



VICEPRESIDENCIA SEGUNDA DEL GOBIERNO  
MINISTERIO DE TRABAJO Y ECONOMÍA SOCIAL

MINISTERIO DE INCLUSIÓN, SEGURIDAD SOCIAL  
Y MIGRACIONES

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Nota de prensa

Second Social Forum (Porto)

## Spain and Belgium lead the European social agenda with initiatives in social and labor matters

- **Belgium and Spain intensify collaboration in social and labor issues in view of the Spanish and Belgian Presidencies of the Council of the EU**
- **The Ministries of Labor and Social Affairs of both countries have agreed on an unofficial document (non-paper) with innovative proposals, such as the introduction of a Social Progress Protocol or a new Charter of Workers' Rights**
- **Progress is expected in the strengthening of the social dimension of the EU economic governance, including the implementation of a new Social Convergence Framework to address social imbalances at the European level**

Porto, May 27, 2023.- The Second Vice-President of Government and Minister of Labor and Social Economy, Yolanda Díaz, and the Minister of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration, José Luis Escrivá, together with their Belgian counterparts in the fields of Labor and Social Affairs, Pierre-Yves Dermagne and Frank Vandenbroucke, have agreed today to strengthen their collaboration at the European level by presenting new social initiatives that will set the agenda for social and labor policies of the upcoming European Commission and the next European Parliament, to be elected in 2024.

The collaboration has been sealed by the signature of an unofficial document (non-paper) agreed upon by both parties in Porto, at the margins of the European Social Forum organized by the Portuguese government and the European Commission.



Various points are outlined, among which the introduction of a Social Progress Protocol in the Treaties of the European Union or the promotion of a Charter of Workers' Rights stands out.

Furthermore, the document includes strengthening the social dimension of the European economic governance, with the adoption and implementation of a new Social Convergence Framework to address social imbalances. It further supports the adoption of actions aimed at strengthening access to adequate social protection for all, social dialogue, green collective bargaining, workplace democracy, and exploring all avenues to promote social economy. A more comprehensive approach to mental health that includes stress, burn-out and job instability aspects is underlined.

### **Social Progress Protocol and SURE Program**

Spain and Belgium aim to bring to life one of the proposals that emerged during the Conference on the Future of Europe held in May 2022, which called for taking measures to protect social rights in the event of conflict with economic freedoms. To achieve this, they propose the incorporation of a Social Progress Protocol into the Treaties of the European Union.

To advance the full implementation of the Social Pillar of Social Rights, both countries consider it necessary to build upon the successful experience of the SURE program, a mechanism that emerged during the pandemic and focused on protecting employment by providing financial support to job retention schemes. The idea now is to establish a structural instrument with similar characteristics that supports member states facing the challenges of the ecological and digital transitions in the labor market, safeguarding decent work and preventing social and labor cutbacks.

### **Social investment and minimum income**

The document emphasizes the importance of social investment, highlighting the need to negotiate a revisited European fiscal framework that guarantees adequate funding for welfare systems and public services,



also including protecting social investment in times of crisis and economic turbulence. To achieve this, it proposes developing metrics that tangibly define the material and social returns of public investment and identify those that can have a beneficial multiplier effect on future savings for public accounts.

The text also suggests the opportunity to strengthen the social protection systems of member states, particularly in two areas: 1) expanding the coverage and deepening the connection of minimum income schemes with the labor market through inclusion pathways that allow for the scaling up of best practices; 2) improving the adequacy and transparency of social security benefits for all workers and self-employed.

Additionally, it proposes taking further steps at the European level in terms of lifelong learning, with a focus on childhood, the care economy, and educational policies.

### **Social Convergence Framework**

The need to strengthen debt sustainability cannot be separated from the necessity to enhance long-term inclusive growth and fight social imbalances both between and within member states.

In this regard, both governments have agreed to push for a swift adoption and implementation of the Social Convergence Framework within the European Semester which builds on the European Pillar of Social Rights.

This annual assessment tool will allow for better monitoring and evaluation of social policies implemented across all 27 countries in the bloc. Spain and Belgium, as promoters of this initiative, are convinced that it will strengthen social rights and contribute to foster upwards social convergence in Europe.

### **Promoting social dialogue and establishing a Charter of Workers' Rights**

Social dialogue will be a priority for Spain during its presidency of the Council of the European Union. Both countries aim to strengthen this avenue to promote workplace democracy and contribute to sustainable development, including by fostering green collective bargaining, which



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enables the digital and ecological transition without compromising workers' rights.

Furthermore, the two countries aim to adopt a Charter of Workers' Rights and establish greater democratic participation in the workplace, as well as the possibility of reaching European collective agreements, among other measures.

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