

## **Two Years after the Porto Social Summit: bringing the Pillar of Social Rights to life**

### Op-Ed

Europe is about people.

It is about workers, businesses and civil society. It is about ensuring a level playing field for people and all companies. It is about creating quality jobs that enable everyone to fulfil their right potential and assuring a decent living for all. It is about fostering opportunities for the younger generations and access to quality services of general interest, including life and long-term care for older persons. It is about equality between women and men as well as rights and equal opportunities for all.

It is about building an economy that is ever more sustainable, ever more competitive, and ever more inclusive, and where social dialogue and collective bargaining play an active role in those positive transformations.

It is about ensuring the participation and inclusion of all people, including those with disabilities, the homeless or the vulnerable. A society where no one is left behind regardless of their gender, social status, age, health, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or origin.

Two years ago, the Portuguese Presidency of the Council, the European Commission, the European Parliament, the social partners, and civil society pledged to consolidate the commitment already made under the European Pillar of Social Rights in Gothenburg and to pave the way for an inclusive, sustainable, fair and job-rich recovery, while acknowledging that its implementation should be carried out at both Union and Member State levels, and within their respective competences.

The Porto Social Commitment and the Porto Declaration pursued the European agenda, as we renewed the European social contract, committing to further develop innovative and inclusive responses to face present and future challenges.

In early 2022, at a time when the implementation of national Recovery and Resilience Plans was beginning to promote the economic and social recovery after the pandemic shock, Russia's invasion of Ukraine brought war to Europe once again.

We are still far from being able to evaluate the full effects of Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, particularly on the most vulnerable people in our societies. However, this cruel and illegal act has strengthened the bonds of solidarity between Europeans and compelled us to find answers to the strategic debate around Europe's influence in the world. It is time to debate how central the European social model and our common social policies are in a wider and stronger Europe.

Today, the European Union is also undergoing major structural challenges with the green and digital transitions, demographic change, a constantly changing world of work and persisting inequalities and poverty, accompanied by a worrying erosion of the middle class. These structural challenges affect not only the countries of the Union, but also those whose efforts and ambitions are aimed at joining this project.

In this context, the Porto Social Forum held today, a biennial initiative promoted by the Portuguese government with support from the European Commission, in close cooperation with the European Parliament, and involving the social partners and civil society, marked the second anniversary of the Porto Social Summit, creating an opportunity to strengthen the debate on the importance of the social dimension of the European project.

It did so by acknowledging our social model as an advantage at the global level and by highlighting – in the framework of the European Year of Skills – how robust policies on skills, education and training can create better employment and swifter integration in the labour market and foster social inclusion, and consequently boost the resilience and competitiveness of the EU's economy and society. It further reflected on how to use the most suitable tools, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity and limiting the administrative burden on small and medium-sized companies.

At the same time, it highlighted the importance of an integrated anti-poverty strategy against the multidimensional issue of social exclusion and of access to essential services for all people, especially children. The effective implementation of the European Child Guarantee is a vital component to ensure the success of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Education and training are not lost expenditure, but a smart investment in human development. Europe must expand its leadership in the frontiers of

knowledge, and the development of new technologies. At the same time, the best technology is only as good as the skilled workers who can install and operate it.

Individuals must be empowered to embark on lifelong learning, and SMEs and larger corporations must have the talent they need to thrive.

Therefore, it is clear that the EU's economic prosperity goes hand in hand with its strong social dimension. We must give greater visibility to social rights and reinforce the assessment of social standards and upward social convergence as part of a sustainable socio-economic governance anchored in tripartism, at a time when our Union is facing a pivotal moment.

Two years after Porto, we renew our respective commitments in the Porto Social Commitment and the Porto Declaration, and our will to maintain the spirit that created it.

Together, we will keep bringing the principles of the Pillar of Social Rights to full realisation.

The future of the EU is its people and must be social.

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