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Social pillar will define next decade of European policy, EU official says



The action plan for a European Pillar of Social Rights will mark the next decade of European policies, European Commission advisor on social rights José António Vieira da Silva has said.

Speaking to EURACTIV's partner Lusa, Vieira da Silva explained that the action plan the European Commission presented on Thursday details the instruments to realise the principles that guide the EU bloc's social policy, approved by EU leaders at the 2017 Social Summit in Sweden.

The European Commission held an extensive public consultation, in which it received "hundreds or thousands of contributions", in addition to debates among countries and in the European Parliament.

The EU executive also took into account a Eurobarometer survey on the problems identified by European citizens and which "confirms the high priority people give to the social dimension".

"It is clear that the responses are not the same from one country to another, but there is a major common trend: social problems, particularly the problem of the quality of employment and the problem of health, are common to all countries," he said.

The action plan provides, therefore, the response to these problems identified by European citizens, but its presentation "does not mean that the work is all done", Vieira da Silva warned, adding that many of these instruments still need to be developed both in the member states and the EU institutions themselves.

In this action plan, the European Commission sets targets that member states should achieve by 2030, namely, to have at least 78% of the EU population in employment and a minimum of 60% of workers with training actions every year and to lift at least 15 million people out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Vieira da Silva considered that these goals are possible to achieve.



However, he admitted that there are decisive factors such as the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic “which is not yet overcome, far from it” and the process of transition of the economic and social model, which is “very intense and accelerated”.

“These two factors will greatly influence Europe’s ability to achieve these goals, whether in employment, in qualifications or in fighting exclusion. These are factors that we can act on,

but we cannot control them,” he said.

Another factor also part of this equation is the political will, which becomes even more important in this pandemic context, he emphasised.

“Even though we are living a very demanding moment, doubly demanding, because of the transitions and the crisis, these goals will only be achieved if there is political will from the member states and the EU”, he stressed.

A flagship event of Portugal’s EU Presidency is a Social Summit in Porto on 7-8 May, in which Lisbon plans to reach an agreement among the 27 on the European Pillar of Social Rights, based on this action plan.

“The EU has a huge historical responsibility, as it is where the most developed social model humanity has ever known was born. So, this Pillar is about that. With a social model that is unique in the whole world,” he said.

According to Vieira da Silva, one of the aspects that distinguishes Europe from the other blocks is the ability to transform social policies into something that is based on individual and collective rights – the right to education, the right to health, the right to protection in old age, the right to protection in sickness, the right to protection in crises.

“The ambition of the action plan is to deepen this model and to take a further step towards putting social emphasis at the heart of European concerns,” he said.

