

A diverse group of people, including an older man, a young girl, a young boy, a man, a woman, and an older woman, are playing soccer in a park. The man is crouching down, ready to kick the ball. The boy is running towards the ball. The woman is standing behind him, and the older man is standing to the left. The young girl is standing on the far left. The older woman is standing on the right. They are all smiling and enjoying the game. The background shows a park with trees and a building in the distance.

PES

SOCIALISTS &
DEMOCRATS

Changing the Focus:

for a Society of Wellbeing

FOREWORDS

Sergei Stanishev

PES President

"We – Socialists and Democrats – must guarantee citizens' wellbeing and ensure social and ecological progress, leaving no person and no territory behind in the green and digital transitions."

When we took this pledge in our PES Manifesto for the 2019 European Elections, we had still the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis in mind. For many years, Europe's policy-making had been guided primarily by economic and financial concerns, and GDP has been used as the main indicator for both economic and general welfare. This failed to reflect the long-lasting consequences of the crisis, may it be rising inequalities, high youth unemployment, more precarious contracts, damages to the environment or diminished trust in public institutions to name a few.

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit us at the beginning of the year 2020, it further stressed major gaps in how our societies are organised, in how they care and provide for both their vulnerable and ordinary citizens. It confirmed both the need and expectation for public policy to look beyond aggregate economic performance towards capturing the quality of life across social, economic and environmental dimensions.

As Socialists and Democrats, we want to focus on the primary thing that matters for citizens, their quality of life. People's lives are determined by a myriad of issues that are not fully captured in an output indicator such as the GDP. Take health, education, social protection, clean air and access to green spaces, culture, arts, democratic participation, for example. This is where wellbeing comes into play, bringing together social and ecological progress, as



put forward in the European pillar of Social Rights and in the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

We want to offer people a clear pathway to a sustainable and just future. In our vision of a society of wellbeing, every individual has the right and the enabling conditions to develop their highest potential, feel empowered and connected to public action. The welfare state is there to help all citizens in hard times and to accompany them in realising their projects too. It brings all Europeans together around a common project of a more equal, inclusive and sustainable society. This is our ambition, let's work towards it together!

Agnes Jongerius

Chair of PES Social Europe Network

Social progress and social justice are core aims of our political family and they are as timely as ever. Current generations for the first time in recent history have worse prospects than their parents, and both poverty and inequality are on the rise again. Covid-19 has too often shown how years of austerity policies have left our health systems ill-equipped to face the pandemic. This questions the fundamentals of the welfare state we built and contradicts the EU's promise of shared prosperity.

The urgency of protecting our environment has steadily increased in public perception. Europe's youth has mobilised in the Fridays For Future, making it clear that there is an appetite for our societies to become more sustainable. At the same time, phenomena of the Gilets Jaunes remind everyone that the costs and benefits of this transition must be fairly shared to get support across the whole population.

These challenges are complex. As for globalisation, demographic change or the digital transitions, there is no simple policy answer to them. Yet they impact our lives and must be addressed. Because of the scale of the measures they require, meeting these challenges calls for a collective endeavour and a real societal project.



This is why, at PES, we want to work towards a society of wellbeing, where every individual can have a good quality of life in the present and in the future. We are convinced that this can be the red thread, be it for social, environmental or economic policy, that must guide our action. We are convinced that it can reconcile economic policies with social progress, environmental sustainability with the reduction of inequalities, better lives today with more intergenerational justice. We are convinced that it can trigger the adhesion of all Europeans towards a better future.

Yonnec Polet

PES Deputy Secretary General

As Socialists and Democrats, our goal is to put forward policies that improve the life of every individual. This is why we are loud advocates of strong welfare states, strong public services and collective answers to the challenges of our societies. The EU is currently facing many challenges that require complex solutions and the Covid-19 pandemic further emphasized that we cannot continue with “business as usual”. It is time to rethink how our societies are organized and our policies designed.

While the economy is important, we firmly stand by the fact that the economy must work for the people and not the other way around. Instead of focusing on financial tools only, EU policies must also answer citizen’s social, environmental and democratic aspirations. People and the environment should be placed at the centre of policy-making. And luckily, securing and prioritising wellbeing for every citizen in Europe is already an objective that is enshrined in the EU ethos.

With this in mind, we started a discussion in January 2020 in the PES Social Europe Network to identify new ways of securing longterm inclusive sustainability of our societies. We were convinced of the need for new policies and for a new model for policymaking, one that would take the wellbeing of each individual as a starting and end point. Just a month after we launched our discussion, the Covid-19 pandemic hit Europe and further reinforced our convictions. We continued our discussions until the end of 2020, allowing for the crisis period to shape our debates and reflect the evolving realities on the ground. Over five meetings of the Social Europe Network and many written exchanges, our member parties, member organisations, NGOs and trade unions contributed to this publication



with their ideas and experience.

Their findings are clear: inequalities, climate change, gender equality, globalisation, demographic changes, digitalisation and now the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be answered by individuals only, they require our societies to collectively change and adapt, to evolve one way or another. In the face of these challenges, we propose a new model for society, a collective ambition that all citizens can subscribe to. This publication is our contribution to defining how we can achieve this, by placing the wellbeing of our citizens where it belongs, as the main objective of public policy.



PES PRESIDENCY DECLARATION

Towards a society of wellbeing - Our proposal for a post-Covid-19 agenda.

All across Europe, our societies face multiple, complex and often global challenges: climate and demographic change, the digital transition and growing inequalities are just some of the many processes that are impacting our lives. Confronted with these challenges, we, Socialists and Democrats, are convinced that the EU must develop new narrative and new policies for a sustainable and fair growth and social progress in Europe, one that puts sustainability and people at the centre of its policies. This is a process that our political family has already started, and that must continue.

When it hit us at the beginning of last year, the Covid-19 pandemic cruelly revealed major gaps in how some of our societies are organised, in how they care and provide for both their vulnerable and ordinary citizens, and how conservative forces are exploiting a global crisis to backtrack on gender equality and fundamental rights. It showed the importance of strong safety nets and well-functioning public health systems, which have been undermined by too many years of austerity policies in some Member States. It called on strong state intervention to overcome the weaknesses of privatised economic systems. The pandemic also raised important questions on the essence of our society, its sustainability, the place it leaves to solidarity and the objectives it seeks. Our political family acted swiftly to tackle the different effect of the crisis, with regard to the public health dimension, but also to its economic and social consequences. We commend our governments and leaders at all levels for the crucial role they played. The crisis is far from over and we have to deal with its consequences. Nevertheless, the world after

the Covid-19 crisis will not be the same and should not be the same. With the Recovery and Resilience Facility shortly unfolding, Member States will receive unprecedented support from the EU on their way out of the crisis. We must use it to lay the groundwork now to shape a better future, responding to the new challenges and realities. This must be reflected in the Covid-19 national recovery plans. We cannot simply get back to business as usual. It is therefore time for the Union to reconnect with its aims of promoting peace, its values and the wellbeing of its people, as stated in Article 3 of the Treaty of the European Union. In simple terms, it is urgent for the EU and Member States to introduce policies and initiatives that increase people's wellbeing and that make quality life possible for all in Europe. In June 2020, PES put forward our proposals for a health union, to make sure public health systems across Europe are ready to cope with the unforeseen, now and in the future. We also put forward a fully-fledged plan to help workers and companies recover from the crisis, and start working for all. And now we put forward a vision for our collective future, a vision for a society rather than that of merely a market. **This is our proposal for a post-Covid-19 agenda.** In this period of crisis, it is time to question some old dogmas and to be innovative. Social and sustainable progress must be the top priority of the recovery. The wellbeing of all, as the ultimate objective of our society, will help us address individual needs and rights and inscribe them into a broader, collective endeavour. It will help us provide immediate answers to current challenges and take steps towards long-term societal progress. In this perspective, GDP

cannot remain the only metric for progress. Public policies are all too often driven mechanically by economic and financial considerations without much regard to how they impact citizens' lives. We must go beyond this narrow way of thinking that considers the means as ends. We will instead look at what matters the most to people: their quality of life, their health and that of their relatives, gender equality and non-discrimination, the environment, good material conditions, and a good job, security and safety in private and public spheres, quality housing, being part of a broader community, solidarity, happiness... These elements are all constitutive of citizens' wellbeing, and they must be available to all citizens today and in the future. There is no magic trick to get there. As Socialists, we have always been advocates of strong welfare states that provide strong public services; of collective answers to the challenges our societies face. Inequalities, climate change, globalisation, demographic changes, territorial cohesion and rural depopulation, digitalisation and now the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be answered by individuals only, they require our societies to collectively change and adapt and be innovative. In our view, it is the *raison d'être* of public policies (may they be social, environmental, of security, economic or financial...) to work for the wellbeing of all.

At the European level, we do not start from a blank page either. **The European Pillar of Social Rights, the Green new Deal, the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the EU Gender Equality Strategy, are our tools already available to nurture wellbeing for all citizens.** After too many years of EU policies focused on fiscal and macroeconomic considerations, we stand ready to reform the European Semester and refocus the debate towards making life better for all. In its discussion paper *Changing the Focus: for a Society of*

Wellbeing, the PES Social Europe Network has illustrated some of the steps to be taken towards a society of wellbeing:

- We want good working conditions and work-life balance for work to serve a good life, and not the other way around.
- We want strong public education and a flourishing culture sector to work towards the emancipation and active citizenship of all women and men.
- We want a healthy environment and new business models that look beyond profit, in the interest of all and for the sustainability of our societies.
- Beyond safety nets, we want strong welfare and health systems to support people throughout their life, because we choose solidarity.
- We want a feminist Europe and a feminist economy that puts gender equality at its centre and creates the conditions for men and women, in all their diversity, to live and work on equal terms.
- We want a proactive redistribution of wealth instead of mere trickle-down policies, because equality is central.
- We want states governed by the rule of law, that closely involve citizens in decisions and guarantee justice, equality and security to all.

The wellbeing of each citizen and social cohesion must become the new indicators for the success of policies. This is the path we want to take to reconnect citizens with public action and build back confidence in institutions and the democratic debate. Placing wellbeing at the heart of our political project, we want to renew the EU's promises of social progress and shared prosperity. We will ensure that all generations are left with positive prospects and trust in the future, both as individuals and as members of a broader community.

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INTRO: WELLBEING MUST BE A CORE OBJECTIVE OF THE EU

“Upholding and advancing the rights of human beings in a society entirely organised around common good is the very essence of socialism.”¹ - Léon Blum

As Socialists we have always been advocates of strong welfare states that provide strong public services and of collective answers to the challenges our societies face. At a time when aspirations are often perceived as more and more individual, when collective structures, such as political parties and trade unions, seem less attractive, collective challenges have not disappeared. Inequalities, climate change, globalisation, demographic changes, digitalisation and now the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be answered by individuals only, they require our societies to collectively change and adapt, to evolve one way or another. In the face of these challenges, we must propose a new model for society, a collective ambition that all citizens can subscribe to.

One way to address these major issues and reconcile collective and individual expectations is, in simple terms, to introduce policies that increase people's wellbeing, that make a quality life possible for all in Europe. If we started working on wellbeing before Covid-19 broke in, wellbeing is all the more relevant in the current context: wellbeing should be our main proposal and main objective when rethinking and rebuilding our society in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Wellbeing is a broad concept.² Often it is measured by only asking people how happy they are. One's

satisfaction with their life depends on their quality of life, which subsumes elements such as the level of physical and mental health, safety, family life, education, employment, affordable housing and freedom. Wellbeing is also determined in relation to other people and their surroundings, for instance by the quality of their relationships with other people, quality and safety of their environment, social cohesion and pro-social behaviors. One's wellbeing cannot be detached from the wellbeing of the society as a whole, which means social progress, human development and sustainability all dictate wellbeing.

Wellbeing is key to a collective vision of a society where all citizens are respected, valued, encouraged and supported in their emancipation and in fulfilling their potential and aspirations. For the benefit of the whole society, wellbeing fosters equal opportunities for everyone, welcomes new members and combats discrimination and marginalization based on gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, age or any other ground.

Traditionally, wellbeing has been seen as a part of the individual sphere, a personal responsibility for which society and the state have no role to play, and no word to say. However, we need to reverse this, so that wellbeing is no longer a sidenote, or a happy byproduct of policies, but indeed becomes their central target.



Focussing on wellbeing, we can thus lay the foundations for better and fairer societies tomorrow, enabling equally each person to thrive and have a happy life, allowing and empowering them to choose what a happy life means for them.

At the beginning of 2020, Covid-19 caused a crisis which forced governments around the world to take extraordinary measures, deemed unthinkable just a few weeks earlier. Next to the emergency of saving lives and halting the spread of the pandemic, it is already clear that this crisis will have deep and lasting consequences.

After a decade of policies focussing on austere economic and fiscal policies, our economies had only just begun to turn the corner from the financial crisis when Covid-19 put our production systems and services partly on hold. Social indicators were still lagging behind, with inequalities, poverty and unemployment still at unacceptable heights in many Member States. Before being put to additional strain from the pandemic, our welfare systems were still struggling with the legacy of years of blind austerity.

Each crisis further stresses the shortcomings of our economic models, and the need for increased solidarity inside our societies, between our Member States, and across all levels of government. We must not

repeat the mistakes of the past. Social and economic inequalities are already a huge burden for Europe. Insufficient reaction to this crisis will exacerbate them even more, shaking not only societies but also the foundation of Europe and its credibility.

Now is the moment to put forward the measures that will mitigate the upcoming crisis and the vision that will prepare our societies for the future. We must prepare to take bold steps and rethink how our societies are organised in a world changed by globalisation, digitisation and climate change. We stand at a pivotal moment, our societies are about to change, we must make sure they change for the better.

We are convinced that improving the wellbeing of every European should be a crosscutting priority for the EU and Member States. It should be reflected in the priorities and policies of the EU and at all levels of governance in each of its Member states. The EU's action cannot be guided by macroeconomic indicators alone, the Treaty aim of wellbeing must be put at the forefront of the EU's ambitions for the years to come.³

More than ever we are committed to “guarantee citizens’ wellbeing and ensure so-cial and ecological progress, leaving no person and no territory behind in the green and digital transitions.”⁴

1 TOWARDS AN EU APPROACH TO WELLBEING?

Article 3 of the Treaty of the European Union clearly states that “the Union’s aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples”.

The main purpose of European integration is not only to boost economic growth, but also to ensure the well-being of people. Through its policies, the EU should strive to ensure positive impacts on public health, environment, social protection, employment, gender equality and education. The European Pillar of Social Rights and the UN Sustainable Development Goals are our tools already available to address current challenges and move closer towards ensuring wellbeing for all citizens.





1.1 EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS AND THE SDGS

Thanks to the efforts of our political family, and in particular of Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven, the European Union has, in 2017, proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights in Göteborg. The Pillar outlines 20 principles for fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems in 21st century Europe, complementing already existing European and international human rights standards. These 20 principles are distributed under three headings, covering equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion.

Since 2015, the EU has also subscribed to the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals for peace and prosperity for people and the planet. While 65% of the SDGs can only be delivered at local level, some of the SDGs relate to or coincide with the social rights and principles contained in the Pillar.⁵ Interpreting the Pillar as addressing only social issues, and the SDGs as concerning mostly sustainability and environmental issues, would therefore be wrong as these issues are strongly interconnected. It is thus crucial that the Pillar principles and the SDGs are implemented in synergy. The objective of citizens' wellbeing allows to bring together both the principles of the Pillar and the goals of the UN SDGs. It is therefore a useful policy frame to combine sustainability, environmental and social objectives.



1.2 A STEP FURTHER: THE ECONOMY OF WELLBEING



Sanna Marin, Prime Minister of Finland

Beyond its Treaty acknowledgement as an aim of the Union, the concept of wellbeing was further developed in the Council Conclusions on the “economy of wellbeing” in Europe⁶, put forward by our Member Party SDP during the Finnish Presidency (second half of 2019). According to the Conclusions, wellbeing and economic growth form a “virtuous circle”, in which increasing people’s wellbeing (in terms of education, health, equality, social protection etc.) creates economic prosperity, stability and resilience, which in turn helps sustain long-term investments into wellbeing.⁷

People’s wellbeing is thus seen as both an intrinsic good and an instrumental factor in macroeconomic growth and progress,⁸ which can contribute to greater and more sustainable productivity, employability, efficiency and savings,⁹ and increase trust and civic engagement. The Conclusions suggest that a more horizontal and crosssectoral policy approach is needed

to achieve long-term, sustainable and inclusive growth.¹⁰

In a similar endeavour, the Croatian Presidency in 2020 put forward Council Conclusions on Enhancing wellbeing at work, which acknowledge that “enhancing wellbeing at work can have positive effects on productivity and engagement at work and on health, and can result in a better worklife balance for men and women.”¹¹

The debate on wellbeing initiated within the Council already points to a new model, where benefits are not only linked to economic growth. To the contrary using wellbeing as an aim allows to factor in a different set of social outputs as well as sustainability criteria. This debate has opened a window for us to advance our vision for another kind of growth and development that contribute to social and environmental sustainability.

2

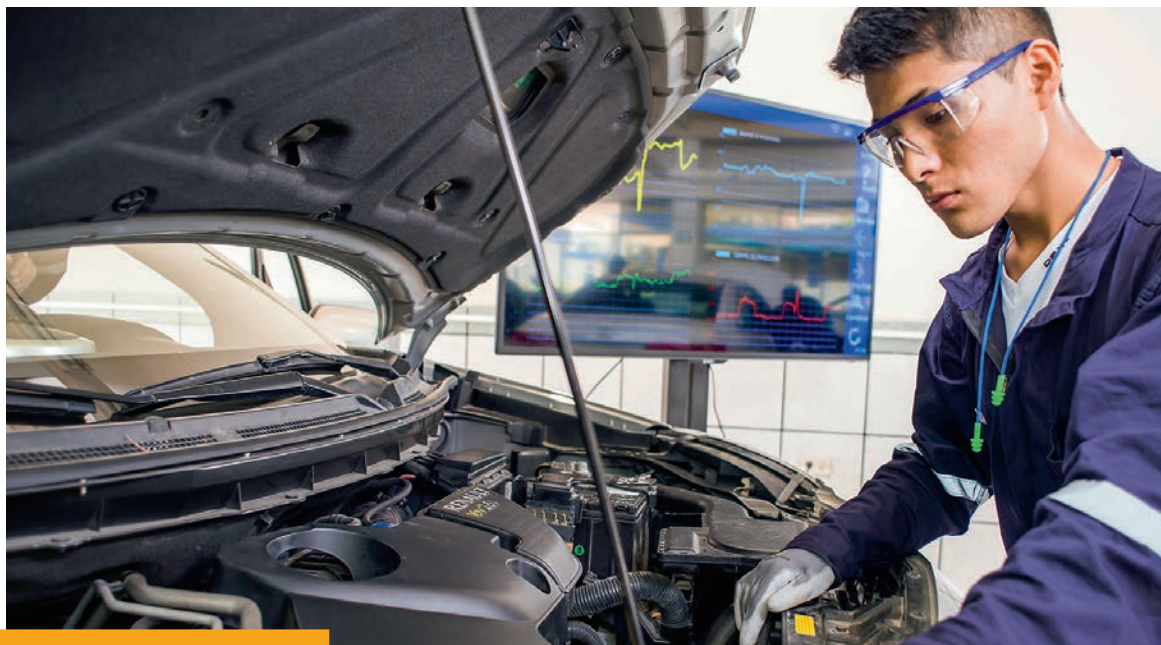
PES AND WELLBEING: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

We consider Europe to be much more than just a single market and a monetary zone. In accordance with the Treaties¹², economic growth and social progress lie at the heart of European integration. Both are acknowledged as objectives of the internal market. Yet, the former has certainly taken precedence over the latter in the past decade of EU policies.

After years of austerity, it is time for the EU to develop a new narrative for growth and social progress in Europe, one that puts sustainability and people at the centre of its policies. The EU has for too long focused

on the development and monitoring of the tools available to a society to reach wellbeing (economic tools, public finances, single market) rather than on the actual wellbeing of its citizens (social and environmental dimension, civic participation, to name a few).

In our vision of the future of Europe, the economy must always serve the people and not vice versa. To ensure full compliance with the EU treaties, the objective of citizens' wellbeing should therefore become the guiding principle for the European Union environmental, social and economic policies.



2.1 DEFINING WELLBEING

For many years GDP has been used as the leading indicator to measure economic performance and welfare. However, as highlighted in the “beyond GDP debate” societal progress cannot be based only on the pursuit of economic growth.¹³ Growth is only of value if it makes people’s lives better – it is not an end in itself. Since GDP alone does not offer an adequate picture of a society’s development and progress, there is a need to move away from a socio economic governance focusing on GDP and traditional economic metrics to a broader perspective that focuses on all dimensions that shape people’s lives and determine their wellbeing. This requires a stronger and more regular monitoring of environmental and social indicators, and their increase use in shaping public policies.

There are many models aiming to measure and conceptualize wellbeing. For instance, the wellknown OECD Better Life Initiative is based on a framework that conceives wellbeing in terms of 15 dimensions, distinguishing between wellbeing outcomes that matter today and outcomes that drive future wellbeing.¹⁴ It focuses on outcomes in: material living conditions (income and wealth, jobs and earnings, housing conditions) and quality of life (health status, worklife balance, education and skills, social connections, civic engagement and governance, environmental quality, personal security and subjective wellbeing). In addition, the development of future wellbeing is taken into account by looking at some of the most important resources that determine wellbeing over time, measuring them through indicators of different types of “capital.”



Source: OECD, 2013

Beyond their acknowledgement of citizens’ wellbeing as an objective of the Union, the treaties say little on wellbeing, and this gap should be filled. In its 2009 Communication GDP and beyond, measuring progress in a changing world¹⁵, the European Commission pointed at income, public services, health, leisure, wealth mobility and a clean environment as means to achieve and sustain quality of life and wellbeing. More recently, in 2019, both the Council of the EU and the OECD have also outlined the opportunities available to people for upward social mobility and for improving their lives, the reduction of inequalities and environmental and social sustainability as key determinants of wellbeing.¹⁶

Within our understanding of society as providing a global frame of democracy, Rule of Law, freedom of speech, personal security and secularism, our vision of wellbeing takes the wellbeing of an individual as a starting point. A true concept of wellbeing must acknowledge that each member of a particular society will need different things to feel and live well, while at the same time having a collective responsibility to do good for others and to not pursue one's own wellbeing at the cost of someone else's. Everyone deserves to have their rights respected. The rights of those who are at risk of discrimination, be it women, ethnic minorities, LGBTI people or any other group, must be protected at all times and in all places. The core of this concept of wellbeing is to ensure that every person has the possibility to be happy and content and have the freedom to choose what kind of life to pursue. It relates primarily to having the opportunity to do things that have an intrinsic value, such as being able to express yourself freely and creatively, participating in a society on an equal level with others and having a job that brings you satisfaction rather than merely an income. But this is not sufficient.

Wellbeing on a personal level cannot be detached from the society one lives in. The quality of life in terms of having an adequate and secure income, decent working conditions or access to quality strong public services directly impacts one's happiness. Relationships between people and groups are equally important. Trust, reciprocity and social cohesion is what keeps our societies prospering continuously. As one's assessment of their personal situation is likely to be in comparison with peers, or with the perceived level of wealth in a society, furthering wellbeing also implies a reduction of inequality. In a society where the prospects of one generation are decreasing compared to the previous one, trust in the future, may it be in environmental terms, in terms of intergenerational solidarity or towards a democratic system must be taken into account too. A society can flourish today without compromising the future of generations to come.



2.2 WELLBEING, A CONCEPT THAT REFLECTS OUR CORE VALUES

A neoliberal approach to economic and social policy has dominated the EU's discourse since the sovereign debt crisis. In the public sphere, austerity, paving the way for minimal states, has put great strain on the welfare states and public services. In the private sector, neoliberal shortterm mentality has hindered research, innovation and investments in people, while generating ever higher inequalities and severely damaging future resources and the environment as a whole.

Against this vision, wellbeing offers an alternative narrative that places people at the centre of the EU's policies. It translates collective actions into tangible improvements for each and every citizen. In a context where the EU is too often decried as distant for citizens, wellbeing focuses on each and every individual situation, it offers a purpose that every citizen can relate to, while calling for collective tools and strong states to realise it. Thus, wellbeing provides us with an opportunity to bring our collective objectives closer to citizens, to regain their trust towards public policies and restore their confidence in the future. It can help us frame the need for collective action to fight climate change, to redistribute wealth, to set limits to the mighty hand of the market by showing positive impact for each individual. The wellbeing of all as a core political objective thus offers an alternative to the capitalist society of individuals seeking to maximise their profits at any cost and to the liberals' project of a minimal state.

Wellbeing strengthens the argument that a Social Europe makes economic, as well as social, sense.¹⁷ It bears the potential to complement and reinforce the welfare state, to reimpose limits on uncontrolled capitalism, and to provide more social rights to workers

and citizens in Europe. Wellbeing, as an ultimate objective of EU policies can ensure that sustainability becomes the driving force of our societies and it can be the guiding principle to build up the autonomy and resilience of society. It comforts our fundamental aspiration for a society based on solidarity and strong public services. Policies aimed at increased wellbeing can restore trust in the future, paying attention to each and everyone, bringing progress to the many and limiting environmental damage. Finally, adopting wellbeing as an ultimate objective of EU policies offers a clear vision of the new world we want to live in.

Over the past years, PES has developed a strong policy agenda, with the purpose of improving Europeans' quality of life. Previous publications such as the PES programme for progressive reforms (2016)¹⁸, Workers' rights and social progress in the digital economy (2017)¹⁹, Combatting inequalities in the European Union (2018²⁰), or Just Transition, Decent Green Jobs, Modernised Economy, Citizens' wellbeing (2018)²¹, already identified a solid set of opportunities and measures to improve the wellbeing of all in Europe.

Similarly, the 2018 report of the S&D's Independent Commission on Sustainable Equality²² already offers a solid ground for sustainable wellbeing policies and it will be crucial to translate its recommendations into effective EU measures and governance.

Our ongoing work towards the full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, on quality and affordable healthcare for all, towards a sustainable cities strategy and the circular economy will further complement our policy proposals for increased wellbeing in the EU.



3

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: A PROGRESSIVE WELLBEING AGENDA

Advancing wellbeing on the EU's political agenda will enable us to further stress the need to overcome inequality, to fight for tax justice, to advance a social market economy, to tackle the threat of climate change and to harness the digital transformation, placing these fights under the umbrella of an objective clearly stated in the EU Treaties. It will thus firmly anchor our fight for social progress and sustainable development to the EU's primary law.

Highlighting different policy areas and aspects of wellbeing, from the individual to the collective ones, the following policy proposals could form the basis of a PES wellbeing agenda, across policy fields, at all levels of governance.

3.1 EDUCATION AND CULTURE, FOR THE EMANCIPATION OF ALL CITIZENS

Education and culture are essential ingredients for the emancipation of every citizen. Education is the foundation of individual development and societal wellbeing. As the driving force behind social progress, we consider education to be the most powerful social equaliser any society has at its disposal. But for it to be effective and unleash its full potential we must guarantee access to quality education for everyone in Europe, regardless of social background, gender or age.

Equally, culture is what gives us the ability to reflect upon ourselves, what makes us specifically human, rational beings, endowed with critical judgement and a sense of moral commitment. It is through culture that we discern values and make choices²³. Culture is thus essential to the wellbeing of each.



Education as a pathway to self-determination and participation

Education plays the double role of shaping the personal future of (young) citizens and developing our societies. Knowledge of the other is indispensable to building cohesive and inclusive societies in which citizens can flourish, and education is key to developing common understandings of our rights and responsibilities to one another. Language, literacy are the tools to pass this knowledge on. As Socialists and Social-democrats, we fight constantly to ensure that the fundamental right to an inclusive, gendersensitive, quality education becomes a reality for all in Europe, young and old alike. This is why we call for greater investment in education, including informal and nonformal learning, vocational skills, lifelong learning, culture, student mobility, research and knowledge. This is why we made sure that the right to education was inscribed as the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Education is central to the wellbeing of children and teenagers; it must provide both young girls and boys with a safe and supportive environment in which to develop key skills and behavioural awareness through learning and socialising with their peers. Education systems should ensure that children and teenagers are empowered to make their own decisions about their bodies, their lives, their futures, regardless of their backgrounds. Only when young people are fully engaged with their education and training and have access to the broadest possible range of opportunities will they feel that society is working for them.

The lockdowns imposed in almost all EU countries to prevent the Covid-19 from spreading resulted in children staying out of school, mostly relying on virtual classes and digital solutions. Many regions were not able to provide adequate online education and digital

tools. Many families were not able to afford replacing books with computers, and were not equipped to replace teachers. Some schools throughout Europe did not have a sufficient number of classrooms even before the lockdowns and will now struggle to enable all children to attend classes while maintaining adequate social distance. While no one could foresee the pandemic, inequalities in access to good quality education were known and should be urgently remedied.

The wellbeing society should be open to all, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation. Discrimination can only be fought through an inclusive and tolerant education that seeks to challenge biases at every turn.

Proposals:

- Investment in public education is our best tool to face new challenges skills, multilingualism, the digital revolution, artificial intelligence and to prevent unemployment, marginalisation and extremism. It is fundamental to make access to education, training and lifelong learning accessible to all, including those with a migrant background.
- We need greater investment in education and vocational skills, including lifelong learning. Free, quality, early childhood education and care must be available to all.
- Trends to privatise education cannot be a viable option for inclusive education nor be funded by public money. To achieve true social justice, we cannot allow financial means, social situation, gender, ethnic or religious background, disabilities or other forms of discrimination to determine the type of education a child or young person receives²⁴.
- Education has to encompass an agenda for children to freely learn about the functioning of their bodies, sexual orientation and how to protect themselves from abuse.
- Early childhood education and care (ECEC) comes at a pivotal stage for development and plays a determining role in shaping lifelong wellbeing. Access to quality ECEC is associated with better literacy, self-regulation and social-emotional skills, and can help reduce the inequalities in attainment faced by children from a lower socio-economic background²⁵.
- Improved access to language and literacy classes for citizens with migrant background and third country nationals must be guaranteed and further developed as a pathway to integration.
- We want to encourage the organisation of civil and political debates in schools and other discussion platforms and promote media and digital literacy, allowing young people to develop critical thinking skills and enabling them to protect themselves against fake news²⁶, bullying, as well as harassment in any form.
- An adequately funded Erasmus+ programme that is open to all levels of education is required to promote fair and accessible student mobility that is open to all, regardless of one's background. It must focus on young people in vocational training much more than now to allow them to fully participate in the European project.
- The Erasmus+ programme's role in fostering non-formal education must not be neglected and must also benefit from sufficient funding.



Culture as a means of expression and engagement

Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the society and to enjoy the arts. Culture is an essential element in every person's development. It is an essential element of social cohesion, engagement and democratic citizenship

Culture promotes wellbeing by playing a part in individuals' and collectives' education, transmitting knowledge, meaning and care across generations. Evidence shows that the practice of amateur artistic and creative activities is directly correlated to higher levels of life satisfaction, and that measures destined to promote the social integration of minorities and fragile citizens can be improved through the use of culture, arts and creativity²⁷. Europe's vibrant and diverse cultural and creative landscape is also a unique and valuable means for citizens across the continent to express themselves freely, understand others and be understood by them.

Grassroots creativity goes hand in hand with a strong independent cultural sector. Europe's output must not be captured and fenced off by foreign multinationals. Public funding is the guarantor of our exception culturelle, which Europeans depend on to reflect their realities and experiences.

Many of us turn to culture and the arts in times of crisis, and in return we should mobilise public investment to prevent the collapse of the cultural and creative sectors when access to them is restricted for public health reasons. On 12 June 2020, PES Culture Ministers adopted a declaration calling for greater resources to be dedicated to the cultural and creative sectors in the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.²⁸

Proposals:

- **The Creative Europe programme must benefit from sufficient funding to fulfil its mission of creating a pan-European cultural and creative ecosystem.**
- **Local authorities and civil society must be equipped to support widespread access to arts and culture through formal and informal culture centres and activities. Arts funding must not be prescriptive and must reflect the diversity of talents, ideas and lived experiences.**
- **Access to culture must be available for all. Practices such as reduced rates for specific public must be further used (for example Art 27 rates in Belgium, etc).**
- **Policymakers should explore the possibilities of using the arts and creativity throughout the range of policy decisions, including education, health and social care.**
- **At school, extra-curricular activities such as sports and cultural practices should be made accessible to all. All disciplines and ways of expression should benefit from appropriate funding.**

3.2 MATERIAL SECURITY FOR A DECENT LIVING

Receiving adequate income and having a stable job allows people to live autonomously, make decisions they deem are best for them, and plan for the future. When fighting poverty, the focus in many countries is placed on getting people back into employment. Yet it is equally important to consider income levels to fight inwork poverty and the types of employment contracts offered to prevent precarious employment. Indeed, in the recent years, several EU countries have experienced increases in the number of working poor, with many workers being paid less than before, working too few hours and living in fear of losing their job. In 2018, 1 in 10 employed persons was at risk of poverty in the EU 27.²⁹

Typical working contracts are being replaced by new contractual arrangements such as part-time or short-term contracts, on-call work, zero hours contracts or temporary agency work.³⁰ Moreover, we are seeing a feminization of poverty, and the EU gender pay gap has not diminished substantially in the past ten years, remaining at 16%.

Technological progress, and digitalization in particular, did not only change how people work, but also the terms under which they work. Digital technologies led to the development of online work platforms which mostly use flexible working arrangements and short-term working contracts.³¹ The platform economy is growing and the use of bogus self-employment is becoming more and more prominent. Some platform workers organize in platform cooperatives, where they can benefit from the flexibility these newly emerging solutions bring, explore potential collaboration with other cooperators, and democratically decide on the present and future of their cooperative. Worker owned cooperative platforms can furthermore allow self-employed workers to share administrative burdens, raise

their visibility and often allow access to social security, through employee status. However, platform work in corporate models has often lead to an undermining of labour standards, sparked a raise in bogus self-employment, whereby access to adequate social and pension rights are diminished.³² To ensure that this new technology serves the wellbeing of workers, decent working condition and access to social protection should be provided to all workers, regardless of the type or duration of their contract.

Combined, these trends reinforced the requirement of flexibility from the employee and made their source of income less reliable over the time. Next to adequate income, all workers should be able to rely on a long-term employment contract which can provide a certain level of income security, allowing for long-term planning, development and investment in future.



Decent wages

Financial security is key to happiness³³ and wellbeing. To ensure the wellbeing of all, work must pay. It should not only be a way out of poverty, but also come with fair wages that provide for a decent standard of living, as acknowledged in principle 6 of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted how undervalued many workers' contribution to society is. For too many health workers, delivery workers, shop assistants, cleaners, or truck drivers, going to work implies taking health and safety risks and/or difficult working schedules, yet they still have poor working conditions and low wages. This is all the more unacceptable that over the past decades, inequality in the distribution of gross wages and salaries has been growing and rich households have been doing much better than both low- and middle-income families.³⁴ Furthering the wellbeing of all requires to address the question of wages and achieve a reduction of existing inequality.

Proposals:

- The EU must adopt quickly a framework Directive for fair minimum wages, as put forward by European Commissioner Nicolas Schmit, with a view to reinforcing both minimum wages set by law and collective bargaining in general.
- Where they exist, wage discriminations on the ground of age only, with subminimum wages set below a certain age threshold, or for specific categories of workers, such as civil servants, should be removed.³⁵
- For a more equal sharing of profits, wages should further increase overall, and collective bargaining efforts are essential to reach this objective. Yet collective bargaining coverage is down in 22 Member States since 2000: at least 3.3 million fewer workers are benefiting from a collective bargaining agreement across the European Union today compared to the beginning of the century. We need ambitious actions at European level to ensure that Member States promote collective bargaining, in particular sectoral collective bargaining, and to increase collective bargaining coverage.
- A coordinated European initiative should lead to a pay raise for frontline workers in the crisis, including health workers, delivery workers, shop assistants, cleaners, or truck drivers, who have kept our societies running throughout this crisis. Any such ad hoc measure should not however distract us from the need for long-term measures for quality salaries, and decent working conditions. A pay rise for frontline workers would furthermore contribute to reducing the gender pay gap as it would benefit employment sectors highly occupied by women.
- Measures to limit wage inequalities and ensure a better repartition of the salary part of profits of a company between all workers must be considered, such as limiting the pay ratio to 1 to 10 between the lowest and highest wage in a company.

Job stability

Precarious forms of work, such as zero-hour contracts should be banned. Labour standards should be effectively enforced for all types of employment, including platform workers and bogus self-employed people.

Employment and opportunities for career advancement should be equally accessible to everyone, regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, race or ethnic origin.

Proposals:

- A Directive on Decent working conditions is needed to provide precarious workers with more protection, in particular against abusive training practices or zero-hour contracts and include a clear definition of workers.
- Full time should be a given, part-time a choice. Governments should introduce measures to combat involuntary part-time contracts due to discrimination or after career breaks, in particular after maternity leave. Through this so-called 'motherhood penalty' women indeed encounter systematic disadvantages in pay, with perceived competencies preventing them from equal opportunities in promotion or in the ability to regain the same full-time contract as before their pregnancy.
- To promote the use of long-term contracts, specific taxation or increased social security contribution on short-term contracts could be envisaged, taking into account the increased societal cost of alternating between short contracts and unemployment benefits.

- Workers' rights, including those defined in collective bargaining agreements, and social protection should be extended to nonstandard forms of work.
- Everyone should have equal access to employment and all forms of discrimination at a workplace should be eliminated. In particular, workplace harassment on the basis of gender, sexual orientation and gender identity remains quite high in EU countries, and hampers people's access to employment and job security.³⁶



Minimum income security for people out of work

The European Pillar of Social Rights' principle 14 clearly states that "Everyone lacking sufficient resources has the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life, and effective access to enabling goods and services. For those who can work, minimum income benefits should be combined with incentives to (re)integrate into the labour market."

We strongly encourage all Member States to implement measures ensuring that students, unemployed and pensioners in need receive financial support that ensures their subsistence in decency.

Proposals:

- The EU should propose a framework Directive for a Decent Minimum Income to enhance income support for the most vulnerable ("social protection floor").
- A minimum income scheme at national level must be guaranteed to all citizens providing universal access to essential quality health services and minimum income security.

Housing

Having a place to live is an essential criterion of personal stability and of wellbeing. Many European citizens are today faced with the challenge of finding safe, affordable, healthy and good-quality housing.³⁷ People are forced to avoid areas that are becoming more expensive, settling for longer commuting time and lower quality living environment. We want to develop the model of the 15 minutes city, where you can get to work, school, public services, shops, cultural and leisure activities within a 15 minutes reach from the place you live in.

Member States and cities with the highest numbers of households that perceive their housing needs pose no financial burden tend to have a higher share of social housing, higher government spending on housing support, and higher employment rates.³⁸ In most countries, housing markets show evidence of distortion, fragmentation and great regional disparities; it is evident that the housing crisis does not only affect the most vulnerable groups but has reached the middle income households at large³⁹. Investments have declined steadily since the financial crisis 2008/2009, thus increased pressure even further.

Europe has to invest in affordable housing for all to reduce and eliminate homelessness and inequalities between citizens. It is not a surprise that in several EU Member States and many EU cities, one of the first measures taken to mitigate the economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis was to offer safeguards to renters and on mortgage instalments.



Proposals:

- Acknowledge that housing is a human right, not a commodity, and that the role of the state is to provide safe, decent and affordable housing for all as markets do not deliver. This can take many forms along the “Housing Continuum”⁴⁰, from social, public, cooperative, for limited profit, affordable rental and affordable home ownership.
- Introduce measures to make unlimited contracts the default option in housing systems and combat increasing rent and energy prices, such as a cap on rental price increases per year in areas which are considered to have a lack of affordable housing.
- Introduce limits to the activities of online short-term rental platforms which contribute to rising real estate prices in cities.
- Fight against the financialisation of real estate by establishing a transparency registry for transnational real estate activities and creating better control mechanisms to prevent money laundering in the sector.
- An EU Plan for Affordable social and public Housing should be developed to better coordinate EU policies and intervention mechanisms to support housing policies with dedicated attention to the local and regional level.⁴¹
- In order to account for the deeply subnational character of housing, the EU must improve its database in this context, which will have an impact on policy development and assessments of housing markets in the European Semester.
- New house building programmes and in particular social housing should take into account and anticipate the specific needs of the elderly and of disabled people. EU funding for social, public and affordable housing construction and low-carbon renovation should be improved, for example, with increased financing via the European Structural Investment Funds, InvestEU and the European Investment Bank.⁴² Especially for low-income households, many of them being women, energy prices have become an additional burden. These households have to be supported first with the “Renovation Wave” announced in the European Green Deal.⁴³ The renovation wave must be designed to prevent evictions after renovation and has to prevent the capitalisation of public subsidies.⁴⁴
- Member States should use their ESF+ budget dedicated to the most vulnerable groups to effectively combat the most severe forms of poverty with the greatest social exclusion impact, such as homelessness.⁴⁵ More attention should be devoted to preventing homelessness amongst people with disabilities, as research shows that they are overrepresented among homeless people.⁴⁶
- The capacity and the knowledge of local and regional entities to access EU funding and to combine different funding streams should be improved. They should also be supported to learn how to create sufficiently big housing associations and aggregators as intermediaries to use EU funding.⁴⁷

- EU state aid rules currently hinder investment in social, public and affordable housing due to lack of legal clarity and certainty⁴⁸. Specifically, the Services of General Economic Interest Decision (2012) must be revised to broaden its so far narrow target group of social housing. The definition should be broadened so as to enable the implementation of sustainability goals such as “social mix” and “social cohesion”.⁴⁹
- Affordable and quality housing indicators should be included in the European Semester,⁵⁰ in order to better reflect diverse housing tenures, the fragmentation of the subnational housing markets as well as housing needs. This would provide more data needed for policy monitoring and contribute to informed policy-making.⁵¹
- The EU should better support financing conditions for affordable housing by excluding investment in social infrastructure from the fiscal rules.⁵² The situation in cities and urban areas should be examined specifically.⁵³
- On Member States level, the Housing Focal Points and the Informal Ministerial Meetings on Housing should be reactivated.
- Our proposals for housing and urban policies are further developed in the PES Sustainable cities publication currently in preparation.



3.3 **BALANCING PROFESSIONAL AND PRIVATE LIFE**



Striking the right balance between private and work life is an important determinant of both short-term and long-term wellbeing.⁵⁴ Men and women should not be forced to choose between having a well-paid, secure job and taking care of their children or pursuing their interests and passions. Instead, everyone should have sufficient time to rest, to spend with their families or to engage in other activities such as sports or volunteering, allowing them to be more involved in the community.

We as Socialists and Democrats have been committed to ensuring all workers have good-quality jobs.⁵⁵ A major factor in defining what a good-quality job is the question of whether the worker has the opportunity and the time to develop both in professional and private life. It is of utmost importance to ensure that people are able to have sufficient time off, regardless of the type of job they have.⁵⁶ Additionally, a better balance between professional and private life and more equal sharing of care responsibilities would also contribute to facilitating women's participation in the labour market, allowing women to progress in their careers and generate higher incomes, thus leading to greater gender equality.

Reducing working time

Many people work long hours which can lead to overwork, stress and burnout. Research indicates that a key to a happy life lies in having more time for family and more free time to relax.⁵⁷ Combining a full-time job and working around 40 hours a week with unpaid household work and the desire to engage in social activities is challenging for women and for men. Further than improving individual lives, better sharing working time can, at least partially, help solve problems that all European countries experience, may it be in terms of unemployment, gender inequality, the ageing population or work-related health hazards.

In addition, technological progress led to a transformation of many sectors of the economy, boosting productivity and enabling people to work more efficiently. Changes in the world of work should be directed towards benefiting employees instead of diminishing their wellbeing and providing gains only to employers and investors. Although progress is slow, this is being more and more recognized in European countries. For instance, after securing a deal in 2018 to allow staff to cut their working week to 28 hours for up to two years to care for children or other relatives, German union IG Metall is fighting to introduce a four-day working week in order to help protect jobs that are in jeopardy due to the economic crisis caused by Covid-19 and the structural changes in the automotive industry⁵⁸. Gains in productivity caused by technological progress, and in particular digitalization, can and should be used to further reduce working hours while maintaining income levels.

Proposals:

- At the moment, the EU's working time directive obliges employers to ensure that their staff does not work more than 48 hours per week on average (including overtime), over a reference period of up to 4 months.⁵⁹ The EU should consider lowering its working time limit taking into account productivity and technological gains.
- Several EU countries have lower working time limits and the opportunity to further reduce working time is often discussed in link to digitalisation and automation. France reduced statutory working hours from 39 to 35 hours in 2000 for all companies employing more than 20 people, and in 2002 for smaller companies.⁶⁰ Some countries set up projects aiming to examine impacts of reduced working hours. For instance, Sweden implemented a six-hour working day in a Swedish retirement home for a period of 23 months, instead of the standard eight-hour working day.⁶¹
- Outside the EU, as part of the public debate on mitigating Covid-19 shock, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has suggested employers consider a four-day working week and other flexible working options as a way to boost tourism and help employees address persistent work/life balance issues.⁶²
- In some EU countries, specific working time reductions exist for older workers, according to sectors (for example in Belgium cleaning services have set a lower working time for older workers and nurses can have a monthly additional recuperation day after 45).



Right to disconnect and telework

As a result of technological developments, workers are able to stay connected and “on call” even when they are not in their work place, thus blurring boundaries between work and private life. The right to disconnect is about creating limits for using electronic communication after working hours. It ensures that workers have the right to disconnect outside established working hours, without facing any consequences. For employers there is a corresponding duty to safeguard this right and help ensure that everyone can disconnect from work-related electronic communications, such as emails or other messages, during non-working hours.

The Covid pandemic made teleworking a norm for millions of workers in the EU, demanding workers and companies to adapt quickly without always being able to rely on clearly defined rules regulating work from home arrangements. Telework has had an immediate impact on workers' lives and imposes to rethink management policies. It saved many workers the time they used to go to work, it reduced traffic in big cities, and offered a more flexible approach to work both in terms of location and schedule. Yet, next to these positive aspects, for many telework also meant working extra hours, not being able to disconnect and increased interference of work into private life and viceversa. It also increased the temptation for companies to externalize their offices costs and their duty to provide a healthy working environment. It is thus essential to frame the use of digital technologies in remote work in order to strengthen workers' ability to organise their work life according to their specific and personal needs.

Proposals:

- A few EU countries have already started introducing the right to disconnect, while others are exploring and considering doing the same.⁶³ For instance, France passed a law in 2016 which makes the right to disconnect a topic for mandatory negotiation in companies.⁶⁴
- The EU should aim to ensure a minimum level of protection for workers in the new digital world of work through a Directive on the Right to Disconnect applicable to all workers who use digital tools, including ICT, in the course of their work, including atypical workers.⁶⁵
- Propose a Directive on occupational stress related diseases, which acknowledges a “Right to Disconnect” for workers to fully enjoy family time and leisure.
- Include the right to disconnect in the upcoming occupational health and safety strategy.
- Covid-19 lockdowns have shown both the interest of promoting telework, for social and environmental reasons, as well as the great need to further regulate it and to prevent that it leads to increased work intensity in non-adapted work environments and working conditions. Labour Ireland has recently proposed a law on teleworking, currently debated in the Irish Parliament, while the topic is also in ongoing negotiations by social partners in France.



A healthy professional life

There is no point in losing one's life trying to earn it. There is no wellbeing in private life when work is a source of pain. Today, 8% of all cancer cases are work-related (12% of cancer cases among men and 7% of cancer cases among women). These occupational cancers could be avoided by eliminating carcinogens or reducing workers' exposure in the production processes. Improvements in terms of better protection for workers against occupational cancer have been recently announced by the Commission with the fourth revision of the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive (2004/37/EC, "CMD"), which together with the three revision undertaken in its previous mandate 2014-2019, add up to the establishment of binding occupational exposure limit values (BOELs) for 27 priority substances. Yet, with more than 100,000 work-related cancer deaths per year much more still needs to be done. There are still at least 23 other priority substances against which workers should be protected. Some of the limit values are still far too high and needs to be lowered as soon as possible.

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and psychosocial risks are the main risk factors reported by European workplaces in 2019⁶⁶. Even though musculoskeletal disorders are firstly connected with biomechanical loads (loads, frequencies, repetitions, vibrations), they are also inextricably linked to forms of work organization and the general trend of an increased work-related cognitive, sensory, and psychosocial load. Musculoskeletal disorders are the reason that millions of workers in the EU are no longer able to do certain tasks or even have to stop working altogether before retirement age. Ambitious European action is needed on musculoskeletal disorders to address the physical risk and foster effective prevention at the workplace. This prevention should include a gender sensitive

approach as it is particularly relevant in preventing musculoskeletal disorders among women

Additionally, more and more workers voice their concerns about stress-related sickness. More than half of all working days lost in the EU are caused by work-related stress. This is due to factors such as: job insecurity; long or irregular working hours; excessive workload; effort reward imbalance; poor organisation and management; discrimination and different forms of harassments and violence. This is an angle which cannot be overlooked when tackling work- and health-related challenges.

Proposals:

- The EU should develop a new post 2020 Strategic Framework on Occupational Safety and Health, and commit to eliminating work-related deaths. This strategic framework should include a completed list and stricter limit values of harmful substances, such as carcinogenics and mutagenics. The EU should also come up with ambitious proposals on musculoskeletal and stress-related disorders, in cooperation with social partners.
- The scope of the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive should be extended to reprotoxic substances and carcinogenic cytotoxic drugs.
- The EU must put forward a Directive on mental wellbeing at the workplace including the recognition of anxiety, depression and burnout as occupational diseases. This Directive on mental wellbeing at the workplace should establish mechanisms for prevention and for the reintegration of affected workers at the workplace.
- Comprehensive EU and national legislation on musculoskeletal disorders is needed to address both risk factors and foster prevention. There is also a need for training and awarenessraising of workers on both musculoskeletal disorders as well as on the key role of health and safety representatives in this regard.

3.4 A SOCIETY FOR ALL AGES

Article 3 of the Treaty on the European Union specifically states that, among other values, the EU is also committed to promoting solidarity between generations. In the last decade this has proven to be much harder, as birth rates are declining, life expectancy is rising and there is an imbalance in the number of working young and old, leading to conventional relationships between generations changing rapidly.

When asked about the quality of life in the future, only one in four European citizens believe that future generations will have a better life.⁶⁷ On the one hand, today's young people are a generation with worse prospects than the previous one, on the other hand pension systems are less and less capable of maintaining older people, especially older women, out of poverty. In the wake of austerity, a lack of public spending on formal quality care for the elderly means younger, mostly female, relatives have had to shoulder more care responsibilities. It also meant that our health and care systems were not ready for the Covid-19 outbreak.

Next to these demographic challenges, climate change is a major threat to the sustainability of our societies, which makes the wellbeing of future generations depend on the actions we take today. In Europe, children, the poor, and the elderly are most vulnerable and are increasingly exposed to the consequences of climate change.

As Socialists and Democrats, we are convinced that every generation must be able to live in dignity. We care not only about the present, but also about the wellbeing of future generations, which means we need to do everything we can to guarantee them a liveable planet. Younger generations can benefit from investments in infrastructure, innovation and greater environmental protection whereas older generations need decent pensions and public and family care. The European social model must offer both solidarity and a clear vision of social progress from one generation to the other. This requires a strong social bond between the young and the elderly and the political will to put intergenerational solidarity at the head of EU policies.



An age-friendly society

We need to rethink our economic and social policies so as to create age-friendly environments that make it possible for citizens of all ages to take part in society, contribute and support each other. Employees, regardless of their age, cannot be considered as a commodity that can easily be made redundant. We want to guarantee the possibility to work and live in good health ensuring good working conditions to all. We are convinced that strong, quality public services are the most efficient way to ensure (inter-generational) solidarity in our societies.

Actions taken to respond to demographic changes should be equally beneficial for all Europeans. This requires intergenerational solidarity to be mainstreamed in all policy areas and particularly concerns social protection systems that should shield both the young and the elderly, now and in the future. When designing reforms of labour law and social protection systems, the impact of such reforms on all generations should be taken into account.

Proposals:

- The arduousness of occupations should be taken into account into pensions calculation, and the effective possibility to remain in employment should be used as core criteria to define working life duration rather than life expectancy.
- Age-friendly working conditions at the workplace: special attention should be given to flexible end-of-career opportunities without losing pension rights, including working time reduction according to occupational arduousness.
- Age-based discrimination is unacceptable may it be against hiring older workers or lowering down wage standards for the young. Gender impact assessments, professional trainings for older women and bridging the gender pay and pension gap remains a clear priority too.
- Every citizen in Europe should be guaranteed a minimum pension that reflects national income levels. Member State should gradually lift the minimum pension above the poverty threshold (60% of national median income).⁶⁸ Alternatives to private pensions could be developed for example via national savings bond.⁶⁹
- Developing lifecycle approaches at the workplace can help keep older people in employment for longer and transfer knowledge and experience across generations, notably through mentoring schemes. These approaches ensure healthy working environments and foster interaction, cooperation and solidarity between the different age groups.

- We should build on the early success of the Youth Guarantee to develop similar employment policies towards the elderly, installing tailored, individualized support as the standard for helping jobseekers of all ages to find a job.
- Quality child and elderly care are essential for the wellbeing of all age groups in our society, especially for promoting gender equality. They are also sectors that create many jobs and can be mutually beneficial for the young and the older generation. We will defend investment in care services, notably through the Child Guarantee and as part of a social investment strategy.
- Education should be accessible regardless of age and social conditions. We are convinced of the necessity to establish life-long learning as a right, recognizing that access to affordable high-quality education, formal and nonformal for people of all ages is a precondition to strengthen participation in society, increase social inclusion and reduce discrimination.



Intergenerational solidarity as a red thread for sustainable development.

Intergenerational solidarity is a leading principle of sustainable development. Challenges brought about by climate change and a rapidly ageing society can be tackled separately, but are also strongly intertwined. Climate change is a question of intergenerational justice, as delayed action will make it socially, economically and environmentally more costly for the future generations to manage to live with the effects of intensified global warming. It also stresses the need to refrain from the excessive approach of a capitalist model that wastes resources and damages the environment as well as the prospects of the generations to come in the name of immediate profits.

Indeed, total atmospheric carbon concentrations are still rising rapidly. Global emissions have increased by 1.5 times since 1990, and CO₂ emissions from energy use reached a historic high in 2018.⁷⁰ European citizens seem to be aware of this, as they indicated that climate change is one of the biggest challenges facing the continent.⁷¹ Current generations have thus a responsibility towards future generations to ensure sustainable progress. It is essential that they contribute to climate change mitigation and hand over a healthy environment to the next generation. Involving multiple generations allows rights, responsibilities and risks to be shared.

- The EU should closely monitor the climate targets set for 2050 as well as clear interim targets (still to be defined). This implies that the European Green Deal must provide a clear European Strategy, coupled with national targets to meet these objectives and a clear phasing out of fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) and renewable energy use and energy efficiency improvement commitments must be raised to be in line with this long-term goal.

- The European Union's economy must move away from the 'linear' model where raw materials are used to make a product and thrown away afterwards, to a circular economy that reduces waste and ensures lower impact in terms of resources consumption.
- The EU should ban practices that lead to the premature obsolescence of products and introduce a mandatory labelling on product's expected lifespan and reparability.⁷²
- The EU must step up waste prevention and management strategies, and to be more ambitious in the development and implementation of ecodesign and energy labelling measures to increase the overall energy and resource efficiency of products move to a circular economy—both for production and consumption.
- The EU should develop a streamlined and gender-sensitive environmental impact assessment, both for the projects it supports and the policies it brings, including long-term projections over a generation's span.
- Promoting job-rich green growth, as well as access to education, training and labour market policies that ensure youth can acquire the right skills and competencies and are appropriately accompanied to take up the green jobs on offer, could help to simultaneously address both the climate transition and youth unemployment.⁷³

3.5 A FEMINIST ECONOMY

Our vision of Europe is that of a society that offers equal opportunities for all and takes into account the wellbeing of every individual, regardless of gender. Caring for children and the elderly, not being able to work or move up the ladder in their careers, gender-based violence and sexual harassment are all issues that affect women more frequently than men. Gender inequality prevents women from entering the labour market, getting good quality jobs and thus contributing to the household income⁷⁴ and society's wealth.⁷⁵ Treating women on an equal footing as men, with an equal contribution at home, at work, as well as in public life leads to healthier, happier, more trusting and just societies.

Every woman has the right to a career, just as every man has the right to raise his children and care for his family. Both PES and PES Women call for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and gender stereotyping, enabling women to enjoy the same worklife balance as men and to exercise choice and control over economic opportunities and political decision-making at all levels.⁷⁶

Ensuring gender equality and full protection of women's rights calls for a shift in economic policy-making towards a feminist economy. Economies should be actively reshaped to make them work for women through progressive taxation, corporate accountability, progressive public services, social protection, the redistribution of unpaid care work, sustainable infrastructure and decent, equally paid work.



Quality jobs for women too

Compared to men, women are more likely to be in precarious employment throughout their lives regardless of their educational level.⁷⁷ As they are often forced to use flexible work arrangements to balance work and family life, more women than men face low pay, part-time contracts and low job security. Women tend to work longer hours for lower wages with less leisure time while keeping up their full-time responsibilities at home. Women earn 16% on average less per hour than men, and progress has been minimal over the last decade.

The EU, as well as individual Member States, should tackle the gender pay gap and pension gaps by imposing clear legislation prescribing binding targets per year, country and age group to eliminate the gaps and set up corresponding monitoring mechanisms, together with binding measures on pay transparency.

More ambitious policies to reconcile work and family life should be put in place, encouraging the participation of men to parental responsibilities and unpaid care work on an equal footing with women.

Member States should work towards affordable child care, making it possible for women to participate full time on the labour market without having to rely on family members taking care of the children.

While sectors excessively occupied by women such as the health care sector need to be upvalued to counteract gender segregation on the labour market, at the same time, we need to shift to an economic model that recognizes, reduces and redistributes the unpaid care work that is disproportionately done by women and guarantee the right to unionise.

Gender bias in education training and professional orientation should be corrected to encourage women to choose carer with the highest professional, income and work life balance prospects.

End gender-based violence

One in three women in the EU has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15.⁷⁸ This shows the urgent need to combat all forms of violence that affect women, including domestic, intimate partner violence, sexual violence and rape, human trafficking, female genital mutilation, sexual harassment, forced marriage and so-called honour crimes. A society of wellbeing is not possible if half its members face such a threat to their personal safety.

Proposals:

- All EU itself and all Member States must ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention, which was introduced by the Council of Europe in 2011 to make Europe a safer place for all women by recognising multiple forms of gender-based violence, taking measures to prevent it, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators.
- Action must be taken to prevent emerging forms of gender-based violence, such as online harassment and anti-feminist hate speech by expanding and unifying the definitions of violence against women and by applying a systematic gender perspective to EU policy and programmes related to digital space/market, trade, AI, competition, ICT and development.
- The EU should promote the ratification of the new ILO Convention on violence and harassment in the world of work in order to eliminate gender-based violence in the workplace, involving employers as agents of change.

Promote women's autonomy, safety and ability to engage politically.

The EU has a responsibility towards 52% of its citizens to ensure that women have an equal share politically, economically and socially.

Proposals:

- Europe urgently needs to increase and guarantee the political participation of women and foster equality role models for young girls in all sectors through targeted actions. Europe needs to encourage national and European parties and institutions to reach parity democracy, and to develop more gender-sensitive policies and budgets.
- Further efforts are required to promote gender-balanced workers' representation and to ensure that women's and minorities' interests are properly taken into account throughout the social dialogue.
- In order to reach gender balance and to promote female leadership in the private and public sectors, quotas should be fostered through unblocking the women on boards directive and expanding its scope to the executive and managerial level. There is a need of a backup initiative from the European Commission if the directive remains blocked at Council level.



CHANGING THE FOCUS: FOR A SOCIETY OF WELLBEING NARRATIVES AND FIGURES

General Context

The EU and its Member States currently face many challenges that require complex solutions and the Covid-19 pandemic further emphasized that we cannot continue with 'business as usual', Wellbeing on a personal level cannot be detached from the society one lives in. It is time to rethink how our societies are organized and our policies designed. **Citizens can count on Socialists to deliver a new wellbeing model for society, one that all can subscribe to. Our proposals for a society of wellbeing:**

- We want good working conditions and work-life balance for work to serve a good life, and not the other way around.

A reduction of working time can allow to more time for family and more free time to relax, which is key to a happy life. It can also aid the objective of allowing every woman having the right to a career, just as every man has the right to raise his children and care for his family.

A quarter of Europeans, (186 million people) says that it is not easy for employees in their workplace to take family leave.

- Material security: we must ensure work fairly pays

We must ensure that those at work are able to gain enough to live a good quality life, wages must be appropriate. Good quality living and collective bargaining are necessary in order to ensure profits are not

only going to shareholders but also to those that make profits possible in the first place. The increasing numbers of working poor in Europe today stress the urgency to implement decent minimum wages and stable contracts. A coordinated European initiative should lead to a pay raise for frontline workers in the crisis, including health workers, delivery workers, shop assistants, cleaners, or truck drivers, who have kept our societies running throughout this crisis.

1 in 10 employed persons was at risk of poverty in the EU 27 in 2018 (74.6 million people).

- Life post Covid-19 should not be a return to business as usual but the first step in designing a new, more sustainable EU, fit for all.

The way we consume and produce is impacting our environment, there are alternatives to business models that only seek profit through unsustainable practices. Businesses that seek locally sourced products, short supply chains or cooperatives, to name a few, seek environmental and social improvement and we must therefore support them. We must ensure that social and environmental considerations take precedence over profit-making.

Social economy enterprises represent 10% of all business in the EU, accounting for 8% of the EU GDP, around EUR 1000 billion.

- Citizens aspire to more protection: we strive for a Europe of welfare with strong welfare states

We have a duty to protect people if they fall sick, lose their job, suffer disabilities or fall on hard times. There is substantial evidence showing that well-functioning social welfare systems are associated with higher society wellbeing. We want strong EU ambitions for a Child Guarantee and efficient minimum income schemes in all Member States.

92.4 million people in the EU-27 are at risk of poverty or social exclusion equivalent to 21.1 % of the EU-27 population.

- Gender equality requires a real transformation of our society, both culturally and socially, pushed by ambitious public policy

We must fight the pay gap and gender biased employment through gender-transformative public services entailing infrastructure (physically; socially), public care and health care, public education, public water and sanitation, public energy, public transport and social protection.

The gender employment gap stood at 11.7% in 2019, with 67.3 % of women across the EU being employed compared to 79% of men (EU27 data).

- Policies beyond GDP: public policies must go beyond GDP growth only and improve the daily life of all citizens, in the public, professional and private sphere.

A fair, progressive tax system is a central element in combating inequality. It is also essential to ensure the state has the means to deploy its welfare system. Notable reductions in income inequality result from moving from a flat tax system to a progressive one. This leads to a positive, although limited, macroeconomic and employment impact.

Due to the amount of private financial wealth booked in a country other than the household's country of residence, the corresponding EU estimated revenue lost to international tax evasion is EUR 46 billion (0.32% of GDP in 2016).



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Ensure gender-transformative public services

When designed, funded, and delivered properly, public services can address structural causes of discrimination by redistributing power and resources. Gender-transformative public services entail infrastructure (physically; socially), public care and health care, public education, public water and sanitation, public energy, public transport and social protection. They need to be accessible and affordable for all.

Proposals:

- The EU and its Member States should prioritize fiscal policies that provide sufficient resources for the provision of universal public services.
- Accountability and transparency in decisionmaking, financing, delivery and monitoring should be improved, ensuring that women's organisations and trade unions are meaningfully involved.





3.6 EFFECTIVE AND SUPPORTIVE WELFARE STATES

Since the end of World War II, the Welfare State is characteristic of European countries, organising their political, social and economic life. It is a key strength of our continent that helps maintain cohesion in our societies, in the good times and in the challenging times. This way of organization takes different shapes and forms depending on geographical, historical, spending, and development criteria. Thus, there exist different modalities of Welfare State: the Nordic, the Continental, the Meridional, the Eastern and the Anglo-Saxon. All of them are structured in a series of public policies organized in different Social Welfare Systems, providing integral services and economic benefits for a decent life in different areas: social security, healthcare, education, housing, employment, justice, social services for vulnerable groups, transport, waste management, energy supplies and clean water. Public services are essential for a functioning society and they are all equally important. Just like the quality of healthcare services directly determines one's wellbeing, clean water and hygienic waste disposal are also an essential determinant of the quality of life.

These Social Welfare Systems protect people from economic volatility and help mitigate inequalities in health, education and on the labour market. They are also crucial for preventing poverty and protecting those in need. Combatting poverty and social exclusion is in turn key to promoting wellbeing, while at the same time supporting economic growth. There is substantial evidence showing that well-functioning social welfare systems are associated with higher society wellbeing⁷⁹. Everyone should thus be able to access and benefit from solid social protection and public services. Defending public services and the role of the state is at the heart of our political position. The Covid-19 crisis has only reinforced our conviction.

Strong social public services in crisis and peaceful times

If a decade of socio-economic challenges for the EU was not enough, the coronavirus crisis acted as a wakeup call. Covid-19 not only raised the question of the solidarity that lays at the foundations of our Union, but it also showed that strong, well-funded, resilient public services are not a burden, but a central pillar of the stability and wellbeing of our societies. This crisis has comforted us in the knowledge that our fundamental aspiration for a society based on solidarity and strong public services is the right way forward. We are determined to step up our efforts in defence of strong welfare states.

A new logic for the provision of public goods and services is urgently needed. For too long, neo-liberals considered public services as a burden that they should get rid of. Imposing a business culture to public services shows its limits today. Cost reduction « no stock policies » and lean management might work for some companies selling goods, it does not stand the test of an epidemic that leaves hospitals with no beds for their patients, no masks for the nurses and not

enough, overworked, staff to take care of those who are sick. Our health systems should foresee margins of manoeuvre to cope with the unforeseen. We cannot continue to assess the efficiency of health systems, and public services in general, based on their cost only.

Public services, in healthcare, education, social protection, etc, are the pillars of our society, and they must get the attention and support they deserve. They constitute the capital of those who have none and should be considered a Common Wealth⁶⁰. This means strengthening and, in some cases, extending the public or publicly overseen provision of traditional public services along the lines of improved social and environmental wellbeing.

The wellbeing of all citizens can be secured only if well-functioning and high-quality public services are in place, set up by strong states. Our political family will fight with even more determination to defend, promote and extend them.



Proposals:

- All European countries must offer their citizens efficient and effective social safety nets. In times of peace and prosperity, social services have to support people to fully participate in a society, while maintaining enough capacities to cope with an emergency situation and secure protection for every individual.
- Every worker should also have the right to a paid sick leave and workers in non-standard forms of employment must be supported too when their main employer or contractor ceases its activities, for example in the case of a lockdown.
- Social protection, through new or existing schemes, should be provided for all workers, including platform workers, seasonal and migrant workers, and the self-employed. They must have access to unemployment benefits, social assistance and public employment programmes when in need.
- European Welfare State should guarantee to European citizens public services and economic benefits for a decent life in different areas: healthcare, education, housing, employment, social security, justice and social services.
- They should also ensure access to essential services such as transport, water, energy, sanitation. Too often the privatisation of these services has led to lower quality, inequality or disruption of access and higher costs. This must be avoided and reversed whenever it negatively impacts beneficiaries and users.
- Public services should focus primarily on their beneficiaries and users, rather than on costs. They should be funded well enough to pay correctly and operate in good conditions.
- To ensure access for the whole population, full territorial coverage of public services is crucial and must also reflect local realities
- Local, regional and national authorities should be involved in the implementation of social objectives and public services and should collaborate to design robust policies and ensure adequate funding.

Affordable and quality healthcare for all

Health and social care services are central to the public good and to the wellbeing of all in a society. As other pillars of society, such as education, culture, water, sanitation – health and social care is not a commodity like any other. It is a right that cannot be solely subjected or left to market forces. We are opposed to the principle of commodification of health. Access to high-quality services is an inherent social right for all people and it must remain so in Europe. It is thus essential to continue fighting for universal health coverage, notably by improving access of vulnerable groups, including homeless people and migrants. We support a definition of Global Public Good which encompasses health and social care services, and allows Member States to take all necessary measures to support national health and social care systems. Coordinated action at the local, regional, national and European levels is needed to reach the UN SDG 3 on good health and wellbeing.

Health workers, nurses, caregivers and doctors who were and still are on the frontline of the battle against the Covid-19 virus have been rightfully applauded as heroes. Their efforts and sacrifice must be rewarded. Yet they are too often underpaid, understaffed and underresourced, particularly when it comes to nurses and support staff. Over the past years, they had to bear a significant part of the different budgetary restraints in public health. The crisis not only highlighted the shortage of workers and specialists in our hospitals, it reminded us of the difficult working hours and conditions they experience as they try to save people's lives.



As social democrats we must do our utmost to improve the financial status and working conditions of health workers. A number of measures must be taken to alleviate part of the pressure and stress healthcare workers face: limiting the number of hours a healthcare worker can work under normal circumstances; increasing the number of available healthcare workers; increasing training of medical staff and caretakers; offering lifelong learning opportunities; providing better work life balance; guaranteeing higher salaries; and, making the profession attractive for future generations. For us, it is clear that to provide health services of the best quality, it is fundamental for our public hospitals to be properly staffed, and that doctors and nurses can work in the best conditions possible.

Preventing diseases and promoting a healthy lifestyle are increasingly the focus of health systems. Preventive action empowers people to increase control over their health, avoid harmful behaviours and leads to long-term benefits, including reduced healthcare expenses for households. Prevention is a key aspect of the response to the rise of chronic diseases in Europe. More importantly, preventive actions foster a better quality of life and wellbeing for each, notably in a context where the average citizen lives longer than ever before. To truly address many health challenges, we need to look at the root causes and shift our focus towards the promotion of a healthy lifestyle and the prevention of illness. Ultimately, investment in healthcare and health promotion will both reduce the burden on national economies and increase citizens' quality of life.

Beyond tackling illnesses affecting people's lives it is therefore crucial to address the risk factors leading to poor health. In addition to health measures, we must address the socio-economic determinants of poor health conditions which prevent people from following a healthier life. For an effective and efficient long-term care, it is thus extremely important to consider integrated care systems, which includes the coordination between health systems and social service systems. Most vulnerable persons, especially people with disabilities, elderly and dependent people, need both an integrated care and social care, thus, synergies must be created. An integrated care model must be considered and developed at EU level and in Member States in full respect of the subsidiarity principle. At the same time, there must be coordinated action at the local, regional, and national levels when it comes to the environmental health factors leading to chronic diseases, such as air pollution.

Mental health is one of the fundamental preconditions for wellbeing. Mental health difficulties, such as depression or anxiety, impact more than one in six people in the EU. People experiencing mental health difficulties often face stigma and exclusion, including from relatives and friends, and their difficulties may contribute to alcohol and drug use. Alongside the health impact it has on individuals, poor mental health is putting health and social care under additional strain. This calls for a comprehensive and proactive strategy when it comes to mental health. There is no health without mental health.

Proposals:

- The principle of universal access and public health-care must guide European health policy.
- Promote integrated care systems and improve the coordination between healthcare and other social services.
- Promote decent work and improve the financial status and working conditions of health workers, thereby also increasing the attractiveness of the profession.
- The EU should develop a new post 2020 Strategic Framework on Occupational Safety and Health, and a Directive on mental wellbeing at the workplace including a zero-vision for work-related fatal accidents and occupational illnesses, and the recognition of anxiety, depression and burnout as occupational diseases.
- Urgently develop an EU strategy on mental health, with an emphasis on advancing prevention, early diagnosis, treatment and destigmatisation of mental disorders.
- PES has further developed its proposals for Quality and Affordable Healthcare for All, in a dedicated publication.



Ensure the effective take up of social protection benefits

Although to varying degrees, all European countries share the challenge of non-take up of existing social protection benefits.⁸¹ Non-take up of benefits can be defined as a “non-receipt of benefits by people who are entitled to them.”⁸² It arises when part of the population entitled to receive a benefit, often belonging to the most vulnerable groups, do not claim it. It can occur due to various reasons: lack of information about eligibility to a benefit, an application procedure that is too complex, costly or time-consuming while the benefit level is low; and the unwillingness of eligible individuals to claim the benefit if there is a possibility that others will find out they need such benefits, thus leading to feelings of stigmatization.⁸³ Reducing non-take up is thus essential for the effectiveness of social protection systems. It would improve the situation of the main beneficiaries and could contribute to achieving EU-level employment and poverty targets. It would also prevent greater social and economic costs in the long run, by facilitating access to utilities, food, housing and healthcare.

Non-take-up is less likely to occur when benefits are initiated automatically based on the available data, with no need for applications. This takes away the burden of administrative procedures and loss of time for the applicant. When application is regarded as unavoidable, non-take-up can be reduced by making procedures as proactive and simple as possible, alerting potential beneficiaries that they may qualify.⁸⁴

Proposals:

- EU policies should support and promote the automatic provision of social benefits to beneficiaries and favour one stop shops to simplify administrative process for recipients.
- Governments should strive to make their systems more efficient. This can be facilitated by a further digitalisation of public services across Europe, while maintaining physical access at least for specific publics that do not command IT tools. Such further digitalisation should not come at the expense of the quality of the service delivered.
- Social benefits policies need to be more transparent and better communicated towards their target groups and the broader citizenship to ensure that all people are well-informed about their rights.

Alternatives to conditionality and sanctions on people experiencing poverty and unemployment⁸⁵

The EU has been striving to ensure full employment, a goal which entails that everyone who is able and willing to work should find a job in the shortest time possible. Yet this ambition has too often overlooked the quality of the available jobs as well as their match with the skills, capacities and personal circumstances of the job seekers. Too often, unemployment benefits have been considered as disincentives to employment and eligibility conditions for social protection became tighter with the imposition of ‘conditionality’ in exchange for benefits. Refusal of job offers or failure to get back into the labour market in a certain time period triggers sanctions, placing the blame on the individual and thus negating the collective responsibility to offer good-quality, sustainable jobs that suit individual’s specific competences and personal circumstances.⁸⁶

This pressure to find a job pushes people to enter into any kind of working contract such as shorter and more insecure contracts, forced or bogus self-employment, agency work, unpaid internships, etc., leading to an increase in precarious work, wasted talent and personal frustration, thus negatively impacting wellbeing. Cutting social benefit to the most vulnerable beneficiaries also risks aggravating their individual situation.

Social protection systems should operate in a way that provides people with the personalized assistance and support needed to find good quality jobs that offer security, guarantee fulfilment of social rights and allow for growth in personal and professional life.

Proposals:

- Identify best practices and build on the experience of Youth guarantee to provide individual tailored support to jobseekers and explore the possibility of initiating an “employment guarantee” principle.
- Public hiring for projects of general interest could be considered as one measure to tackle unemployment, in particular in the aftermath of Covid-19, as well as the rechannelling of combined benefits to cover unemployment costs in general interest projects, building on the practice of “zero long-term unemployed territories” put forward by PS France and PS Belgium.⁸⁷



3.7 BEYOND PROFIT: ALTERNATIVE BUSINESS AND CONSUMPTION MODELS

Companies and businesses are usually understood as entities operating according to the rules of supply and demand with the objective to maximize profit. Yet, alternative business models exist that better take social and environmental concerns into consideration and better contribute to increased wellbeing for all. In order to ensure that social and environmental considerations take precedence over profit-making, alternative forms of business should be fostered whenever possible, placing more emphasis on collective responsibility for the impact that companies' activities have on the society and the environment as a whole.



Social economy

In 2015, the conclusions of the Employment and Social Affairs Council adopted under Luxembourg's Presidency acknowledged that "social economy enterprises [...] promote a more sustainable and locally anchored economy."⁸⁸ The social economy sector indeed offers goods and services that work in the interest of the general public, using surpluses primarily to achieve social and societal objectives, rather than on maximizing profits for their owners and shareholders.⁸⁹ As opposed to the dominant business model, social economy is characterized by favouring people over capital, sustainable growth, balance between social and economic outcomes, as well as democratic governance and ownership. Social economy has been steadily increasing over the years, with social economy enterprises representing 10% of all business in the EU, accounting for 8% of the EU GDP.⁹⁰

Proposals:

- The development of social economy is unequal and differs among Member States. To facilitate further development, the EU should adopt a European regulatory framework which would acknowledge the different forms of social economy in Europe, and enabling social economy providers to operate on a legally certain basis while enjoying the advantages of the internal market and free movement
- The EU should ensure that the regulations on EU funding grant easier access to social economy stakeholders. Investment in social services and the social economy, and an easier access for social economy organisations to financing, can strongly support the creation of jobs, including for disadvantaged workers, while contributing to the well-being of the entire population and a stronger cohesion.
- Monitor the implementation of 2014 Public Procurement Directive, and support public authorities, especially local and regional administrations, to include social and environmental considerations to public tenders.
- Provide flexibility and guidance on the proportionate application of State aid rules for social economy organisations.

Local consumption and short food supply circuits

New forms of consumption have emerged, placing greater focus on social and environmental sustainability, notably by favouring local products over imported products. This is particularly visible in the food sector. In recent times, short food supply chains and local markets, where farmers sell their produce directly to consumers or with a minimum of intermediaries, have flourished in all EU countries, both in rural and urban areas. They represent an alternative to conventional longer food chains where small farmers often have little bargaining power and the consumer cannot trace the food to a known producer or local area. They provide a fairer price for farmers, access to fresh and seasonal produce for consumers, a reduced environmental impact, support to the local economy and greater social cohesion at the local level.⁹¹ The bio-economy, by placing greater emphasis on a product's environmental impact and its potential health effect, has the potential to strongly contribute to the wellbeing of citizens as well as to the local economy. In particular, agriculture and the food sector must be further encouraged to produce healthy, quality and affordable food while preserving nature and biodiversity and reducing the impact of long supply chains on carbon emissions.

- The EU's support for agriculture, notably through the CAP should help farmers in their transition to more sustainable production methods and climate mitigation, focusing more on organic production, good animal welfare, preservation of biodiversity, reduction of harmful pesticides, sustainable forest management and sensitive landscapes.
- An EU Strategy for the transition to a Sustainable Food Systems should be developed to ensure, inter

alia, that all EU funds completely contribute to the transition towards a fully sustainable food system, including by stronger support for sustainable, smallscale agriculture.

- While preserving the goal of food security for the EU and its citizens, it is crucial to limit food waste. The new CAP post 2020 must therefore also address overproduction and failures in the food and nutrition market. Food waste and resource waste are unacceptable when still some of the most vulnerable go hungry.
- The Farm to Fork Strategy has to tackle the environmental impact of food processing and retail. It is essential that the goals to reduce pesticides and endocrine disruptors, the focus on innovative low-impact farming techniques and the up to 40% of all CAP funding dedicated to climate action are implemented as communicated by the European Commission.⁹²
- The circular economy model offers great benefits to the agriculture sector in terms of limiting the impact of transport, storage packaging and waste. New ways of reusing existing resources must be explored and supported.
- The Common Agricultural Policy should redirect its support from big industrial exploitations towards small sustainable producers and funding must be made available for farmers, who commit to the transition towards sustainability, as well as to innovative farming techniques and new, sustainable smallscale producers.



3.8 SOCIAL INVESTMENT AND PROGRESSIVE TAXATION



The deregulation of the labour market has too often been accompanied by a reduction in social protection expenditure which means support and services for Europe's poorest have been reduced. Spending on active labour market policies and out-of-work income support has been declining and lead to higher inequality. As Socialists, we are committed to ensuring a Europe of equality and fairness by promoting measures aimed at reducing social inequalities, fighting poverty and increasing solidarity.⁹³

Ensuring social rights and preserving social cohesion requires action from all levels of the government. Cities, local and regional authorities are often the government level closest to people and the local economy. As such, they are best positioned to determine and respond to existing inequalities and labour market changes. However, it is not enough to be close to beneficiaries and to be able to understand their needs. It is essential that the authorities have the necessary financial and professional resources and capacities to provide adequate social support.

Social investment

Social investment must not be seen as a burden on the public purse: it is a productive factor essential for long-term growth and sustainable tax revenues. In 2013, at the initiative of PES Commissioner László Andor, the European Commission defined social investment as policies designed to strengthen people's skills and capacities and support them to participate fully in employment and social life, notably in the key policy areas of education, quality childcare, healthcare, training, jobsearch assistance and rehabilitation. This is today strongly echoed in the Pillar of Social Rights. In order to fight inequalities, enhance productivity and labour market participation, social investment also has to go beyond the typical investment on human capital (education) by investing in children, women, minorities, social housing, access to health and the proper functioning and accessibility of public services. Although the responsibility for strong welfare societies rests mainly with national governments, the European union can set the frame for strong welfare states and well-funded public services that allow effective access to social housing, healthcare and essential services.

Yet, the assessment of budgetary and social objectives in the European Semester's country-specific recommendations (CSR) stays lopsided on the costs of social progress. There must be a change of paradigm and real push for social investment to become a full part of the EU policy toolbox.

Proposals:

- **The Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) needs to be revised to exclude public investment from the public deficit calculation, in particular investment linked to strengthening human capital such as education, healthcare and skills creation, but also support social security systems, affordable housing, social services, healthcare.**
- **Fiscal flexibility needs to be introduced to promote the implementation of progressive social policies in Member States.**
- **Expenditure on social investment should make sure that planning, programming and budgeting contribute to the advancement of gender equality and the fulfilment of women's rights.**

Progressive taxation

A fair, progressive tax system is a central element in combating inequality⁹⁴ and essential to ensure the state has the means to deploy its welfare system. It should ensure the redistribution of economic gains across the population. This requires a modernisation of tax systems to address technological improvements in production and the supply of services as well as the digitalisation of business activity.

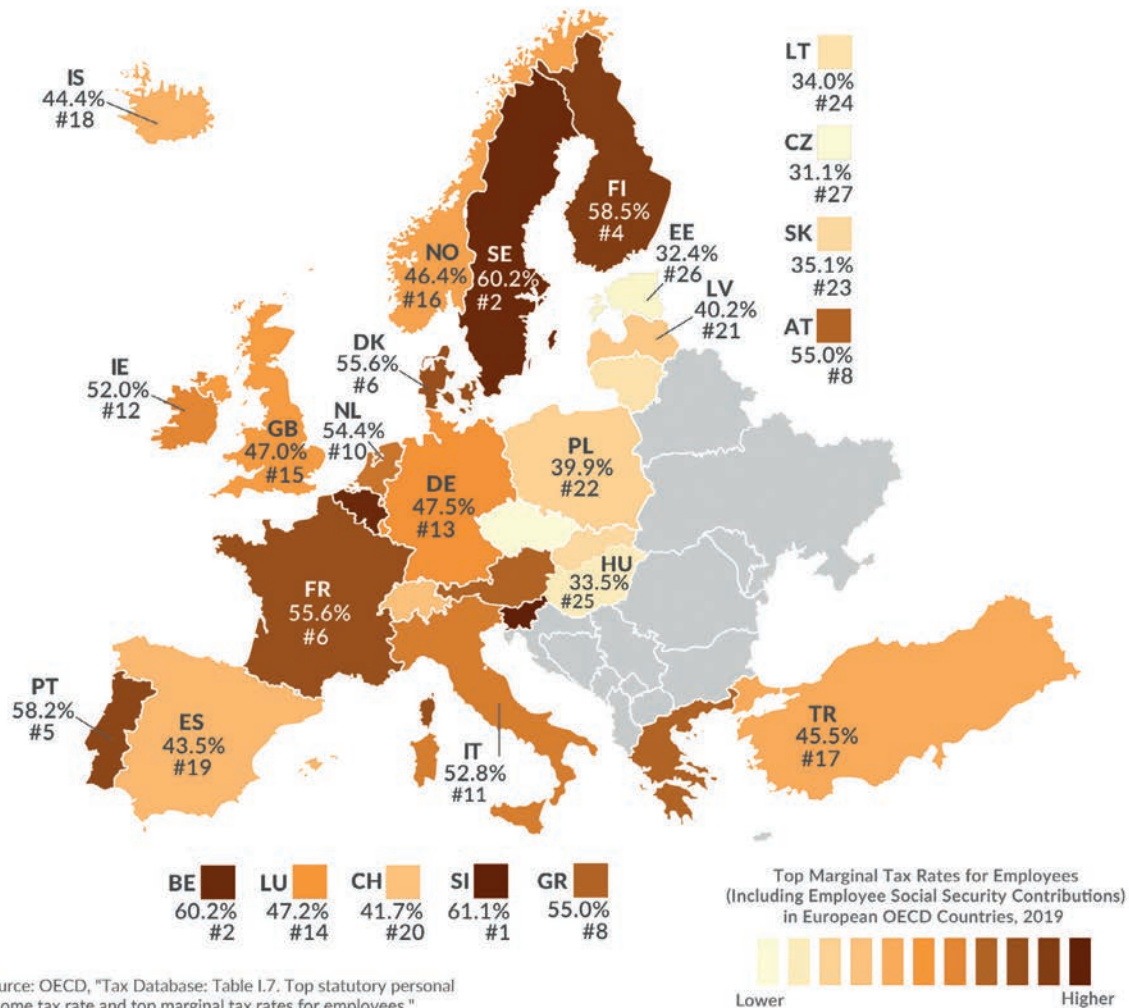
Added value creation is also changing and stemming more and more from capital. Tax policy needs to reflect this too, as it still mainly relies on labour. Productivity profits should contribute to broadly-shared prosperity, even when they come from machines. Tax policy must be updated and adapted to new sources of added value, including user-provided data or gains from automation. Although this is to a large extent not an EU competence, the European institutions could promote specific measures or orientations for taxation policy through their country-specific recommendations.

Proposals:

- Support higher taxation on capital gains, converging with the rate of labour income taxation, through recommendations to Member States, for instance on a robot and artificial intelligence tax, or on dividends and stock options. Short-term capital gains should be taxed at a higher rate and targeted tax breaks used to incentivise sustainable productive investment.⁹⁵
- Progressivity of personal income tax should be increased together with progressive property taxes, based on up-to-date property assessment.⁹⁶
- Introduce an EU-wide wealth tax with a partial allocation to the EU budget. In order to reduce rising inequalities and ensure that the European Union has the financial means to successfully overcome the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, relaunch its economy and deliver on the political priorities. A progressive tax on accumulated wealth of individuals above 50 million EUR can render additional revenue without compromising their subsistence and wellbeing and providing crucial resources for Europe's needs.
- Taxation system, such as family-based taxation, which disincentivise second earners (primarily women) from participating in the labour market should be dissuaded.
- Continue to better fight tax fraud and avoidance including by closing down all tax loopholes to prevent profit shifting through the automatic exchange of information and by opening up registries for companies and beneficial owners.
- Introduce a minimum effective corporate tax rate and a common corporate tax base in Europe through new EU legislation.
- Introduce urgently a European Financial Transaction Tax.
- Modernise taxation systems to include economic activity in the digital sphere.
- PES is currently preparing a dedicated document on progressive taxation policies.

Top Individual Income Tax Rates in Europe

Top Marginal Tax Rates for Employees (Including Employee Social Security Contributions) in European OECD Countries, 2019



3.9 A RIGHT TO AND FOR NATURE

Nature provides the basis for the good health and wellbeing of the European population. Clean air, water and food are essential for sustaining life. Natural environments provide space for recreation, relaxation and social interaction, and raw materials which feed into our production systems⁹⁷. Yet, environmental pollution remains at the origins of 13% of all deaths in the EU, due to exposure to pollution at home, in the workplace and outdoors.⁹⁸ Climate change also has deep negative consequences of climate change on public health determinants such as clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food and shelter.

Faced with the urgency to scale up measures to protect nature and mitigate climate change, the EU has committed to the overall aim of ‘living well, within the limits of our planet’.⁹⁹ Designing policies that fully take into account people’s wellbeing requires not only looking at the wellbeing of present generations, but also ensuring that future generations get to enjoy an equal or better living environment. Our future, the future of our children and the future of many generations to come depends on the actions we take today.

EU environmental and climate policies have led to some progress but significant problems still persist and are likely to become worse.¹⁰⁰ Natural capital, consisting of natural assets (e.g. stock of natural resources, land coverage, species biodiversity) and eco-systems and their services (e.g. oceans, forests, soil and the atmosphere), is not unlimited and thus requires protection. We are already facing alarming

signs related to climate change and biodiversity. PES has already put forward an ambitious set of policy proposal with its Just transition brochure (2018)¹⁰¹ and is currently preparing a dedicated publication on the circular economy. The proposals below complement these publications.



Nature is part of our health agenda

Environmental pollution is linked to a range of disease outcomes, including cancer, heart disease, stroke, respiratory disease and neurological disorders. Air pollution and high temperatures are known to increase mortality. The urban environment in particular exposes people more to air pollution, noise and chemicals while also providing lesser access to green space than people in rural environments.

Over the past years extreme climatic conditions are affecting communities throughout Europe, generating higher densities of pollutants in the air, causing droughts and impacting our agricultural sector and ultimately also leading to premature deaths. The most vulnerable people in our society are more exposed to a higher burden of pollution, with citizens in poorer European regions exposed to high levels of air pollution and noise, and to high temperatures. This strongly exacerbates existing health inequities.¹⁰²

We therefore must decisively address environmental and climate policy as a central tool in safeguarding public health throughout the EU and beyond. A healthy and sustainable climate and environment are needed in order to better prevent the spread of diseases, decrease occupational hazards such as heat strokes, and avoid food shortages due to natural disasters and inadequate weather conditions. The European Green Deal is the central tool in addressing these threats and must be supported in order to deliver better health and improve the quality of life for European citizens.

- **We must take stricter measures to fight pollution and ensure air quality. This implies reducing the impact of emissions from traffic and energy production, while simultaneously increasing the air,**



water and soil quality standards throughout the EU, notably through dedicated zero-pollution action plans for air, water and soil as foreseen in the European Commission's "Towards a zero-pollution ambition for a toxic free environment" proposal.

- **The Farm to Fork strategy plays a key role in making the production of foods and consumption patterns healthier. Better nutrition is a solid base for the prevention of diseases, increasing public health in the long-term.**
- **The European Union must reduce the use of chemical pesticides, fertilisers and antibiotics allowed in agriculture and food production, and promote healthy affordable food options for all.**
- **A sustainable chemicals strategy is needed for the EU to effectively address the impacts of chemicals on the environment and on consumers. New scientific evidence must be included in the regulations of endocrine disruptors and hazardous chemicals in consumer products.**

Nature (h)as a right

Healthy ecosystems, improved protection and restoration of natural forests and marine areas are crucial to combat climate change and to stop the loss of biodiversity.¹⁰³ They are also directly linked to our own wellbeing. Natural areas also act as reservoirs, may it be for natural carbon storage, biodiversity, cooling capabilities as well as regenerating natural resources. They contribute to climate change mitigation and provide ecosystem services at a large scale. Nature increases positive emotions and feelings of vitality and proximity to nature is highly associated with lower stress levels, fewer mental health problems, lower levels of air pollution and subsequently lower mortality rates due to air pollution as well as an overall better quality of life. Access to nature benefits all people, irrespectively of age or socio-economic status and must therefore be taken into account in all policies related to urban spatial planning and regional development.¹⁰⁴

Green spaces, especially in urban areas, can act as places of refuge, both from an environmental (heat, pollution...) and social point of view (stress,

loneliness...). In cities, these spaces also improve the quality of the urban environment – filtering the air and water, producing a cooling effect, and buffering noise. In other words, nature benefits people. Green spaces are not only essential for recreational uses, enjoying them has great benefits for the wellbeing¹⁰⁵ and health of citizens. Accessibility and proximity of these spaces correlates with fewer respiratory diseases and mental health.¹⁰⁶ Yet, access to green space is unequally available to the population, largely correlating with the socio-economic status of citizens and the overall economic performance of the Member State citizens are living in, making the topic of access to nature a topic of equality within our societies.¹⁰⁷

When countries worldwide imposed lockdowns to halt the spread of the coronavirus, suddenly playgrounds and parks were locked, access to hiking trails cut off and outdoor recreation limited. Many Europeans came to realize how important spending time outdoors is for their wellbeing and how beneficial it is to have space for nature in big cities.



Proposals:

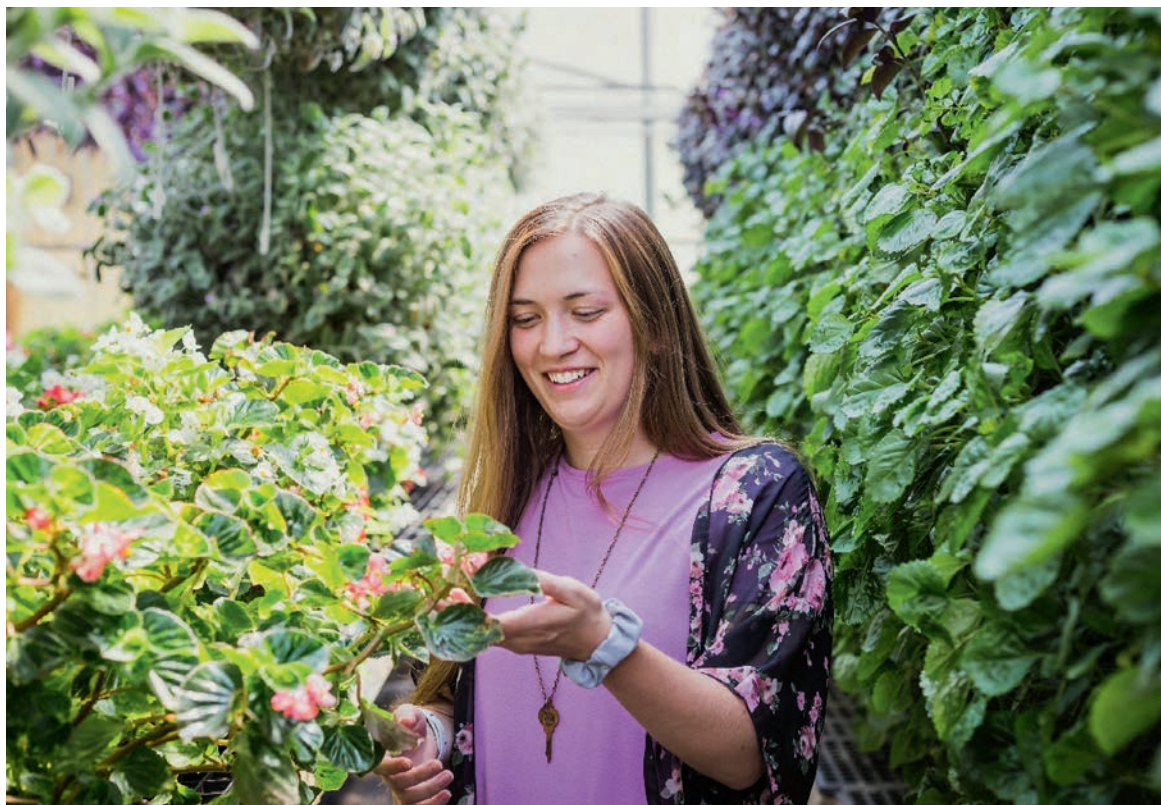
- The OECD Natural Capital indicators¹⁰⁸ could be better monitored and the EU policies' impact could be assessed on the same basis.
- Water and sanitation are public goods that must be accessible for all Europeans, both in rural and urban areas.
- Adopt clear measures against the artificialisation of soils, monitoring the share of land available to natural vegetation and supporting the vegetalisation of artificialized areas, notably in the cities.
- Strategic and inclusive urban regeneration can reduce the inequalities of access to nature related benefits and foster an equitable and resilient urban environment.
- Environmental Conditionality must be introduced into the frameworks applied to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund to ensure that all projects contribute to protecting our environment and increasing access to nature.
- Increase the number and the quality of protected areas on the continent and at the sea to support the recompletion of biodiversity stocks and increase natural carbon capture.
- At regional and national level, building codes and traffic management must be adapted to ensure that minimum proximity to green spaces and low levels of noise and air pollution are guaranteed to all citizens, but especially to the most vulnerable who

have been affected disproportionately by the lack of it.

- Further promote more sustainable cities, in line with the PES Agenda for Sustainable cities while at the same time continue to support rural development.

Defending a more sustainable European Way of life

We need to fundamentally transform the way we live. It is not enough to make incremental steps to change technologies or production processes only. We need to speed up and scale up our actions on all fronts, while catalysing behavioural changes in order to fundamentally change our consumption patterns and our way of living. Sustainability must become the guiding principle for ambitious and wide-ranging policies across all levels of society. Stricter regulation on pollution and waste must be implemented and enforced to protect the environment and citizens.



Proposals:

- The plastic pollution, especially of our planet's oceans, lakes and rivers, has to stop. We support the ban of single use plastics, and we will support measures for the overall reduction of the use on a global scale. This ban should also be extended to microplastics, which are hazardous to the environment and to people alike.
- Promote and encourage 'transition town' initiatives
Transition towns are community projects that aim to increase self-sufficiency to reduce the potential effects of climate change and economic instability. They do this by stimulating renewable energy production, lifestyle change, community housing, alternative local currencies, repair cafes and community cafes using food that would otherwise go to waste.¹⁰⁹
- Promote novel social practices, technologies and business models. In urban traffic management, strong and smart multimodal public transport solutions must be supported, including sharing services for bikes and, where necessary, carsharing services. These sharing services are not just about behavioural change, but they also represent new business models and new technologies (e.g. electronic booking systems, GPS — or global positioning systems, smart cars).
- Promote knowledge sharing to enable the diffusion of grassroots initiatives and social innovations to reduce uncertainties of switching to new technologies and practices.
- To enable consumers to make sustainable choices, green labels must be better regulated. Industry-issued labels used to communicate 'false green claims' to consumers must be banned, while independent third-party labels and authority-approved and certified labels must include all necessary impacts on the environment to fully inform about the product and enable consumers in making the sustainable choice.
- Planned obsolescence strategies must be fought and punished.
- A truly circular economy based on the radical reduction of waste and resource usage, a complete shift to renewable energy sources and abandoning the linear logic of production-consumption-waste in favour of reuse, recycling and refurbishment will be the economy of the future. The European Commission has launched its Circular Economy Action Plan 2.0 and the PES is suggesting complementary and further measures in its Circular Economy Brochure. The Circular Economy will greatly benefit economic resilience, sustainable growth, environmental protection and consumer protection.

3.10 **DEMOCRACY: EXPANDING INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS THROUGH COLLECTIVE ACTION**

Being able to decide for oneself is an essential dimension of wellbeing and emancipation. Along the defence of the Rule of Law, freedom of speech and secularism, our belief in democracy has always been a driver for our political action. It has been our core motivation in our fight for universal suffrage. It has been our incentive as we strive for modern political systems that can fully represent, include and protect citizens.¹⁰ We want to make democracy on all levels, at the workplace, through voluntary engagement, in the decisions that affect their daily lives, work for citizens again.



Democracy at the workplace

Work is more than just a source of income. Considering that people spend the majority of their lives at work, the quality of the working environment is a key determinant of wellbeing. Further to this, a job is also a crucial part of an adult's personal and social identity. Having a job contributes to material self-sufficiency, but is also a crucial determinant of subjective wellbeing, as being in work allows people to socialise, communicate and grow.

Corporate governance models that focuses on short-term profit maximization and returns to shareholders instead of long-term sustainability have increased distance between workers and employers. The rise of global corporations shifted powers and created great imbalance at the detriment of workers. It is thus essential to put forward and promote more equitable governance models for European companies, implementing the principles of economic democracy in ruling an enterprise. Allowing workers to have a greater say in the company they are working for could contribute towards increasing their wellbeing.

Worker ownership, an employment relationship where workers are at the same time employees and owners of the business, should be further promoted in Europe.

In the framework of the current economic crisis, several national federations of worker cooperatives

foresee an increase of worker buyouts (business transfers to employees under the cooperative form). Although worker buyouts are very complex, they are a key mechanism for workers to save their jobs and retain the local skills in their community.

Workers' organization, mobilization and representation through trade unions enable workers to voice their concerns and expectations and engage with employers and institutions.

As national traditions differ, the way trade unions operate, their coverage and overall membership vary within the EU. Many countries are observing a decline in union membership due to lower employment in traditionally unionised sectors, rise in non-traditional forms of work and enforcement of employment and government policies that undermine the role of trade unions.¹³¹ As the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) often stresses, increased trade union representation and collective bargaining is instrumental to improve the working conditions of employees and contributes to their wellbeing at the workplace. Although the EU has limited competence in this area, it can foster trade unionisation in several ways by promoting measures to strengthen and further develop social dialogue while protecting social partner autonomy and social partner agreements.

Proposals:

- The EU should promote the principles and rules of codetermination; and support workers' participation in company decision-making, including due consultation during crossborder moves, splits and mergers, fiscal transparency as well as territorial dialogue.
- The EU should develop a Partnership for Collective Bargaining, with the aim of bringing about Council recommendations and a Framework Directive on collective bargaining. Such a directive should include a robust non-regression clause and should respect the autonomy of social partners, including the right to negotiate and conclude collective agreements and take all forms of collective action.¹¹²
- Workers should be represented on company boards and participative management should be promoted and strengthened.¹¹³
- Strengthen workers' participation in companies, namely through buyouts, and improve the consultation of employees in case of restructuring.
- Revise the European Works Council Directive to enhance worker participation in decision-making and European-wide collective bargaining by proposing a lower threshold than 1,000 employees for the transnational firms concerned.
- Propose a Framework Directive on workers' information, consultation and codetermination (Mitbestimmung).
- The EU should follow up on agreements concluded in the framework of the European social dialogue, such as the two collective agreements on active ageing and the protection of occupational health and safety in the hairdressing sectors, and ensure their implementation. It should also encourage the conclusion of more agreements between European social partners.

Civil society engagement

Civil Society, may it be youth organisations, trade unions, sports clubs, nature conservation unions or cultural organisations... provide citizens with a space to socialize, exchange, propose, debate and contribute to their communities, at the local, national or European level. Volunteering, membership of an association, local engagement do thus contribute to the wellbeing of all and help everyone to realise their self as part of a broader collective.

In many countries, NGOs also play an essential role of checks and balances, of public scrutiny and they facilitate the active participation of citizens in public affairs while contributing to the democratic debate. Civil society provides citizens with an alternative way, alongside elections, of making their voice heard and working for the community¹¹⁴.

While active in many different fields, civil society organisations broaden the scope of engagement to other areas of civic life and can help fight against the alienation of citizens from democratic representation and/or political processes.



Proposals:

- NGOs must be recognised as free and independent bodies in respect to their aims, decisions and activities. They have the right to act independently and advocate positions different from the authorities with whom they may otherwise cooperate¹¹⁵.
- Local and regional authorities, social partners, social NGOs and other civil society organisations must play a strong role in a vivid and broad civic space. We want to involve organisations representing citizens, including trade unions and non-governmental organisations and minority representatives when designing, implementing and evaluating policies and legislative measures.
- We need to support education and development of young people beyond formal education systems including through volunteering.
- Some PES Member Parties (Parti Socialiste for example) request their membership to engage into another civil society organisation, next to their political activity. Such good practice could be promoted within our family.
- We must ensure stakeholders and NGOs have adequate funding in order to carry out their work including in the long-term, while civil society must show openness, responsibility, clarity and accountability in return of public funding.
- We encourage transparent decision-making processes, which foresee and provide shared space for public authorities, institutions, trade unions and civil society organisations to foster a constructive relationship.
- Measures to support community initiatives and non-profit organisations must be designed with intergenerational outreach in mind, notably access to culture and sports in all their forms. These offer ways in which to build bridges across gender, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation, putting into practice the values of tolerance and inclusion that should be central to our societies.



Civic engagement with the democratic process

Amongst many other aspects, people's wellbeing is also determined by the level of citizens' participation, citizens' empowerment, transparency in decision-making, as well as the feeling of collective responsibility. Citizens and civil society organisations should be able to organise, participate and communicate without any obstacles. Efforts should be made to make public spaces more inclusive to women and minority groups. When people have an opportunity to be heard and to give their contribution in a public debate, they feel safer, more valued and have more trust in public institutions, all of which leads to a greater life satisfaction.¹¹⁶

Raising inequalities, technological, demographic and environmental changes are creating fears and frustration among parts of the population in most EU Member States. This too often feeds into scepticism towards the democratically elected institutions' ability to control the course of events on their behalf or in their favour. It also feeds the vote for radical, populist, anti-systemic, sexist and increasingly anti-democratic parties, putting the cohesion of our societies and our democracies at stake. The rise of hate and divisive political forces in some EU countries are jeopardizing our democracies and fostering inequality and discrimination against marginalised groups, including ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTI people and people with disabilities. We must ensure that democracy works for everyone, not only for those with more power.

Youth participation is also fundamental when it comes to voting. Data from the last European elections demonstrates a sharp decrease in the turnout of young people, though this does not mean that the younger generations are not willing to engage. On top of that, the gap between the participation of the

oldest generation and the youngest one is widening. We need to address this issue to ensure the sustainability of our democracies over generations. In several parts of the European Union, often in big cities a large share of the population cannot join the democratic process at all and vote because they are not nationals nor from another EU Member State. We need to take this into account and consider democratic participation of third country nationals, and give them the rights to contribute to the decisions that affect their daily lives, in particular at the local level.

Sustainable wellbeing for all citizens can be achieved only if citizens and civil society organisations are able to identify themselves with the democratic system and engage in decision-making and with political representatives on a regular basis. This is all the more crucial at the local level where citizens can – and want to – directly participate in decision-making and implementation; where they immediately see the added value of new policies, where they can explore and shape policies that reconcile social, ecological and economic needs.

Citizen participation, public accountability, and transparency, are all interlinked. Increasing transparency increases the opportunity for public accountability, and increasing public accountability, in turn, increases the chances of citizen participation, since democracy then becomes an ongoing process, rather than a duty to vote once in a while.



Proposals:

- There should be more opportunities for citizens to share their views throughout the decision-making process in an open and accessible format. We want to enhance hearings and consultations in EU institutions, bringing them to the people so that everyone, no matter where they are from in the EU, can get engaged.
- The EU should propose minimum standards for civil dialogue at EU level based on the Lisbon Treaty and participatory democracy must be strengthened on all governance levels: local, national and European.
- The EU could develop a properly funded pilot project for EU-level participatory budgeting.
- We want effective integration and participation policies for third country nationals. This should include voting rights at local elections, to contribute to the decisions that affect their daily lives.
- Next to representative democracy, alternative ways of participation must be further explored and supported to involve citizens also in between the elections and throughout the electoral mandates.

Practices such as citizens assemblies, randomly selected citizens' panels and participatory budgeting should be used more often and developed to complement the action of elected representative assemblies at all levels of decision making.

- To further inspire youth participation and representation in political forums and allow them a direct say in the decision-making process, we support ways to increase the number of young people who are active in political and public life, with a strong focus on women's participation. Children and youth assemblies should be further established in order to encourage a sense of civic engagement from a young age. We also support more young candidates in electable positions on parties' electoral lists.¹¹⁷
- All EU leaders should actively prevent, sanction and eliminate hateful and divisive rhetoric within their parties and offices. The recent infringements of rights of LGBTI people in Europe show that there is a great need for the Member States and the EU to protect the human rights of LGBTI people. The long-awaited adoption of the Anti-Discrimination Directive would be an important step in this direction, as would be the recognition of same sex marriage in all EU Member States.

4

WELLBEING AS A CENTRAL OBJECTIVE OF THE EU: SETTING THE GROUND FOR A RENEWED GOVERNANCE

Covid-19 caused a crisis which forced governments around the world to take extraordinary measures, deemed unthinkable just a few weeks earlier. After this crisis, it will not be possible to revert to business as usual. For the EU to be more than a market and to keep its relevance in the eyes of citizens, as a project of solidarity that brings progress to all, it will have to set itself new priorities. As Socialists and Democrats, we are convinced that placing wellbeing as a central objective of EU policies can meet the challenge.

This will imply changing many policies and reviewing a great part of the EU's governance. While the challenge is great, it is also clear that both the Pillar of Social Rights and the UN SDGs already offer a strong anchor point for our family to push its values and policy proposals on the EU agenda. Wellbeing provides us with an opportunity to push all their specific objectives into the EU's policy-making and to offer a counter narrative to those who consider the Union only has a free market area or as an instrument to impose an ordo-liberal agenda.



4.1 THE EU'S COVID-19 RESPONSE MUST BE ORIENTED TOWARDS A MORE SUSTAINABLE AND FAIRER ECONOMIC MODEL



There is no doubt that the current Covid-19 crisis will harm employment, businesses, and economies. It would be a historic mistake to abandon them. We must stand shoulder to shoulder with workers, back SMEs, and support the sectors that have suffered in order to lessen the social and economic impact of Covid-19 now.

At the same time, any sort of public support to the private sector, to prevent or circumvent an economic crisis, should come with clear strings attached. We cannot repeat the mistakes of the past, when banks and the financial sector placed bets against the very states that saved them from bankruptcy. In comparison to the 2008 crisis, state aid and guarantees should be given with conditionalities: maintain the employment in each company supported by forbidding dismissals, make sure the money is used for the recovery by banning the payment of dividends and bonuses for the companies supported with public money.

Climate change, inequalities and digitalisation will not disappear because of Covid-19. If massive public amounts are to be injected in the economy, they should contribute to a fairer and more sustainable economic system rather than ending up being confiscated by some happy few when everything is “back to normal”. In case of massive support to specific companies, public authorities should become shareholders of the company and use this position to push it towards sustainable development and improved social practices, or at least benefit from a share of the future profits of the company.

PES has developed a full Covid-19 containment and recovery plan. The following proposals strongly echo it.

Proposals:

- The EU funds allocated as part of the recovery strategy should support sustainable sectors first. They should come with a clear set of social and sustainability clause for every company to comply with.
- No dividends or bonuses should be paid from companies who received post Covid-19 public support.
- Public support should be conditioned to capping the highest salaries in companies receiving support, while pushing for a raise of the lowest ones, in particular for the workers who continued working during the whole pandemic to ensure essential services, both in public institutions (healthcare, police, waste collection) and in the private sector (supermarkets, deliveries, platform workers, ...).
- More generally, the EU should develop a comprehensive social recovery strategy aimed at supporting and coordinating national responses to protect those who have been most affected by the Covid-19 crisis and to develop more resilient and equal societies for the future. This European social recovery strategy must be gender mainstreamed to ensure that women are not more exposed to the negative impacts of the crisis than men.
- To be ready to face future crisis, the European Union should build up on the European instrument for temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency (SURE) and establish a permanent and fully-fledged European Unemployment Reinsurance Scheme to intervene not only in support of unemployment systems, particularly for short-time work and income compensation arrangements, but also to enable such measures to be established, operational and universally accessible in all Member States.

4.2 WELLBEING SHOULD BECOME THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF A REVISED EUROPEAN SEMESTER

The creation of a portfolio for an “Economy that Works for People” within the European Commission is a first step in the right direction, which should push economic policy to better support wider societal and environmental goals. This change of orientation is partly confirmed by the switch from the Annual Growth Survey to the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy, which better integrates the SDGs in the European Semester. Nevertheless, this shift is not complete yet and will remain an open political battle for the years to come. This represents a great opportunity for us to put the objective of wellbeing in all its dimensions at the heart of EU policies and show that the wellbeing of its citizens is the EU’s priority, the true guiding principle for all EU and Member States’ policies. The European Semester is the tool we can use to push the objective of wellbeing, it needs to be reformed accordingly.



Existing fiscal objectives should be coupled and be put on an equal footing with sustainability objectives in the social, employment and environmental fields. A series of wellbeing indicators should be taken in consideration for a renewed European Semester and a more social and sustainable growth strategy.

Such indicators could, amongst others, reflect the capacity of a society to meet the basic human needs of its citizens, establish the building blocks that allow citizens and communities to enhance and sustain the quality of their lives, and create the conditions for all individuals to reach their full potential¹¹⁸. This would imply to complement existing data series, such as those produced by Eurostat to better monitor inequality, wage levels, poverty, inclusiveness, access to public services, to education¹¹⁹ as well as housing, access to nature, biodiversity, etc., and to use them to feed in the design, assessment, implementation and evaluation of EU and national public policies.

Proposals:

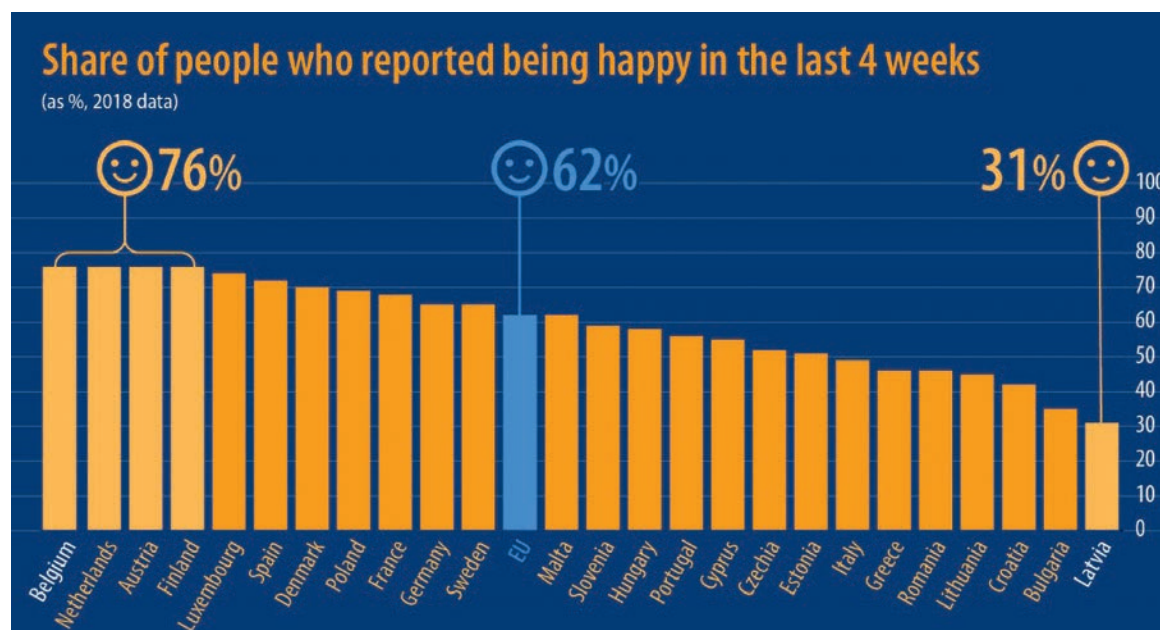
- The European Semester should measure and pursue sustainability and wellbeing policy goals and indicators¹²⁰, with clear, quantified and measurable policy goals in addition to the fiscal objectives defined in the six- and two-pack legislation. The measurement of growth performance based on GDP must expand to include a set of synthetic performance indicators based on UN SDGs and on the notion of equitable and sustainable wellbeing¹²¹, including the mainstreamed gender equality objective.
- The EU should develop and regularly monitor a set of wellbeing indicators, complementing, updating and refining existing data series in order to provide an overall assessment of wellbeing in EU Member

States, and support evidence based development of its socio-economic and environmental policies.

- Revise the Stability and Growth Pact to make it a Sustainable Development Pact whereby fiscal objectives on debt and deficit and other sustainability objectives in the social, employment and environmental field are taken into consideration on an equal footing.
- Budget policies for equitable and sustainable well-being¹²²: integrating sustainability targets and indicators into a refocused European Semester would make little sense if this does not impact national and EU budgets. There needs to be strong coherence between policy goals and budgetary means. The MFF, the Euro area fiscal stance, the missions entrusted to the European Investment Bank, national draft budgetary plans and the subsequent national stability and convergence programmes

need to clearly mirror policy commitments towards sustainable development and the SDGs based on well-identified policy goals.

- Gender budgeting should be standard practice at EU, national and local levels.
- The impact of current EU State Aid rules on the investment capacity of local and regional authorities must be assessed and if necessary, reviewed in order for these authorities to deliver better in the area of infrastructure and services.
- The Europe 2020 Strategy, the EU's agenda for growth and jobs for the current decade will come to an end, with no successor in sight for the moment. This offers a great opportunity to put forward a comprehensive wellbeing agenda to take over from it.



CONCLUSION

Putting people's wellbeing at the core of all policies is fundamental to overcoming many complex challenges we are faced with today. For too long, the EU has focused on economic growth only, with a narrow view of what counts as social progress. We can and should continue making our economies stronger, but economic gains must be used to advance people's wellbeing in all spheres. Securing citizens' wellbeing should become the primary aim of the European Union. It is about time for the EU to take concrete steps towards achieving this. Today, we have an opportunity to advance this topic further and push for our vision of sustainable Europe.

PES has for a long time been committed to advocating for measures that can improve wellbeing in different areas. We are now calling for a comprehensive progressive wellbeing agenda that places social, societal and environmental aspects under the same umbrella and offers clear solutions to make citizens' lives better, today and tomorrow.



ANNEX: FROM GDP TO WELLBEING

GDP has significant shortcomings because it cannot capture all dimensions of people's wellbeing. GDP alone says nothing of the quality of life, including whether people have leisure time, stable social connections or a good-quality working environment.¹²³ Numerous studies have shown that economic growth does not necessarily lead to a similar growth of household incomes, higher levels of subjective wellbeing, social cohesion and equality and does not improve the quality of governance and of public institutions.¹²⁴ Moreover, encouraging constant economic growth through ever increasing output, over production and wealth accumulation in the hands of a few leads to a faster depletion of natural resources and degrading ecosystems.¹²⁵

Because of these shortcomings, the “beyond GDP” debate gained more and more visibility over the years, either among international agencies, including the United Nations, the OECD, the World Bank, or within the EU and national governments. The debate evolved and led to a number of developments in global development research, as well as in the political arena:

- 1990: UNDP publishes the First Human Development Report with a multidimensional approach and a Human Development Index;¹²⁶
- 2000: the World Bank publishes its World Development Report which was based on multidimensional poverty;¹²⁷

- 2000: world leaders adopt the Millennium Development Goals;
- 2009: the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission publishes its report the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress;¹²⁸
- 2009: the European Commission publishes its Communication GDP and beyond, measuring progress in a changing world;¹²⁹
- 2011: the OECD launches its Better Life Initiative;
- 2015: world leaders adopt 2030 Development Agenda;
- 2018: the Wellbeing Economy Alliance is formed.
- 2019: the Council of the EU adopts Conclusions on the economy of wellbeing under the Finnish Presidency;

An institutional shift from considering human development from an economic perspective only to a multidimensional approach better reflecting social dimensions is happening. The Millennium Goals, succeeded by the Sustainable Development Goals, have provided an opportunity to discuss development as the interaction between many different factors, beyond GDP. Within the OECD, new ideas on the measurement of social progress began to influence governments to improve their frameworks that guide policy development.

More recently, several national governments, primarily centreleft, also spearheaded the shift towards the economy of wellbeing by incorporating a focus on wellbeing into their national economic programmes and budgetary discussions. Finland is one of them.¹³⁰ Some countries and organisations, have even organised together in the Wellbeing Economy Alliance¹³¹, which aims at encouraging governments to put wellbeing at the centre of their agenda and reshape their budgets accordingly.¹³² Sweden, at the initiative of Stefan Löfven, but also Italy, France, Scotland Latvia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom are examples of EU Member States using the concept of wellbeing to guide policy initiatives.¹³³

Outside Europe, New Zealand is a best practice example, where the coalition led by Labour Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's government has made wellbeing central to their policy programme since her election in 2017. The country's 2019 budget is the first in the western world to be designed based on the concept of wellbeing, with ambitious budget allocation for decreasing inequalities, mental health funding, and tackling child poverty and domestic violence.¹³⁴

Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand



NOTES

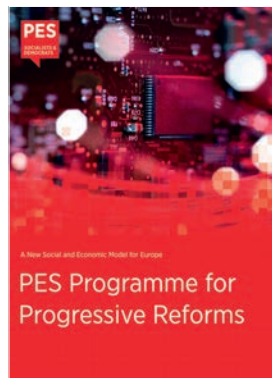
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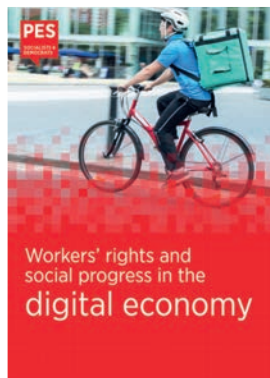
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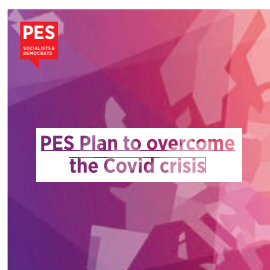
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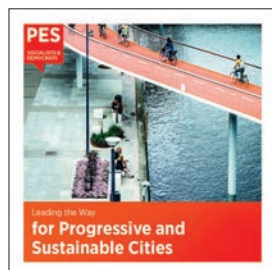
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