



Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission
Via email

Brussels, 3 September 2015

Dear President,

Europe's economic and political future depends on its social policy

With Europe's political crisis over migration and refugee arrivals as a backdrop, your second orientation debate on social policy on 8th September is an opportunity to show the EU's ambition and leadership. With alarmingly high poverty, social exclusion and inequality, the claim that Europe is in economic recovery remains a myth for many people across Europe. Job creation alone is not enough, especially given the current in-work poverty epidemic and rising job insecurity. The Commission wants to avoid a race to the bottom on social issues. However, upward social convergence requires an ambitious social agenda. Far from being a cost, it will help drive a healthy economy.

Member States' austerity-driven measures have led to *ad hoc* discriminatory measures and decreasing social standards, as well as violations of fundamental rights which are at the core of the EU project and enshrined in EU treaties. The EU is far from powerless; it has at its disposal legislative and financial instruments as well as economic coordination such as the European Semester and the Europe 2020 Strategy. Social policy must be recognised as an investment in human capital rather than a cost. Investment across the life-cycle has measurable benefits – both socially and economically.

We understand and welcome that the Commission is working on strengthening existing legislative and non-legislative instruments to deliver on its commitment to "a Triple A social rating for Europe". As part of this we call on the Commission to work towards a package of universally-accessible social standards which would include:

- **Adequate minimum income schemes** of at least 60% of national median income to protect people against poverty across the life-cycle, linked to reference budgets that capture real needs in relation to access to goods and services. Member States should be supported in the progressive realisation of such schemes, including through an EU framework directive.
- **Adequate minimum wage** in all Member States, set higher than adequate minimum income and with a minimum threshold of at least 60% of national median wage.
- **Common standards for unemployment benefits** set at a level above adequate minimum income. Wide coverage must be ensured to avoid the exclusion of people who have not yet worked or have only worked for a limited period.
- **Rights-based and non-discriminatory access to quality, inclusive and affordable social, health, education and lifelong learning services**, recognising that investment in such services also have a high potential for job creation. On-going efforts to unlock the Equal Treatment Directive, adopt the Accessibility Act and develop a Roadmap to address the challenges of work-life balance are important in this regard.

We urge the Commission to explore how its own financial instruments can support a more ambitious social agenda, whilst also speaking out against Member State budget cuts in the fields of social protection and services.

Civil society organisations are in a unique position to connect European and national policy-makers with the people and services their policies directly impact. Often seen as a thorn in the Commission's side, we are in fact an underused resource that can help deliver a more socially just Europe – a goal which is in our common interest if we want to keep the European project alive. We look forward to sharing our expertise as you step up your efforts to deliver your commitments in the coming months.

Yours sincerely,

Jana Hainsworth
President

Pierre Baussand
Director