Nordic-IN statement on European Pillar of Social Rights

The Nordic federation of industrial employees, Nordic IN, support the principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The whole base of the European Union is challenged today, and there needs to be a clear redefinition of the Union to become a Europe for all Europeans.

This requires a rethinking of a long list of fundamental European policies. It also means that the Social Pillar cannot be limited to a declaration of principles. It also must be followed with initiatives on other European policy areas.

Social pillar policies should improve working life, work-life balance and ensure an active pension life. Policies should guarantee social security nets covering the entire life cycle.

Social pillar policies and active industrial policies should contribute to each other so that skilled and healthy workers are well employed in future industries and their social rights are respected.

Different approaches are needed with different aims and issues. The choice of method: EU competencies, open coordination, harmonization or only national policies should be discussed case by case with the social partners, EU bodies and Member States.

Socially fair growth

First of all Europe needs to return to growth and to a solid job-creation across the union. We call for the end of the austerity policies and the beginning of a policy of investments for jobs.

In such a policy change the further development of the EU’s Internal Market, economic investments, open trade policy, extension of IT-infrastructure, increasing funds for R&D and skills-development and vocational training to be better prepared and able to respond to the increasing pace of technological developments such as digitalization.

We also support EU level action against tax havens and tax avoidance, second phase of the EU investment fund, new balanced trade and investment pacts and creation of the Digital Internal Market.

All future trade pacts must include an effective enforcement system - including sanctions - for the sustainable development questions such as workers’ rights.

Implementation is a key issue

Competencies on social pillar issues to the commission may be needed, but this must happen inside the current mandate, supplemented with the powers given under the Euro rules. Possible changes of the EU competencies should be analysed carefully and with social partners case by case.

When it comes to the fiscal benchmarking and other policies, commission reports and evaluations are making clear choices on social and labour market issues, and here the pillar of social rights can be of real importance for the member countries.

Wages must remain a national competency and commission interference in national wage settings through the fiscal benchmarking must cease.

It is worth noticing that commission budget control also extends to countries outside the euro area and so must the social pillar.

Legal initiatives must be taken within existing EU competencies. Targeted use must be made of the European social and regional funds.
**The right of workers influence and representation.**

The EU must not repress workers participation whether at company level or in the national and sectoral collective agreements. The reinstatement of well-functioning social dialogue/industrial relations at all levels, including collective bargaining across Europe needs to be a European priority.

We call for a turnaround of EU policies to increasingly strengthen the social dialogue/industrial relations systems in all member states and at all levels in the labour market. Social partners must be involved in a responsible policy development in respect for workers’ elected representatives and organisations.

The right to representation at work and in the board room should be strengthened by focusing on and enlarging the existing directives. The existence of collective bargaining is fundamental. This includes protection of the right of workers (including self-employed workers) to organise in a trade union and to bargain collectively and take collective action, including strike action. It also includes adequate and effective protection against acts of anti-union discrimination.

The right to freedom of expression must be respected including protection from victimisation and dismissal for ‘whistle-blowers’, outlawing ‘blacklisting’ and offering redress and compensation to victims.

**Key issue of skills development**

Many companies have difficulties in finding skilled labour while at the same time unemployment remains relatively high and people are at risk at social exclusion. This mismatch leads to huge economic and human losses. Access for all persons to quality education and training is the most decisive element in securing the competitiveness of EU and future employability.

Skills development and training must be available for all workers, also older workers and workers with special needs. Lifelong learning must be made reality. Training, retraining and upskilling must happen on the job, not when the worker gets unemployed. Cooperation and closer relations must be encouraged between academia, training institutions and companies to create the best conditions possible for innovation and knowledge to turn from theory into practice.

For a skills policy to be efficient, it is also crucial that EU and national governments address these policies at all levels together with the social partners.

Trade policies and further development of the single European market will bring jobs to many, but others will lose their employment. Trade policies must be followed by a concerted effort from EU and national governments to secure a smooth transition of jobs of good value. We must avoid creations of socially exposed local areas as we have seen in the past.

Even if the responsibility for education and training remains mainly a competency of the Member States the issue must have a stronger role in the EU 2020-strategy and it must be given even more priority within the European Social Fund and other EU funds, such as the European Globalisation Fund. That is an important factor if the industry shall correspond to 20% of the EU countries' total GDP in 2020.

**Flexibility and security**

Flexibility is forced upon workers within the framework of EU and EURO-zone crisis policies. This has to a large extent happened without involvement of social partners and most certainly without the level of social and employment security which is the backbone of the flexicurity model.

There must be a balance between labour market flexibility, security and continuous modernization. In addition, we need growth friendly investments in education, employment, social security and work welfare.
Continuous skills development as mentioned above as well as an active employment policy is absolutely necessary.

An important element of worker security is active enforcement of existing EU employment rights and the securing the right to an employment. The latter is being eroded by new contract forms, bogus self employment and platform economy.

We maintain that all workers must be covered by employment rights, the right to adequate remuneration, fair terms and working conditions, education and training, unemployment protection, social protection, and pension rights, at a decent level in accordance with the ILOs Decent Work Agenda.

We also call for the right to protection against insecurity in employment: by placing limits on the practices, including prohibiting exploitative zero-hour contracts, if-and-when contracts and on-call arrangements, along with providing proactive protection such as the right to full-time work, adequate notice of working arrangements and support in restructuring situations; as well as protection in case of redundancy.

**Mobility**

Migration under the four freedoms of the single European market is not in itself a problem. On the contrary, migration contributes to economic growth, and the ability to, maintain social protection for everyone without differentiation.

Social dumping however is a problem across Europe from Lithuania to Ireland. Whether Belarusian workers are paid below the minimum wage in Lithuania or the same happens to Lithuanian workers in Ireland or Sweden, we are faced with an exploitation of workers, which is incomparable with the principles of European Social Justice on which the EU is built.

Action must be taken on the posting directive. Equal treatment on the labour market must be clarified and defined as EU-policy, in order to prevent discrimination.. At the same time, they must enable the national social partners to effectively address this important issue.

**Social Charter**

We call for a social charter committing the EU and the member states to guarantee pensions, unemployment insurance and sickness insurance at a decent level.

Today’s workforce is characterised by diversity. It operates on many kinds of labour markets and under various working arrangements. This happens in parallel with the technological developments and globalisation, which are changing the very nature of work. A one-size-fits-all approach does not work anymore.

**Principles for a European Pillar of Social Rights**

Finally we can support the claims from the ETUC that a European Pillar of Social Rights must

- Put social rights first;
- Guarantee UPWARD convergence and improvements for all workers;
- Promote quality employment not just minimum standards;
- Guarantee non-regression and ensure that legal interpretations benefit the worker;
- Extend beyond the Eurozone;
- Be based on both rights and benchmarks;
- Embed social dialogue/industrial relations at all levels, including collective bargaining, and protect collective agreements.

Nordic IN is a federation of all the 20 Trade Unions organising employees at all levels in the manufacturing industries, energy and mining in Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Iceland. Our affiliates have 1 million members.