity to choose the form of occupation that is most suited to their skills, project of life, etc.
10. **Collective entrepreneurship** such as it is practiced in the field of **social economy** should be perceived and explicitly mentioned as one possible form of entrepreneurship amongst others. Its advantages in terms of a sharing of risks, responsibilities and knowledge/skills within a community of entrepreneurs, but also its added value when it comes to social integration – should be clearly recognized and displayed. This should happen in the framework of public work orientation programmes, entrepreneurship training etc., but also in school education.
11. The labour market is developing at an increasing pace with rapid changes. The emerging new forms of work and work organisation often imply increasing self-employment and greater precariousness. Current transitions in the labour market could be transformed into opportunities, providing at the same time security and new perspectives for individuals, enterprises and society, if appropriate systems of security in transition (flexicurity) were developed to accompany these changes and provide incentives for cooperation, mutual protection and solidarity. In this respect the social economy can play a significant role. Important examples are cooperative (online) platforms, social economy employer groupings etc.

Education and Training

12. Opportunities in economy and society can only be seized by persons having the right skills and knowledge. A major investment into education and training – and this in the context of a life-long-learning approach – is necessary. Everybody should have access to **quality** education and training at any moment of his/her life. At the same time it appears vital to regularly adapt education and training schemes in order to respond to rapidly changing realities (e.g. digitalization).

Need to protect the specific character of social services of general interest

13. REVES calls on the European Commission and Member States to eliminate existing legal uncertainties experienced by public authorities by better defining and recognising the specific character of social services of general interest (using court judgments of cases such as C-113/13). The protection of the specific character of these services also necessitates the establishment of measures that promote a diversity of social service providers.

Quotation Jan Olsson, Coompanion (SE): "A diversity of social service providers and a clear definition of the specific character of social services of general interest are fundamental if we want to avoid a race to the bottom regarding service quality and domination of private profit-making interests."

III. Implementation of the Social Pillar:

Better involvement of local and regional authorities

14. Local and regional authorities are those public players that are at the forefront when it comes to providing citizens/inhabitants with the necessary services and means enabling them to enjoy their fundamental rights. Moreover, they are in a position to identify (changing) real needs, but also innovative solutions to emerging problems quicker than actors at a higher level (national, European...). They are indispensable allies when it comes to bringing (social) Europe closer to the citizens.

REVES members deplore a lack of involvement of local/regional authorities and parliaments into processes such as the European semester.

Local and regional authorities should therefore be involved much more closely in the definition, implementation, evaluation and further development of the Social Pillar, but also in the European semester process, procedures around the design and implementation of the European Investment Plan and other initiatives in different policy fields.

Participative governance as a pre-condition for the success of a European Pillar of Social Rights

15. The implementation of the principles of a European Pillar of Social Rights and (necessary) further evaluation and improvement of the latter can only be done on the basis of a mobilization of *all* players: national, regional and local governments, but also enterprises (including the social economy), trade unions and employer organisations, NGOs and others.

Civil society organizations have a key role to play when it comes to efficiently implementing social policies. Moreover, they are vital in making the above-mentioned participatory governance a reality. Through them, also and especially marginalized groups are given an opportunity to participate in shaping the society they live in. Social dialogue is indispensable. However, there is also an urgent need to ***introduce a specific and efficient instrument for civil dialogue*** that should facilitate the participation of citizens/inhabitants (and their organizations) in the evaluation of the existing and needs for improvement, as well as in the identification of priorities and new solutions.

16. Yet, in order to be effective and to create coherence throughout all EU policies, such kind of participatory governance has to be mainstreamed. It cannot be limited to the field of social and employment policy only. Also main investment programmes that involve public funds should be based on a more participatory model of governance and decision-making.

Quotation Felice Scalvini, vice-mayor, city of Brescia (IT): “Independent social organizations should be better valued in a process aiming to make the development of our social welfare systems more participatory. We have to build partnerships having at their core not-for profit organizations.”

Financing of actions

The preservation of appropriate and functioning welfare systems able to counteract and prevent social exclusion and inequalities, poverty and unemployment has to be ensured by players committed to follow the general interest. Public authorities (in partnership with organisations founding their actions on a general interest mission) are and have to remain key drivers and supporters of these systems. Therefore, financing of actions should **not** happen **mainly** through market-based financial instruments (such as EFSI). Also, it should be coherent with broader local/regional/national development strategies and apply standards and principles as they are expressed in documents such as the European Charter of Fundamental Rights .

Structural Funds have up to now played a central role in fostering initiatives contributing to promote social inclusion and employment (capacity), in the framework of economic, territorial and social cohesion, in the EU Member States and mobilise different kind of players to work in partnership. Our public authorities and social economy organisations/enterprises insist on the importance of maintaining these instruments and their central position and, at the same time, on the need to make them even more accessible also to local authorities.

In this context, REVES also strongly recommends to continue with the promotion and development of instruments such as CLLD and global grants as well as to revive community initiatives following the example of the EQUAL programme. It is these initiatives that allow(ed) to reach out to the citizens directly, to mobilise and involve them into joint actions and create networks together with a number of other public and private players, to make them feel the owner of developed strategies and initiatives and to generate social innovation. Innovation – also and especially in the social field – usually happens at local level and in contexts allowing to link different kind of actors and potentials. It appears therefore furthermore vital to strengthen communities and make programmes accessible also to smaller projects and initiatives (that might also have an important potential for upscaling).

A combination of instruments such as ESIF and EFSI might be interesting only then when a) initiatives are selected on the basis of democratic and transparent procedures with a central role of public authorities and in cooperation with civil society and social partners; b) democratic governance and partnership-based programming, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of the financed initiatives is guaranteed; c) access to a variety of actors and sizes of projects is ensured.

The importance of cooperation and partnership

17. Cooperation and solidarity should figure among the main concepts to be promoted through the Social Pillar. Partnerships - not only between co-entrepreneurs and employees within an enterprise, but also between different public and private players – are a key when it comes to strengthening the social capital in society and bring together all available resources to enhance social cohesion. Also here social economy is a strong mobilizing and uniting force!

Quotation Consortium Fare Comunità (IT): “We need the establishment/structuring of strong partnerships between public authorities and the social economy in order to react in an ever more efficient way – be it in terms of time framework or adequacy of applied instruments – to the real needs of people.”

Transparency and information as pre-conditions for an efficient implementation!

18. Participation and (social) accountability of politics and administration are pre-conditions for the success of an instrument such as the Social Pillar. There is a need for a greater transparency of policy-making and (implementation of) administrative acts.
19. Likewise, access of citizens/inhabitants to information on their rights such as they are granted to them through international, European and national legislation and conventions needs to be considerably improved. This applies also to legislation issued in relation to these rights.

A need for improved statistics

20. The lack of most recent data/information being one of the main problems when it comes to evaluating in particular social policies in rapidly changing realities REVES invites the European Commission and Member States to develop more efficient systems of data collection and sharing of information (in the framework of the European semester and elsewhere). Also in this field cooperation and dialogue with civil society appears indispensable.