

## EC consultation on the Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights

### Caritas Europa contribution

[Caritas Europa](#) is the Catholic network working with people of all faiths to end poverty and to promote the dignity of all people. We are part of the global [Caritas Internationalis](#) network that has 165 members around the world. We believe that people and the environment, not profits, should be at the heart of all policies. We oppose all kinds of exclusions and support all initiatives that promote sustainable development that benefit everyone and enable all people to find a meaningful role to play in society. Caritas Europa has 49 member organisations in 46 countries across the European continent, including in all Member States of the European Union and the vast majority of Council of Europe member countries.

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Caritas Europa welcomes the announcement by the European Commission, in view of environmental, digital and demographic change, to pursue a strong social Europe to enable just transitions to the society of the future. Caritas Europa calls for the setting of social goals in a European overall strategy from 2021 and for practically-oriented EU structural funding to strengthen social cohesion. To achieve upward social convergence at a high level, it supports the further implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights at EU level and in the Member States. In doing so, national, regional and local interests and the interests of civil society should be broadly incorporated in the European process of shaping policy.

#### 1. Reinforcing Social Europe

In its Communication “A strong social Europe for just transitions” of 14.01.20, the European Commission sets out how it intends to respond in the area of social policy to the economic change resulting from the move to climate-neutrality by 2050, to the digitisation of work processes and to demographic change, notably due to population ageing and movement to cities. The Communication already contains a list of initiatives at EU level aimed at supporting implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) in 2020 and 2021, and is simultaneously intended to prepare the way for setting out an Action Plan for future implementation of the EPSR at EU level and in the Member States, which is to be presented in early 2021.

Caritas Europa welcomes the announcement by the Commission, in view of environmental, digital and demographic change, to pursue a strong social Europe that enables just transitions to the society of the future. From the perspective of Caritas Europa, a social Europe is not only characterized by EU level initiatives which set powerful impulses for upward social convergence of the social protection systems of the Member States at a high level, it must also be flanked by adequate structural assistance to strengthen social cohesion with clear social goals in an overall strategy for policy coordination in the EU, with national, regional and local interests, together with the interests of civil society being broadly incorporated in the European process of shaping policy. Also, EU Member States and other regional and local bodies have to step up and introduce policies within their legislative competencies that aim at or at least support social upward convergence. The implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights is a task that concerns not only legislators on EU level. Deepening the EU’s social dimension also requires social shaping of the digital transformation.

#### 2. Pursuing social goals in a European overall strategy from 2021 onward

The “Europe 2020” strategy runs until the end of 2020; the EU has been pursuing “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” since 2010 and set itself key targets, including in the areas of employment, education and social inclusion, to realise that strategy. The European Council presented “A new strategic agenda 2019-2024” in June 2019, in which it offers very guarded pronouncements on social principles and rights.

Regarding strengthening the social dimension of the EU, Caritas Europa once again speaks out in favour of continuing key elements of the “Europe 2020” strategy in a new overall strategy for the EU from 2021 onwards. For instance, explicit social objectives should be defined and the achievement of those objectives monitored in the “European Semester”, including monitoring implementation of the EPSR, e.g.

in the Social Scoreboard. Clear social objectives need to be incorporated in an overall strategy, in order to achieve a social and sustainable market economy that aims at full employment and social progress, or upward social convergence at a high level. The European added value results clearly from the fact that individual Member States in the Union cannot achieve the exchange with all Member States and concerted, effective coordination of economic, employment and social policies in response to Europe-wide phenomena on their own.

The EC should support EU Member States to improve the scope and effectiveness of social services through a benchmarking exercise between countries. Better and additional targets of poverty reduction should be implemented:

- Improve targeting: incorporate sub-targets for specific groups. For example, sub-targets may be agreed relating to groups at high risk of poverty or social exclusion (such as Roma people or children) and care targets for elderly and dependent people. The EC should work with Member States to ensure that their targets are adequate and to establish national sub-targets for poverty reduction among groups most at risk (based on the identification of the most affected groups in each country).
- Further targets: Consideration should also be given to agreeing further targets related to unemployment, especially long-term unemployment and youth unemployment, and to address serious problems in some countries in respect to young people neither in employment nor education.

In the view of Caritas Europa, a new overall strategy for the EU also needs to integrate the aims of the United Nations' "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", such as the aims for combating poverty, for reducing inequalities and for equality between women and men. The social agenda is not as present as it should be in the European Green Deal, the new EU growth strategy. The risk is that Member States will not or insufficiently include the social dimension in their recovery and resilience plans. The EC and the Council should ensure coherence of European social and economic policy in the European Semester by integrating the social objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Pillar of Social Rights in the European Semester monitoring process. The EC should make full use of the flexibility allowed within the Stability and Growth Pact by labelling as 'exceptional circumstances' measures proposed within the frame of fiscal consolidation that would lead to a situation that does not conform with the principles of the EPSR, thus allowing deviation from the budgetary commitments of affected Member States. The EC should improve monitoring of the implementation of country specific recommendations (CSRs) related to improving adequacy, accessibility, affordability and availability of services in order to prompt Member States to step up their efforts to ensure the accessibility, availability, affordability, and adequacy of their services

### **3. Designing practically-oriented EU structural funding to strengthen social cohesion**

It is important to Caritas Europa that the draft Regulation for the European Social Fund from 2021 (ESF+) takes particular account of the principles and rights set out in the EPSR. The EU, as a political union, should also provide impetus to the Member States to acknowledge their public responsibility in framing their social welfare systems and social services, and to aspire to a policy of social investment. As early as in its "Social Investment Package" of 2013, the European Commission underlined the point that precisely those countries with the most efficient social systems were amongst the most successful and most competitive economies in the world, and called on the Member States to put greater emphasis on social investment.

To apply EU funding in the most practically-oriented manner, Caritas Europa is committed to involving civil society, in line with the partnership principle. The partnership approach enables intensive participation by partners in civil society at the level of developing and implementing funding programmes at Member State level. The partnership arrangement of the Funds is demonstrably a success factor in implementation of the current ESF and of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) in several countries. It should be expressly anchored in the new ESF+ Regulation, in the same way as it is defined in the new EU Common Provisions Regulation. In order to effectively align structural funding to the goal of upward convergence, it is necessary that the European Commission adopts effective measures to increase the take-up of funds by the Member States. This includes retaining the EU co-financing principles from the current funding period, in order to ensure that as many project sponsors as possible are able to use funds from the ESF+ programmes from 2021. Experience has shown in practice that project sponsors are often unable to contribute higher own shares to funding. Added to this is the fact that the proposed funding

quotas, measured against the organisational and financial expenditure involved in applying and accounting for ESF funds, set too low an incentive.

The EC should propose to earmark in the future ESF+ Fund specific funding to support the active and effective training of a specialised workforce, able to work for the inclusion of the most deprived, and to develop more effective social services provision, allowing for a wider share of the population to access social rights and services. The EC should assess how existing EU funding instruments (such as ESF+ or FEAD) could contribute to the design and implementation of a common minimum income framework.

#### **4. Pursuing upward social convergence at a high level**

Just as a prospering economy in the EU enables people to participate in society and in the labour market, permanent economic success is based on effective and efficient social policy. Caritas Europa calls for the potential and the instruments set out in the Treaties to be exploited, in order to deepen the EU's social dimension.

Caritas Europa takes the view that social policy equally makes a contribution to growth and employment, whilst it should also be a pillar of EU policy in its own right. The EPSR, as a guideline for better implementation of social principles and rights in concrete legislation, must therefore be understood as a supporting element of the future European economic and social model. COVID19 is having a devastating negative impact on the objective of upward convergence, with certain Member States' economies being harder hit than others. Weaknesses in their social protection systems are amplified by the drop in economic activity due to the expansive spread of COVID19. Hence the divide toward achieving said upward convergence is even further away from being realised. In this regard, we appreciate the SURE instrument. Caritas Europa supports the goal, via the EPSR, of driving upward social convergence in the interests of improved economic and social cohesion in the EU and of supporting the Member States in this regard over reform proposals. In doing this, it draws attention to the fact that the necessary consideration of the different traditions and systems of social policy in the individual Member States is to be secured through upholding Member State competencies and respecting the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality in the individual EU initiatives to implement the Pillar.

#### **5. Further implementation of the “European Pillar of Social Rights”**

With the EPSR, a plan was agreed in 2017 to strengthen the social dimension of the EU politically and to work towards upward convergence of the social systems of the Member States. The first proposals under the EPSR have now become applicable EU law, e.g. minimum standards for accessibility of products and services, employment contracts being specified in writing, and rules to better support a work-family life balance for parents and carers. It is now important that this is followed up with further initiatives to implement the remaining principles and rights of the EPSR. For Caritas Europa, it is vital that the EPSR supports an improved quality of life in society for people through appropriate EU initiatives for implementation and thus supports improved economic and social cohesion in the EU.

Caritas Europa calls on the European Commission and the Member States to adopt the principles for effective and reliable social welfare provision systems put forward by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and to continue to develop their social welfare provision systems on that basis: the principle of a social protection floor, principle of need, principle of a precise definition of aims, principle of accessibility, principle of proportionality, principle of solidarity, principle of personal responsibility, principle of participation, principle of structure, principle of the user's right to decide, principle of legal certainty, principle of public interest, principle of transparency, principle of a joined-up approach, principle of a level playing field, principle of quality, principle of coordination<sup>1</sup>. With regard to improving the social circumstances in the Member States, Caritas Europa makes reference to the good experiences related to the principle of subsidiarity being applied in several Member States, including an active role for civil society, and to the solidarity-based financing of social welfare provision systems. We call on the Member States to aspire to social policy convergence of European social welfare provision systems at a high level and, in doing so, to include the regional and local authority actors and actors in civil society.

The EU should ratify the Revised European Social Charter, encourage Member States to ratify the Charter and support Member States in the process of accepting and respecting all its provisions. The EU

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<sup>1</sup> Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on “Principles for effective and reliable welfare provision systems” of 17 September 2015 (SOC/520), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PD-F/?uri=CELEX:52015IE1011&from=EN>

Court of Justice should align the status of the European Social Charter with that of other international human rights instruments ratified by all EU Member States.

References to the principles of the EPSR should refer explicitly to the provisions of the European Social Charter, to which these principles correspond. In order to promote convergence on a single interpretation of the provisions of the EPSR, the references should be accompanied by a recommendation to take into account their interpretation by the European Committee of Social Rights.

The further implementation of the EPSR is a task not only limited to be carried out by EU legislation. In accordance with No. 17 of the preamble of the EPSR, “delivering on the EPSR is a shared political commitment and responsibility.” Therefore, implementation of the EPSR principles should happen at “both Union level and Member State level within their respective competencies”.

In order to fulfil this holistic approach, Caritas Europa urges the EC to strengthen its effort in raising awareness of the EPSR among Member States and subsidiary legislative bodies (on regional or local level). This could be done by creating guidelines for the EPSR implementation and/or a compilation of best practice examples where especially regional or local legislative bodies have – within their power – implemented the EPSR through legislative acts.

In this sense, Caritas Europa highlights that EU Regulation 360/2012 recognises work integration social enterprises (WISES) as entities that provide Services of General Economic Interest, and WISES are precisely the ones that focus their activity on the most disadvantaged groups and around the concept of protected employment.

Social economy enterprises, especially not-for-profit, play an important role as a powerful element for the implementation of the EPSR, since it is a source of stable, quality and non-relocatable job creation and it is an important platform for people at risk of social exclusion to access employment. They constitute, therefore, a key element of social cohesion and a powerful tool for the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The study based on the ‘Impact WISEs’ tool of ENSIE, presented on 17.11.16 in the European Parliament, with the support of MEP Jens Nilsson, underlines two important results: the WISES are active at the very core of the economic system in several sectors of activity and according to the industry agreements of these sectors, and the WISES have a success rate of 66% of people enjoying a positive result after their integration pathway.

Conclusion 1.1. of the EESC opinion: ***Strengthening non-profit social enterprises as an essential pillar of a socially equitable Europe***<sup>2</sup> states that “*Given the role of non-profit social enterprises in realising the social dimension of the European Union (EU) and in implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), including and especially in crisis situations, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) calls for the strengthening of and targeted support for social enterprises and other social economy organisations, particularly those that reinvest any profits fully in tasks in the public interest or for non-profit purposes as set out in their statutes. In addition, their visibility should be boosted across Europe.*”

We urge not only to make visible, but also to recognise and give the importance of the social economy in the development role in the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

In its exploratory opinion “*Social economy enterprises’ contribution to a more cohesive and democratic Europe*”<sup>3</sup>, the EESC notes “*that SEE models hardly feature at all in educational programmes and business start-up and development schemes. It must be possible to include the issue of training and education on the social economy in the curriculums of educational systems – the true gateway to knowledge and entrepreneurial spirit. Therefore access of SEEs to the Erasmus+ programme should be promoted.*”

Caritas Europa urges the EC to implement this recommendation.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/strengthening-non-profit-social-enterprises-essential-pillar-socially-equitable-europe/timeline>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/social-economy-enterprises-contribution-more-cohesive-and-democratic-europe-exploratory-opinion-request-romanian>

## 6. Participation and consultation

The EU and the Member States should heed the principles of the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development and promote the participation of people experiencing poverty, also in the development, monitoring and evaluation of services and minimum income measures. The EC should develop a social and sustainable post-2020 strategy which prioritises the eradication of poverty and supports the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals. The current focus on the Green Deal as the new growth strategy is not sufficiently addressing this need. This should be achieved through meaningful dialogue processes with civil society and people experiencing poverty at EU and national levels.

Against this background Caritas Europa – on the basis of its extensive practical experience across the EU – wishes to give advice to the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council and the Member States on the following individual policy areas which the EU has taken up in the European Pillar of Social Rights:

### A. Education, training and life-long learning (Principle 1 of the EPSR)

Poor education and poverty are often interconnected, suggesting that poverty is directly correlated with an inadequate level of educational attainment. Another challenge for parents/adults impacted by poverty is the risk of loss of competencies which occur during long periods of unemployment. A low level of education affects people impacted by poverty for the rest of their lives and makes it all the more difficult to cope. Children impacted by poverty also suffer from the consequences of the poor educational opportunities their parents often had in their youth in cases of intergenerational poverty and social exclusion. In these cases, the vulnerability of formative capital also puts children's educational path at risk, further exacerbating the intergenerational transmission of poverty and social exclusion. Moreover, lack of access to or an inadequate level of income also prevents people from going beyond "survival modus". People need to meet their basic needs, food and shelter first before they can think about pursuing training courses to increase their chances in the labour market.

Caritas Europa therefore recommends the EU to promote, through the available financial instruments, provisions for a path to recuperate lost school years and to possible qualifications and enable skills training programmes as soon as possible. The European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, recently presented by the European Commission, is a promising initiative in this context, as well as its proposal for a Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training. Building on the good example of the Youth Guarantee, it should be considered to extend the concept to other age groups, particularly to people living on benefits.

Caritas Europa also recommends that the action plan for the social economy, that was announced in the Communication on a strong social Europe for just transitions (COM(2020) 14 final), takes a strong stance on the importance of social economy enterprises in the creation of sustainable and inclusive jobs through proper education, training and reskilling for those engaged in social economy initiatives so that they can learn and grow. This should include training and education on how to start and set up social economy initiatives.

Furthermore, the new Digital Education Action Plan needs to promote a socially inclusive development of digital skills and capacities, e.g. through offering special courses for all age groups free of charge and the provision of hardware, where necessary.

**CARITAS practice:** *the social insertion company OUR FARMS (Nossas Quintas), a social economy enterprise, is managed by Cáritas of Ilha Terceira, Portugal. Three staff members develop practical activities in the area of organic farming, packaging, and marketing and also provide services in the area of agriculture to individuals. Besides the focus on agriculture, and the production of fruit processing (preserves and jams), pastries and small traditional sweets is also an integral aspect of this new project. The "Nossas Quintas" brand contributes to the sustainable development of innovative actions supporting the integration of young people and beneficiaries, and that fit the perspective of local intervention. The service fights poverty and social exclusion through labour market integration and/or socio-professional reintegration, the acquisition and development of personal and professional skills appropriate to the exercise of an activity, and in creating new jobs. Since 2012, this service has presented applications to private entities to finance activities in training, for the employability of young people aged 18 to 30, with the objective of promoting skills for employability. The result is a better balance between social*

intervention, the promotion of personal and social skills, and the employability of socially vulnerable people. Further information is available here: <https://acores.caritas.pt/asnosasquintas-quem-somos>.

**CARITAS practice:** *Einzigware® is the upcycling brand of employment companies of Caritas all over Germany. Long-term unemployed, people with disabilities or mental illnesses give objects new life and people new opportunities. Einzigware® participants and employees are the "goods masters". The creative work creates new self-confidence and makes them fit for an inclusive labour market. Einzigware® turns old into new. Einzigware® is an active contribution of Caritas to the fight against the climate crisis.*

**CARITAS practice:** *Caritas Spain's employment and training programmes have trained 16,276 people in 2019 and have carried out 1,057 formative actions. These trainings have been aimed at people in situations of exclusion or social vulnerability in order to improve their employability and options to find a job. The majority participant profile active in the programme is composed of women over 45 years of age. With this programme, we try to tackle the need and ensure the right each person has in regard to capacity building to better access the labour market.*

## **B. Pursuing the EU strategy for equality with a broad-based approach (Principle 2 of the EPSR)**

Drawing on the political guidelines presented by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, it is vital that the EU commits to adopting new anti-discrimination legislation that ends the current artificial hierarchy of grounds and ensures comprehensive protection against discrimination in key areas of life, including in housing. At a time of misinformation, it is also important to establish a fact-based and responsible public discourse on migrants and refugees as well as Roma people and other particularly marginalised groups in all news and communications media, and on social media in particular.

The EU and its Member States should also step up their engagement to address, monitor and sanction discrimination and xenophobia by adhering to and strengthening existing non-discrimination and equality legislation, programmes, and actions in employment and occupational training.

Caritas Europa welcomes the fact that the European Commission has approved a "Gender equality strategy 2020-2025", as announced in its communication from January 2020 (COM(2020) 14 final). In its opinion, the previous "strategic engagement", based on a Commission staff working document, was inadequate and a multiannual policy strategy of the full European Commission is needed that is implemented in committed fashion by the EU and its Member States. Caritas Europa welcomes the fact that the strategy focuses not only on the principle of wage transparency, but also on good working conditions. "Equal pay for equal work" is a key aspect to lower the higher risk of poverty for women. But it likewise relates to the fair distribution of care or support tasks and housework between women and men, to the breaking down of persistent gender stereotypes and to measures for the effective prevention of violence against women, a phenomenon which has come under more public scrutiny during the COVID-19 pandemic. What is needed is the pursuit of a broad-based approach to reducing discrimination against women at EU level and in the Member States. In doing so, the experiences and suggestions coming from equality work by civil society organisations and by local authority and regional administrations should be used when implementing the new strategy.

Caritas Europa also welcomes the planned new strategy for disability as mentioned in its communication from January 2020 (COM(2020) 14 final) and expects it to focus on strengthening the European Accessibility directive.

**CARITAS practice:** *Insertare SL is a Sheltered Employment Centre run by the diocesan Caritas of Barbastro Monzón in Spain since 2008. Barbastro is a small town located in the north east of Spain, near the Pyrenees where there are no other services aimed at people with intellectual disabilities in the area. The goals of Insertare are to offer professional gardening and cleaning services to companies and individuals, to provide fair job opportunities to people with less possibilities, favouring their social integration by performing decent and productive work, and to improving people's employability conditions by providing support and developing adapted training.*

**CARITAS practice:** *RAD-DAR Ltd. Economic Society for the employment of disabled persons is a social enterprise of Caritas Mostar, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In its work, Caritas Mostar places special emphasis on the care of people with disabilities. In addition to accommodation, rehabilitation and customised educational services to people with disabilities, Caritas Mostar also offers occupational*

therapy and social inclusion. By founding the RAD-DAR, Caritas Mostar goes a step further in the care of people with disabilities and gives them the opportunity for employment. There are many difficulties and barriers that people with disabilities have in exercising their rights, in particular, the right to work. People with disabilities are invisible on the labour market and their dream of employment has previously usually been unattainable. RAD-DAR has a great social impact, primarily on persons with disabilities, its employees, beneficiaries of other Caritas institutions for persons with disabilities, as well as their family members. This social impact also expands to the wider community, primarily by promoting people with disabilities as employable persons, changing the attitudes and raising awareness about employing people with disabilities and improving their living conditions. In addition, the enterprise's profit making and acting as a social enterprise promotes the development of social entrepreneurship as a good economic model. Originally, the main activity of the RAD-DAR was the production of decorative products and souvenirs. Over time, RAD-DAR expanded its business to agricultural production (starting in 2015) as well as to printing T-shirts, cups and badges (in 2016) and olive growing and poultry breeding (in 2017). Persons with disabilities are included in all these activities, as well as the process of the design, production and product placement.

### **C. Reinforcing anti-discrimination provisions at EU level (Principle 3 of the EPSR)**

The EC and Member States should ensure equity and non-discrimination for all. Discrimination should be eradicated also in relation to access to services. Entry points where people in a condition of extreme vulnerability can easily access the services they need is extremely important to safeguard their access to social rights. This can include measures such as lowering the access threshold, cutting red tape and the setup of outreach teams designed to connect persons in vulnerable situations with social services. The Council should prioritise and promote rights to equal opportunities and non-discrimination, notably by adhering to existing equality frameworks and by finalising the EU negotiation to adopt the anti-discrimination directive to ban discrimination in all areas of life.

Caritas Europa would welcome a new proposal for a Directive from the Commission to better implement the ban on discrimination. Alongside the right to equality between men and women, the EPSR also gives expression to the right of all persons to equal treatment with regard to social protection, education and access to publicly-available goods and services. This corresponds to the bans on discrimination in the Treaties set out in primary legislation. However, there is currently an absence of secondary legislative provisions for protection against discrimination in daily life on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age and other important areas of life in accordance with Art. 18, 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), other than in relation to employment and career.

**CARITAS practice:** Caritas Czech Republic runs a project called Community Work in Osada Míru. The project aims to activate the community of inhabitants in the socially excluded locality of 'Osada Míru Ostrava – Kunčičky' (approximately 750 inhabitants) where the population is mainly composed of a Roma ethnic group. The inhabitants of socially excluded communities are often in a situation that does not motivate them to actively focus on their neighbourhood and the common environment. Their life situation and life failures have a negative impact on their self-esteem and on their ability to have higher life goals. There is also a lack of interest in things beyond their closest private sphere. The project's activities include contacting people, mapping problems, building and supporting a leadership group; activities to improve their housing; activities to improve relationships as well as contacting external subjects, in addition to evaluating the community work process and its results.

### **D. Active support to employment (Principle 4 of the EPSR)**

The EC and Member States should promote employability of young and elderly people, and should more generally tackle unemployment and improve access to job opportunities through the proposed EUInvest programme. Particular focus should be directed especially towards the sectors of the green economy and social enterprises, capable of producing new jobs, especially for young people, and by expanding lifelong learning opportunities currently offered by public administrations. These efforts should be combined with the Youth Employment Initiative, which needs the financial backing and support by the EC, Council and European Parliament in the next 7-year funding period. The EC should also support Member States to strengthen and modernise public employment services through the continuous training of operators, the inclusion of highly specialised counsellors and tutors, and the implementation of targeted policies for each category of the labour market. The Council should adopt such an approach, incorporating these points, in the functioning of public employment services.

**CARITAS practice:** Caritas Greece operates a job counselling / employment hub. Since the design phase of employability hub services, Caritas Hellas has aimed at a rounded approach. This takes into consideration the analysis of the labour market and legal framework, and offers a holistic model of support and accompaniment to the job seekers. To live up to this goal, Caritas Hellas conducted research with a variety of methodologies ranging from the value chain market analysis in Athens, digital tool development such as the online platform and app linking refugees to employment and training opportunities, the hiring of professional job counsellors and social entrepreneurship experts, and the running of pilot programmes in its shelters and social services.

**CARITAS practice:** Caritas Norway offers a total package of skills-enhancing activities to help immigrants enter/re-enter the labour market. Our resource centres offer free job search courses with CV and cover letter writing, in addition to an expanded digital offer, enabling immigrants across the country to participate. The digital course consists of 5 presentations and 5 videos in both English and Norwegian, summed up with a Zoom video conference. In parallel with job seeking courses, Caritas Norway also offers individual computer training. The resource centre runs regular courses in both The Work Environment Act and practical courses on how to set up and run one's own business. Selected participants who are motivated to invest more time, are offered an 8-week programme called JOBFOCUS. Caritas Norway's in-house legal team provides free counselling as needed, and their Business Contact cooperates with companies and other partners to supply good candidates for vacant positions. The package also includes a 12 month mentoring programme, where the jobseekers can acquire their own external mentor with relevant employment background.

**CARITAS practice:** Caritas Kosova ran the project "From reintegration of detainees to restorative justice" in the correctional centre in Lipjan, Kosovo. The project aimed at supporting the post release integration of women and youth detainees in Kosovo. For this, they organised tailoring and hairdressing courses for 90 women as well as sports activities for the youth detainees. The project also raised awareness on prisoner reintegration. As a result, the participants improved their self-esteem and confidence, were enabled to start their own businesses with limited investment or work for a business or company once released from prison.

**CARITAS practice:** The social economy enterprise (SEE) Ecosol in Girona allows people in social need to work in a protected space for up to three years and learn a job as well to acquire social and work skills that will allow these youngsters to find a job on the labour market once they have finished their path in the social economy enterprise. Caritas Spain runs the SEE and effectively employs immigrant youngsters, trains them and empowers them by supporting opportunities for them to learn a trade/skill and acquiring a job contract elsewhere, ideally before the three year period elapses.

## **E. Secure and adaptable employment (Principle 5 of the EPSR)**

Europe is experiencing a substantial employment transformation, which has only gained momentum through the Covid-19 pandemic. New forms of work and a more individualised approach to labour through advancing digitalisation poses chances but also challenges to thoroughly protecting workers. In order to tackle these issues, the EC plans to introduce a new Digital Services Act that protects consumers and employees alike. Furthermore, the European Platform Work Summit aims to put relevant stakeholders together to discuss these topics and possible solutions.

Caritas Europa calls for the EC to continue with the planning process for such a summit, despite the difficulties of holding physical events during or in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. An overarching approach to the discussion of how employment can be secure and adaptable is necessary and must include aspects of morals and ethics. The European Social Economy Summit, that is planned to take place in Mannheim, Germany in May 2021, may provide some important impulses to this discussion and future legislation and policies. Moreover the implementation of the European Green Deal can contribute to the realisation of principle 5. We encourage the EC to take inspiration from Pope Francis' encyclical letter [Laudato si'](#) as well as the ambitions and findings stemming from the [letter by Pope Francis for the event "Economy of Francesco"](#) on sustainability, which will now be held virtually from 19-21 November 2020. Participants to this congress will include prominent experts on various aspects of sustainability, 500 young entrepreneurs and economists, and Pope Francis. As things stand at present, speakers and discussion partners include Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, promoter of the microfinance idea, Swiss economist and happiness researcher Bruno S. Frey, Slow Food founder Carlo Petrini, sustainability researcher Kate Raworth and Tony Meloto, initiator of a Philippine poverty reduction programme as well



as several young Caritas participants. The goal will be to reflect on a new economic model that is based in solidarity and equality and to bring together people who, in research and practice, are seeking alternative economic approaches and an economy "that lives and does not kill, that includes and does not exclude". Pope Francis emphasises that, "today more than ever, everything is deeply connected and that the safeguarding of the environment cannot be divorced from ensuring justice for the poor and finding answers to the structural problems of the global economy. We need to correct models of growth incapable of guaranteeing respect for the environment, openness to life, concern for the family, social equality, the dignity of workers and the rights of future generations. Sadly, few have heard the appeal to acknowledge the gravity of the problems and, even more, to set in place a new economic model, the fruit of a culture of communion based on fraternity and equality". Caritas Europa believes this should be the framework for securing employment and adapting our economic model to the needs of people and our common home today.

**CARITAS practice:** *Caritas-Tandem 4.0 is the joint initiative of the six eastern German diocesan associations to promote digital transformation within Caritas in Germany. The aim of the project is to find out what digital transformation means for the East German diocesan associations and to support them in the implementation of transformation projects. Digital coaches support the Caritas organisations in taking advantage of the opportunities presented by social change and meeting new challenges. Concrete challenges arise, e.g. in establishing digital and target group-oriented personnel and application processes, improving employee training using modern methods and technology, and using agile forms of work organisation. The processes are accompanied by a digital coach in two dioceses. Managers and specialists at the diocesan, local and institutional level are sensitised and trained in workshops on the influence of digital transformation processes on management culture and organisational structures.*

**CARITAS practice:** *MAKE BRAGA, a local social development contract in Braga is a result of the partnership between the Archdiocesan Caritas of Braga (Local Coordinating Entity of the Partnership), the Cultural and Social Centre of Santo Adrião (Local Entity Executing the Action) and Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Braga (Local Action Enforcement Agency), and is based on a concerted strategy between different educational, social and economic agents in the territory. The initiative promotes employment, qualifications and inclusion and stimulates entrepreneurial skills in the population. It activates personal and social development experiences with families and the community, enhancing their autonomy and inclusive social participation; and it empowers local actors, such as through development leverage and territorial cohesion. A "Community of Practice" in the disability sector was created in partnership with the Municipality of Braga and the Working Group for the Disability Sector. The project hopes to contribute to the intelligent, inclusive and sustainable development of the municipality. More information is available here: <https://makebraga.pt/>.*

## **F. Fair wages (Principle 6 of the EPSR)**

The last decade of recession has marked an entire generation of young girls and boys, passing "the best time of their lives" under the dark clouds of the crisis. As recession swept over Europe, youth unemployment rose to unprecedented levels, with an unequal distribution between the core and peripheral Member States of the Union. Moreover, wages and legal protection of the first employment forced European youth to settle in a, formerly unknown, universe of precariousness and low pay. Being young meant to be confronted with a far greater exposure to all effects of the crisis. Europe has answered to the youth unemployment crisis with decisive measures, but labour rights and social protection need to be safeguarded and require further regulatory efforts.

Caritas advocates for a rights-based and non-discriminatory approach to employment that is sensitive to the necessities of youth. National and/or regional authorities play a vital role in organising employment counselling services, ensuring minimum wages and job security, and devising measures to support the transition from education to the labour market. These obligations are stated in the European Social Charter and the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights. Recently, they have been reiterated in the global framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These, concretely, state in Target 8.6 "By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training" and in Target 8.5: "By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value". They also urge governments in Target 4.4 to ensure that "by 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship". The European Commission should develop a minimum standards legal framework on

wages and support the creation of quality jobs with decent minimum wages. Linked to this is the need to make full use of the potential of social economy enterprises to create decent jobs with fair wages. EU Member States should take advantage of this and promote this potential.

**CARITAS practice:** *Caritas Austria's CARLA project offers income support / minimum income. Since the beginning, Caritas has been collecting clothes and furniture donated by people to help other people who cannot afford new clothes or furniture. Clothes are collected and distributed in many institutions throughout the Federal territory, as well as in the care and counselling centres of Caritas, and also via the Caritas parish network. The professionalised section of the collection takes place via the CARLAs. CARLA is a Caritas store where used and useful goods are collected and offered free of charge to people in need, or offered for sale to others. The minimum wage standards formulated under principle 6 of the EPSR apply to the jobs created by these shops.*

**CARITAS practice:** *Participation in Local Domestic Workers Platforms: Several Spanish diocesan Caritas (Salamanca, Granada, Valladolid...) are members of the Local Domestic Workers Platforms that are trying to ensure compliance with regulations in a sector that is clearly facing high discrimination. Domestic workers represent a still highly unprotected sector and a great number of whom are women, both migrants and Spaniards, who work taking care of elderly people in the informal economy without contracts and social or legal protection. Caritas participates in many local platforms with other entities trying to ensure compliance with the regulations regarding wages and working conditions, offering information to both workers and employers and facilitating access to jobs with decent conditions.*

### **G. Work-life balance (Principle 9 of the EPSR)**

Measures for improved compatibility of family and career benefit family members by contributing to a raised sense of well-being. However, they can also increase employment levels, particularly for women, and boost the economy. In this regard, Caritas Europa argues for a work-life balance that extends over the full life course. This is because that balance relates not just to the period of bringing up children, but is also a challenge when caring for other family members. Caritas Europa therefore calls for an appreciable time easement for combining caring with a decent job. The need-appropriate expansion of care offers is essential for the compatibility of raising children and pursuing a professional career. Alongside framing infrastructural and financial conditions, time represents the most important resource in caring for a family. What is needed here is not just the pure time between care-giver and the recipient of care, but also time for and with a partner as the "core" of the family, personal time and social time, through which families are able to integrate into various social networks. A sustainable family policy therefore needs to include time-related policy measures, alongside financial and infrastructural measures. The Commission should carefully monitor the correct transposition and implementation of the [Work-Life Balance Directive](#).

**CARITAS practice:** [Magdas Cleaning](#): *in 2017, Caritas Vienna started "Magdas Cleaning", a social economy business offering cleaning services for office buildings. As of mid-2020, 110 employees have been working for Magdas Services in more than 30 buildings. The social impact of Magdas Cleaning goes beyond offering employment to people with limited opportunities on the labour market: Magdas Cleaning offers family friendly working conditions with working hours during the day. Usually working hours in cleaning companies in Vienna start very early in the morning or late afternoon/early evening, making reconciliation between work and family life very difficult. In addition, Magdas Cleaning offers free social counselling for employees to support them in overcoming personal challenges.*

### **H. Childcare and support to children (Principle 11 of the EPSR)**

Caritas Europa supports the implementation of the Child Guarantee, with a Council Recommendation, reinforcing the Investing in Children Commission Recommendation (2013), recognising the multidimensionality of poverty and framing the Recommendation within an integrated antipoverty approach tackling the needs of children and their carers/parents: access to adequate resources and benefits, access to affordable, quality and inclusive services, and children's right to participate in cultural and recreational activities, and in decisions made for their lives. The Council Recommendation should have a clear implementation plan to ensure effective monitoring and is properly financed and interconnected to other EU financial instruments beyond [ESF+](#).

**CARITAS practice:** *The "Priority to the Children" (Prioridade as crianças) programme of Caritas Portugal focuses on the most vulnerable, poor, deprived and mistreated children. The programme aims to pay*

*permanent attention to the life situations of children and their families, at the diocesan and parish level; it identifies cases of children and youth in danger, namely, those affected by poverty, neglect, abandonment, mistreatment and abuse; it monitors the identified cases; finds appropriate responses for the removal of the danger and refers the identified problems to the competent institutions, in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity; it also evaluates and studies all detected situations; proposes appropriate measures / solutions to unanswered problems and denounces the omissions and incorrect actions that remain.*

*Caritas Portuguesa together with the 20 Diocesan Caritas are recognised as particularly suitable for supporting parishes and their institutions in the creation, functioning and development of the local groups that support the most vulnerable children, as well as in the qualification of volunteers.*

**CARITAS practice:** *The project “Hagan Lío”, run by Caritas Spain, is based on the idea that the behaviour of boys and girls who get into trouble, responds to unmet needs and that their situation is framed within an exclusive social context that imposes very harsh conditions. The project accompanies a group of 60 adolescents and young people aged between 14 and 20. It is intended to work at three levels (individual, group and community) and to do so from a pedagogy of the relationship, centred on a playful and cultural approach. And all this in a workspace of special interest for these young people, since they leave their environment and live a unique experience of youth coexistence and exchange that generates positive experiences based on experiences and the group.*

*This group of 60 youngsters who didn't know each other and came from five regions, have designed and organised how they wanted to create that space. The first encounter was in 2019 in Barcelona. In 2020, in times of COVID, they have continued to maintain their enthusiasm through the networks and hopefully in 2021 they will be able to meet again. This project aims to promote an “educational environment that is a place of openness to the other and to the transcendent; to offer a place of dialogue, cohesion and listening, in which the young people feel valued in their own potentialities and inner richness, and learn to appreciate their brothers/sisters/each other. This teaches the participants to enjoy the joy that springs from living charity and compassion for our neighbour day by day, and from actively participating in the construction of a more humane and fraternal society.*

#### **I. Social protection (Principle 12 of the EPSR)**

Member States should ensure access to social rights, especially by those in particular need or in situations of vulnerability. The European Commission should promote the exchange of best practices addressing legal barriers, bureaucratic hurdles and other difficulties faced by people in need when trying to access services. Gradually moving towards universal access to services and minimum income, while improving a tailor-made individual approach in service provision are vital steps toward this aim. The Council should further adopt a Council Recommendation towards this aim, and monitor its follow up.

**CARITAS practice:** *the Caritas Rescue Network of Diocesan Caritas Brno (Czech Republic) aims to help people who are not reached by the system of social services, either because some of the social services do not cover the area or the need itself, or because the users are unable to access social services themselves. The Caritas Rescue Network thus responds to gaps in the social services system and to the particular needs not covered by the services of other institutions. From Caritas's experience, there is a relatively large number of people who cannot find a solution due to their difficult life situations or there is no suitable service that could help them in their situation. In general, the Caritas Rescue Network is there for people in the most difficult of situations.*

#### **J. Unemployment benefits (Principle 13 of the EPSR)**

Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, the EC proposed a temporary instrument called Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) that aims to provide monetary assistance to Member States in order to help them set up measures that protect jobs and workers affected by the pandemic. Although this instrument is only meant to be in effect specifically to counter the impacts of the current crisis, it could function as a blue print for a future long-term EU unemployment re-insurance scheme that may come in effect to absorb asymmetric economic shocks in single Member States in order to support the labour market.

We think that such a scheme could indeed help to implement principle 13, especially in times of economic crises. The impact of the SURE instrument has to be carefully evaluated and an assessment has to be made, whether such an instrument can function as a permanent measure.

All workers should have access to unemployment benefits when losing their job. When the right to unemployment benefits ends, people should immediately have access to minimum income.

#### **K. Minimum income (Principle 14 of the EPSR)**

It is essential to set European standards for minimum income systems in order to achieve upwards social convergence. In the EU, this would be possible with the adoption of a legally binding framework on minimum income.

Caritas Europa affirms that the goal of the “Europe 2020” strategy of combating poverty should be pursued with increased emphasis. Minimum income schemes make a fundamental contribution to this cause. They can safeguard individuals against poverty and social exclusion and empower them to realise their individual potential. This approach is based on respecting the dignity of every individual person and on the fundamental notion of solidarity. The efforts must be directed towards preventing people from falling into poverty in the first place, or to supporting them in their paths out of poverty. Caritas Europa endorses the observation from the EESC that in the Member States collective financing and legal safeguards for minimum income schemes sometimes need improving. Minimum income schemes can and should make a vital contribution to enabling participation. The financial benefits in minimum income schemes need to create a degree of freedom for those entitled to them, which enables them to undertake their own endeavours and activities, with a view to taking up employment.

The EC should oblige Member States to design basic social protection systems in such a way that they guarantee a decent life for all citizens. The EPSR enables an opportunity to strengthen the social rights component of impact assessments in the preparation of legislative proposals by the EC, such as a framework directive on minimum income. Taking into account the current national minimum income policies and their specific outcomes in alleviating poverty and ensuring a dignified life, the EC should design practical guidelines and tools for Member States based on a comparative, evidence-based analysis, drawing out the common characteristics and setting common standards for eligibility criteria, access to services, and a transparent mechanism for setting up and indexing benefits. Hence, the EC should propose and the EP and Council should adopt a legal framework on minimum income.

In this regard, Caritas Europa welcomes the aspirations of the EU in the EPSR to establish appropriate minimum income systems in the Member States and encourages the EC to develop a European framework for national minimum income systems. First and foremost, such a framework has to include criteria, establishing the eligibility and adequacy of minimum income services and provisions and also focus on an enabling aspect that supports people to be able to fully participate in society, regardless of their ability to work, and to leave the minimum income system as soon as possible. Other important parameters are presented in Caritas Europa’s Position Paper [Minimum income schemes to ensure dignity for all](#).

**CARITAS practice:** *Caritas Luxembourg runs a social grocery shop. This is within the framework of the common objective of combating poverty and against the background of the increasing risk of poverty in Luxembourg. The Luxembourg Red Cross and Caritas Luxembourg jointly developed a concept of ‘social grocery shops’ that is being implemented in different parts of the country. These social grocery shops provide food and everyday products to people affected by poverty, at a reduced cost of one-third of the normal market price. Some products are co-financed by FEAD. Through this solidarity initiative, disadvantaged people see their purchasing power increase while having access to fresh quality products. Please refer to initiative webpage <https://www.caritas.lu/service/epiceries-sociales>.*

#### **L. Old age income and pensions (Principle 15 of the EPSR)**

A sustainable system of old-age provision contributes to preventing poverty. At the individual level, it serves primarily to secure an income in retirement that allows older people to have a decent standard of living. Statutory pension insurance should represent the most important pillar in ensuring an appropriate income in retirement. This is the essential basis to ensure adequate pensions and to reduce inequalities, in particular between women and men. Statutory pension insurance can be supplemented by opportunities for company and private pensions.

The EC report on the impact of demographic change (COM(2020) 241 final) should be taken into account when such policies are implemented. As the situation of demographics and income often varies strongly between different regions, it seems that implementing principle 15 cannot be achieved through a “one-size-fits-all” approach but implementation (or transposition) has to be carried out on national, regional and possibly even local levels. Furthermore the planned EC Green Paper on ageing may provide further substance to this issue.

#### **M. Inclusion of people with disabilities (Principle 17 of the EPSR)**

Under the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which both the EU Member States and the European Union have signed, measures are to be introduced to reinforce the rights of persons with disabilities and to support inclusion. Even if implementation of the UNCRPD presents in some cases major challenges to the signatory states, social welfare provision systems are to be geared to the group of people with disabilities and adapted accordingly in order to guarantee extensive participation. Caritas Europa observes that the inclusion of persons with disabilities is an important cross-sectoral task, which needs to be appropriately taken into account when implementing all 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and particularly in the area of education. It welcomes the fact that the Commission has announced submission of a strengthened strategy for people with disabilities for 2021, building on the results of the evaluation of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020.

**CARITAS practice:** *the programme Social services for children with disabilities, run by Caritas Latvia, intends to better promote the inclusion of children with disabilities and their families. The actions are: the promotion of a day care centre and the provision of social rehabilitation of disabled children, and social care at home. The aim is to involve 50 of Riga’s resident children. It is not possible to estimate any result yet because the project started in March 2019. More information on the project can be found here: <http://www.caritas.lv/2019/03/14/4753/>.*

#### **N. Long-term care (Principle 18 of the EPSR)**

In the spirit of the EPSR, everyone has the right to affordable long-term care services of high quality, in particular home-care and community-based services. In the course of demographic change, the number of people requiring care and support with daily tasks is growing Europe-wide. It is fundamental to guarantee access to and affordability and adequacy of long-term care services, as well as conditions allowing family members to provide support (for the latter, see our recommendation regarding principle 9 of the EPSR above). In Caritas Europa’s view, persons requiring care should be able to live for as long as possible in their familiar/family environment. This requires a guarantee of support in managing daily tasks, with medical and care provision and with social participation. In saying this, the decision regarding the provision of services either in the community or in a care establishment should always be taken on basis of the best interest of the individual person. Community-based care requires framing conditions allowing the care-giver, particularly family members, to undertake that activity. In addition, it is of great importance to prevent or reduce the need for care, where possible. The EC should enhance universal access to affordable services for facilitating independent living and healthy ageing and support Member States’ implementation of a long-term care guarantee.

Caritas Europa demands that working conditions, especially of people working in private households (so called “live-in-care workers”), are improved and constantly monitored. For this reason, Caritas organisations are already working on establishing basic quality standards and criteria for the area of live-in-care at various levels. (Private) agencies, that organise inner EU cross-border employment in the long-term care sector, have to abide to certain quality standards that ensure both a professional provision of care service but also adequate working conditions and social protection for those carers. Carers, employed in this sector, have to be able to obtain officially recognised documentation for the skills and competences they have acquired. Furthermore, considering the transnational perspective of this area, carers should be supported in further developing their qualifications, in order to aim for more permeability and to reduce the artificial barriers between different types of educational systems in the area of care in the European Union.

Finally, considering the impacts of COVID-19 on the social care sector, including border and travel restrictions, lack of protective gear and disinfectant, delayed access to COVID-19 tests, limited access to state material reserves, challenges this caused not only for the care-worker to earn an income to feed their families, but also for the families and recipients of care as well. Knowing that the majority of care

workers are composed of women and often migrant women, the COVID-19 crisis has shown that migrant care workers have been subject to unfortunate treatment, one may even say “harassment”, when it comes to the neglect of pragmatic and fair solutions, such as the establishment of care worker corridors along the borders. In this context, it would have been plausible to install professional registers, which could have listed migrant care workers as occupational commuters, who could have been allowed to cross borders, regardless of the distance between the border and workers’ professional jobsites. Given the fact, that care workers are generally understood to be “relevant for the social system” or “system-relevant”, such a solution would have been more than adequate for solving the omnipresent fear of a collapsing care system and would have given clarity to everyone involved in the matter.

In addition, the COVID-19 crisis clearly demonstrates how fragile and unsustainable Europe's current home care migration model is. The current situation has exposed problems that have been lying dormant, hovering underneath the surface for years, making clear the necessity of implementing long-term solutions and emergency plans. In Europe today, with an ageing population and a system reliant on mobile care workers, this is expected to worsen. In places, where immigration is being curtailed, we can expect that there will be too few migrants in sectors crucial to recovery, such as health and social care. The question remains as to how the system of migrant care work can be reshaped in the light of these structural shortcomings. European policy makers should act now to provide for more assurance and guarantee a fair treatment to mobile care workers and their care families in these exceptional situations. It would be important to ensure fair wages, ensuring that 24-hour care is divided among workers, so no one person is working beyond the number of hours legally possible and that home care workers are paid dignified wages in accordance with local standards. This would imply that the majority of the money paid by the families is not going to the employment placement agencies. Moreover, ensuring the same conditions for every care worker in Europe would be desirable, as this could help in achieving upward social convergence and in reducing the number of people leaving their children behind to be cared for by grandparents/relatives.

It should also be mandatory, that home care work be accompanied and better connected to professional nursing services. Care workers should be legally recognised as "essential workers" similar to health professionals, especially during health emergencies such as COVID-19. Their financial compensation should acknowledge this recognition. According to the EC, personal care workers (10.3%) compose one of five of the largest categories of key workers in the EU and personal care work depicts one of six categories of key occupations.

The EU Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas Schmit recently said, that the COVID-19 experience has shown that the social value of professions has to be re-assessed as in most EU Member States, health workers have been underpaid and undervalued for too long compared to their social impact. “This has to be revised. We have to look again at what the social value of professions is and not just having a hierarchy on wages that sometimes does not correspond to the social value,” Schmit said. With this, should come stronger protection measures of migrant care providers, including full employment protection and access to unemployment insurance benefits. Improved working conditions and labour rights must be respected. It is vital to implement with no further delay the European Pillar of Social Rights, paying due attention to principle 16 and 18 to ensure health for all, and access to quality, safe and affordable long-term care.

Interestingly, the European Commission is now hoping for a treaty change so that it has more say on health, which will be debated during the Conference on the Future of Europe when the EU's priorities over the next two years are spelled out.

We thus recommend that home care workers obtain an "official" permanent status in the nursing sector with a recognised job title, such as "nursing assistants living in the household" and that this be reflected in all future relevant nursing agenda concerns. Receiving countries should also recognise the negative impacts of care drain and look for more sustainable solutions, such as investing in education or institutional care in sending countries and striving toward social convergence. Some standardisation of care work would likewise be beneficial - qualification requirements, e.g. diplomas recognised in all EU countries.

In addition, examples provided in Portugal and in Italy to grant amnesties for undocumented migrants could be pursued, as they combined concerns about labour shortages in the personal care and agricultural sectors with the willingness to provide these workers with some form of social and health protection. Sweden also announced a 12-month extension to several labour market integration programmes allowing migrants whose subsidies would expire in the near future to remain employed.

Considering the migratory component of ensuring care work in Europe, it is also vital to provide European solutions, not just national ones. As Schmit reminds, “Europe’s south in this crisis means actually helping the EU as a whole, considering that northern European countries export to the south, and they are all part of the EU single market”. Hence, governments, civil society actors, and others need to step back and think about what we really want, similar to the request of Pope Francis. It is certain there is a clear need to invest in the social care sector and to adjust a salary-based scheme to account for this. Perhaps, EU structural fund could be created for the care sector? One thing is certain, namely, the necessity for governments to ensure that post-COVID systems support a wider economic strategy that is fairer and more humane.

**CARITAS practice:** *In Germany, around 150,000 to 300,000 women and men from Central and Eastern Europe work in private households to support people in need of care. Many of them have irregular or exploitative jobs. With CariFair, the Caritas Association for the Archdiocese of Paderborn and Caritas Poland have developed an offer that enables women and men from Central and Eastern Europe looking for work to be legally employed under fair conditions and at the same time offers people in need of care and their relatives support and relief. CariFair supports men and women in the search for a suitable job in the household of a person in need of care and help with the necessary formalities. Health and pension insurance in Germany and as well as regular working hours and paid vacation are ensured.*  
<https://carifair.de/>

#### **O. Housing and assistance for the homeless (Principle 19 of the EPSR)**

In the last decade, housing – intimately linked to the banking crisis – has entered into the headlines with reports on forced evictions, indebtedness of families, overcrowded substandard housing and homelessness. It is estimated that there are 410,000 homeless people living on the street in Europe; and millions of people, thousands of families living in inadequate and insecure housing, with an overrepresentation of Roma people. For years, EU member states (Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, France, Ireland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the UK) have struggled to deliver effective results in the implementation of local measures to support their National Roma Integration Strategies in four key areas: access to education, employment, healthcare, and housing. In consequence, governments have regularly been reminded of the need to improve the living conditions of the many impoverished and marginalised Roma in Europe.

Vast evidence exists on this topic, alluding to the multitude of different challenges, both for the local communities and especially the Roma people themselves. [Research conducted by Caritas Europa in 2016](#) identified the Roma people as one of the five population groups in Europe most impoverished. [Further research in 2019](#) confirmed that five countries (Czechia, Greece, France, Slovakia, and Slovenia) identified the Roma people to be facing particular hurdles in accessing public services in the areas of employment, housing, and early childhood. Beyond these research findings, the [Fundamental Rights Agency further confirmed in its 2018 research](#) that anti-Gypsyism remains a persistent barrier to Roma inclusion and that “living in marginalised conditions and poverty affects young Roma’s employment opportunities in multiple ways”. In many cases, this has been attributed to a lack of commitment and political will on the part of national and/or local policy makers and/or to the misallocation of EU funding toward this priority. And this was the reality under normal circumstances, without the spread of the deadly corona virus.

But now, the Roma and Traveller community has been enormously affected by the economic and social fall-out provoked by Covid-19. Governments must take heed of the disastrous situation facing the Roma communities across Europe today, particularly in eastern and south-eastern Europe. Even the [Council of Europe issued a press statement on 7 April](#) reminding of the need for governments to ensure equal protection and care for Roma and Travellers during the Covid-19 crisis. This year on international Roma day, the call for protection should resonate louder than ever, since Roma people living in substandard housing and in segregated settlements across Europe are among the groups most vulnerable to the current Covid-19 pandemic.

In this current context, many Roma have lost their sources of daily income and face reduced access to social benefits, which have often been made more difficult by quarantine measures.

Their livelihoods traditionally depend on daily or occasional work in the informal sector, for instance, collecting and selling scrap materials, small trade, digging in landfills, as well as searching for food in garbage containers, or even begging. Whatever the source, this usual income is currently blocked at the moment due to social distancing measures

Meanwhile, social measures applied by some governments are focusing only on people losing formalised, regular jobs. But since the Roma people have mainly been active in the informal sector, they are completely excluded from these emerging corona-response related social protection measures. Without an income or social support, thousands are left without the means by which to purchase food. Despite this, public opinion in some countries is not in favour of spending money on food distributions to the Roma people.

Now in the fight against the coronavirus, the situation for the Roma people throughout Europe has become even worse and quite dire. Racism and scapegoating are rampant, made worse since many Roma people have returned to Eastern Europe from Western Europe, where they have lost their jobs due to corona virus-related lock downs. There is a further tendency in some places to erroneously blame them for having brought the virus home with them.

Recently Caritas Romania carried out phone interviews with more than 100 Roma families. Those contacted expressed deep worry about the best way to protect themselves and their children. 95% of the families interviewed consider Covid-19 to be “very dangerous” and 92% agreed that they have to take drastic measures within their own families in order to protect themselves. The implication being that some feel abandoned by their government. Amongst the Roma, there is a huge fear of Covid-19 infiltrating into their communities. This fear is further compounded by concerns whether the government authorities would react by protecting them or more likely just isolating entire Roma communities. In a positive move, the Slovakian government has meanwhile requested from local authorities that Roma settlements at least be provided with unlimited access to water.

Roma rights organisations and NGOs appeal to EU and national governments to recognise that investment in preventative measures and support to the most vulnerable communities, among which is the Roma, is urgently needed.

With respect to EU values and commitments to the National Roma Strategies, EU and Member State governments as well as local and regional authorities desperately need to implement essential measures to ensure that Roma are able to access running water and basic sanitation. Caritas Europa thus urges political and humanitarian action and measures to support Roma communities during and after this Covid-19 emergency.

Likewise, the migration reality calls into question daily the objective of a “common home” for all peoples. Migrant communities face difficult challenges related to access to any housing, even more so when looking for adequate and decent housing. There are many elements that contribute to this: absence of affordable social housing, lack of access to rent allowance, administrative procedures, low salaries, and social discrimination and prejudices. Much more in the case of refugees.

We believe that in order to make possible the cross-cutting, shared and interrelated enjoyment of Human Rights together with the access to adequate housing and a clean, sustainable and affordable environment (Habitat), the following is needed:

**Space:** housing and environment.

**Integrity of the person:**

- Sense of belonging: the human being as unique in itself and in its integral development.
- Environmental relationships: the human being plus others (family, neighbourhood, population, society...)
- Human rights: non-discrimination, access to, support and guarantee of everyone, on a whole and at the same level: employment, education, participation, health, social protection, housing, etc.

This is necessary, especially in a world where economic and market rules prevail and where, in most societies, housing is considered a good investment. Thus, it is necessary for governments to confront, for example, such terrible paradoxes in countries where there are millions of empty housing units but thousands of people and families lose their homes because they cannot pay for them (like in Spain). It is necessary to guarantee the right to adequate, sustainable, clean and accessible housing and environment for people in situations of vulnerability and/or exclusion, which is grounded in integral and participatory action.

Access to affordable quality housing forms an essential part of social protection systems as a solidarity mechanism ensuring the well-being of society as a whole. A number of policies can facilitate access for young people with low income to affordable quality housing. Amongst these are social housing, rent subsidies, rental guarantees, minimum income schemes, tax deductions, rent price control, together with broader policies of spatial planning for urban social cohesion. The competencies for these go right through the multi-level governance of Europe from the municipal councils up to the European institutions.



The principle 19 will need to be translated into State, regional and municipal policies. The European Semester Process might be a useful tool for monitoring its implementation, particularly if the dynamic initiative, spearheaded by the EPSR, is shifting attention from economic and monetary performance towards social goals. Housing as a human right and fundamental condition for human dignity is also protected by article 31 of the Revised European Social Charter, that foresees to make housing accessible to those who are in need and to tackle homelessness. Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global framework for measuring social and environmental standards. Housing comes up strongly. It is explicitly formulated in Target 11.3 of 'Sustainable Cities' Goal: "by 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing (...)", as well as it is implicitly included in the goals of poverty reduction (1) and reducing inequalities (10).

Evictions without alternatives should be forbidden, in order to prevent people from ending up on the street, homeless.

**CARITAS practice:** *The Caritas Spain "NO ONE WITHOUT A HOME" Campaign celebrates, since 27 years, the Day of the Homeless. Within this framework, different awareness and complaint actions are carried out, with various work materials, dissemination activities, press conferences, and the reading of a common manifesto. The main objective of the campaign is to raise awareness in society about the situation of homeless people, claiming attention as a community responsible for rebuilding and weaving a sustainable and inclusive social model for the entire population. That the society approaches and knows the reality of serious residential exclusion, and the faces of those who suffer the most, finally helping them to live better, to recover and value their dignity, and to access and exercise their rights. It is the only State Campaign in which, in addition to Caritas, the main territorial platforms of entities that work with homeless people participate: BesteBi in Bilbao, FACIAM and the XAPSL in Barcelona.*

**CARITAS practice:** *The lack of affordable housing in Cyprus excludes people from the housing market. The situation is worst for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Left to find housing on their own with inadequate resources and little information, these marginalised groups often live in substandard and overcrowded conditions and face exploitation, abuse and homelessness. Caritas Cyprus manages a Refuge for Migrant Women and Women with Children in an effort to assist some of the most vulnerable to find their footing and transition from the trauma of displacement to independent living. The Refuge accepts referrals from the government with priority given to possible victims of human trafficking or contemporary forms of slavery, including those who cannot enter or stay in the government shelter because they have children. Residents of the Refuge receive wraparound care and support to ensure their wellbeing and to secure access to the public services for which they qualify. They are also provided with training in Greek and English and in ICT, CV-writing and interview skills in an effort to boost their employability. The objective is to prepare these women to move to independent living as soon as circumstances allow, but the single largest obstacle remains the unavailability of adequate, safe and affordable housing.*

## Conclusion

Caritas Europa acknowledges that there is a lot of work still to do in order to implement all principles of the EPSR. The following initiatives should be taken as priority:

1. The EC should create guidelines for the EPSR implementation and/or a compilation of best practice examples where especially regional or local legislative bodies have – within their power – implemented the EPSR through legislative acts;
2. The EC should develop an EU anti-poverty strategy 2021-2030;
3. The EC should propose an EU legal framework for adequate national minimum income schemes;
4. The EC should propose a framework to implement the Child Guarantee.
5. The EC should design the new Action Plan on integration and inclusion as tool to contribute to implementing the principles of the EPSR
6. The EC should recognise the contribution of social economy enterprises to the implementation of the principles of the EPSR, and design the Social Economy Action Plan from this perspective.

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