

CONFERENCE ON MINIMUM INCOME SCHEMES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION POLICY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF EUROPEAN SOCIAL PROTECTION

ARANJUEZ DECLARATION

On the 16 October the Member States, representatives of the European Union Institutions, social partners and civil society gathered in Aranjuez, on the eve of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, at the International Conference on Income Security and Inclusion. Following the proceedings of the Conference, the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union declares:

Whereas

- The European Pillar of Social Rights sets out the key principles and essential rights for a strong social Europe that is fair, inclusive and full of opportunity. Principle 14 of the Pillar 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.”*
- In May 2021, the Porto Social Summit afforded the EU institutions, social partners and civil society organisations an opportunity to sign up to the three 2030 headline social targets with a social Europe in mind: (1) employment recovery and the creation of quality jobs, (2) investment in skills, life-long learning and training, and (3) adequate inclusion and social protection policies. They did so through the joint Porto Social Commitment which led to the Porto Declaration adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the EU.
- The governments of the EU Member States have endorsed the social targets from the European Strategy 2030 included in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and have presented their national contributions to achieving those targets. In the specific case of inclusion policies, the target is for a reduction of at least 15 million in the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including at least 5 million children.
- On 30 January 2023, the EU Council adopted a Recommendation on adequate minimum income in which Member States are recommended to achieve a more adequate level of income support, improve the coverage of minimum income schemes and access to inclusive labour markets and essential services, promote individualised support, increase the effectiveness of the governance of social safety nets and their monitoring.

Affirming:

- The current context of socioeconomic recovery in the wake of successive crises and due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, together with the consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have all contributed to the increased risk of poverty and inequality. As governments we should offer responses to match these challenges.
- More than ever, Europe should be a continent of social cohesion that guarantees a minimum income allowing people to enjoy a life in dignity, with consideration to their capacity to work and integration in the labour market. This income should effectively reach everyone who needs it and so Member States should do more, in accordance with national law and practice, to combat the common problem of non take-up of minimum income support. Identifying the causes of that non take-up is crucial to be able to put in place more effective measures to reduce it.
- Minimum incomes need to be supplemented by policies that incentivise access to employment but also, *inter alia*, to education, skills, healthcare, and early childhood care. It is essential to develop further the complementarity of minimum incomes with social inclusion pathways to increase both their coverage and effectiveness.
- But we still need more evidence about the inclusion policies that work best to be able to support the most vulnerable as they transit towards a better situation. The development of public policies –especially social policies– should be based on scientific evidence obtained, if necessary, through experimentation. The use of administrative records should be present from the design stage of the policy right through to its execution and also in the final evaluation of its results.
- And most importantly, the goal is not only to offer protection from social risks ex post, but also to boost the opportunities and capabilities of individuals to deal ex ante with the social risks typical of post-industrial economies, while guaranteeing at the same time the high level of employment necessary to maintain the resources required by the Welfare State which depends on employment and productivity. Social investment as such encompasses a broad range of areas, such as education and training in skills, effective and well-managed active labour market policies, employment services, the care sector (childcare, healthcare, long-term care), active inclusion policies, social housing and policies that enable access to services, including essential services. All in all, social investment not only contributes to reducing poverty and inequality, but also generates returns through higher growth and productivity, more jobs and higher wages.
- **A prosperous and fair Europe depends to a great extent on investments in people and their welfare.**