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Faith-based actors and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights

SUMMARY

The European Pillar of Social Rights was jointly proclaimed and signed by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council at the Gothenburg Social Summit in November 2017. The 20 principles and rights that make up the Social Pillar build on the existing social *acquis*, i.e. social mandate contained in binding provisions of EU law, and should serve as a 'compass' for the renewal of current labour markets and welfare systems across the European Union (EU). Their implementation is largely the responsibility of the Member States in cooperation with the social partners and with the support of the European Union.

Faith-based organisations are similar to voluntary organisations, i.e. civil society associations, third-sector organisations and non-profit organisations. Some are inspired by religious values without being formally linked to religious institutions. They play an important role in addressing social problems, particularly in relation to under-served populations. They often cooperate with secular organisations and contribute to the welfare state. In the EU context, there is no distinction between faith-based and secular organisations, when it comes to policy development, programme implementation or funding.

Faith-based organisations have welcomed the Social Pillar and have emphasised in particular the role they could play in its implementation at grassroots level. Not only can they provide services, they can also help to devise strategies and funding schemes by connecting local, national and European actors. There are still a lot of gaps in the evaluation of their activities, however, which makes it difficult to quantify their real contribution to the functioning of the welfare state.

In this Briefing

What is the European Pillar of Social Rights?

The European Pillar of Social Rights (the Social Pillar) is a set of 20 principles and rights that should support the renewal of current labour markets and welfare systems across the EU. According to the European Commission, it should serve 'as a compass for a renewed process of convergence towards better working and living conditions among participating Member States'. Updating social and employment standards to reflect the new realities of work and daily lives is an important step towards this goal. The Social Pillar was adopted in April 2017 after a detailed consultation process on the Commission's first proposal in 2016. The final framework was jointly proclaimed and signed by the three institutions – Commission, Parliament and Council – at the Gothenburg Social Summit in November 2017.

The principles and rights address three main areas: equal opportunities and access to labour markets; fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion. They build on the existing social *acquis*, i.e. social mandate contained in binding provisions of EU law, but in certain areas go further (for instance, for the self-employed). The principles and rights are addressed to EU citizens and third-country nationals legally resident in the Member States. Currently, the Social Pillar does not have a legally binding status. It is a Commission recommendation, and its implementation is the responsibility of the Member States, in close cooperation with the social partners and with the support and contribution of the EU. It was originally designed for the euro-area Member States but can be implemented throughout the EU.

Implementation of the Social Pillar

Some initial evaluations claim that although the Social Pillar is not presented as a legally enforceable instrument, it has the potential to bring about a new policy dynamic. On the one hand, it not only speaks about rights but actually goes deep into some areas of labour law. On the other, it could affect the EU's economic governance. The same evaluation also points out that the Social Pillar is somewhat reminiscent of the 1989 Community Charter of Fundamental Social Rights for Workers, which also created a new momentum, though no legally binding rights. It laid the foundations for new treaty changes. It also sparked a discussion on fundamental rights in the EU and this led in 2009 to the current (binding) Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.[1]

The EU can support the implementation of the Social Pillar's principles and rights through several channels: legislation, guidance, funding and governance. A March 2018 communication and a staff working document by the Commission took stock of the implementation of Social Pillar principles to date and also outlined possible further developments.

Several related legislative and non-legislative initiatives contributing to the implementation of the principles of the Social Pillar had already been launched before the proposal was proclaimed. These included the European Accessibility Act, the 'New start for social dialogue' and the youth guarantee. Alongside the launch of the Social Pillar, the European Commission also produced a proposal on work-life balance with minimum standards for parental, paternity and carer's leave, initiated consultations on the Written Statement Directive and on access to social protection, and put forward an interpretative communication on the Working Time Directive. Against the backdrop of the Social Pillar, the European Commission meanwhile issued proposals revising the rules on the posting of workers in the European Union, modernising the coordination of social security systems, establishing a new skills agenda so as to equip more people with better skills, revising various pieces of legislation in the field of occupational health and safety, and addressing access to affordable, preventive and curative health care. Other proposals were launched afterwards, including the social fairness package with a proposal for a Council recommendation for social protection for all, a new proposal for transparent and predictable working conditions that would repeal the current Written Statement Directive, and a proposal to move towards a European education area so as to make high-quality, inclusive education accessible to all.

Decisions regarding the future of EU finances will have a major impact on the level of support that the implementation of the Social Pillar will receive. The debate on the post-2020 multiannual financial framework (MFF), starting with the Commission's proposal in May 2018, will also be influential as several funding programmes and instruments support social priorities as well as policies relating to the labour market and education. The sectoral proposals particularly relevant are the European Social Fund+,[2] the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, Erasmus+, and also the Cohesion Fund and the European Regional Development Fund.

Alongside the Social Pillar, the European Commission also put forward a social scoreboard with 12 headline indicators to monitor progress on its implementation. Most of these indicators were already being used in relation to the joint employment report (JER) and the yearly reports on employment and social developments. The scoreboard will be instrumental in strengthening the social aspects of the EU's economic governance. These indicators have already been used this year in the European Semester, in which the in-depth-reviews focused on skills challenges and on national social safety nets. Moreover, the JER that feeds into the November annual growth survey (AGS), and that sets out the EU's economic and social priorities for the next 12 to 18 months, also used the social scoreboard. According to the Commission, the principles and rights enshrined in the Social Pillar will be assessed as part of the future European Semester cycles and some specific themes pertaining to the Social Pillar will be assessed more in detail. Likewise, existing benchmarking and exchange of good practice, planned benchmarking should further help to identify problem areas where further EU support might be necessary. This might, for example, involve providing tailor-made technical support for institutional, administrative and policy reforms with the assistance of the Commission's Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS).

What are faith-based organisations?

Definition

Faith-based organisations (FBOs) are similar to voluntary organisations, i.e. civil society associations, third sector organisations and non-profit organisations (NGOs). To help to better understand the characteristics of FBOs, scholars have developed a number of typologies, categorising FBOs and their expressions of religion. Variations have been found in organisational control, expression of religion and programme implementation, including funding models. These in turn are important for a deeper understanding of the impact of religion on the non-profit sector, especially on social service delivery. They are also strongly related to the question of FBOs' relationship to government, and whether government should or should not support FBOs' development in one direction or another, and whether FBOs' service delivery differs from that of non-FBOs. There are also issues surrounding the fact that they function differently from their secular counterparts, and also their greater readiness to respond to certain social problems since they have provided social services in Europe for centuries. In this context, the most important differences exist in the areas of: revenue sources, organisational capacity, programmes and services, effectiveness and community perceptions. A recent EPRS briefing defined FBOs as independent from the state and as organisations that are either i) congregations affiliated with physical structures, such as local churches; ii) national networks of congregations, including national denominations and their social services affiliates; iii) or unaligned or freestanding religious organisations, which are separate from congregations and national networks.

FBOs and the welfare state

With the transformation of the welfare state since the 1990s, there has been an increasing focus on the role of voluntary organisations, including FBOs, in social welfare. Interest in the role of FBOs first began to gather ground in the United States in the 1990s, but changes were also taking place in European countries at the same time. Many studies have looked into the importance of FBOs' contributions to social work, social capital and social cohesion. These studies have tended to

emphasise FBOs' importance in addressing social problems, particularly in relation to under-served groups, such as the poor, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, children, migrants and other socially excluded groups. However, the reasons for their changing position within the welfare state have not been clarified. Some put the change down to the neoliberal turn in the welfare state together with decentralisation of control, globalisation and socio-economic changes. Yet, these are macro-mechanisms that do not explain individual developments in any one country. An article looking into four European countries with different welfare state traditions according to Esping-Andersen[3] – namely the United Kingdom (liberal), France and Germany (conservative corporatist), and Sweden (social democratic) – explained the historical roots of the current state of play. It looked into the development of the state-church relationship, based on the supposition that religious cleavages in society were important factors in determining the type of welfare state and the development of the voluntary sector in the different countries. It found that in the UK, the changing role of the voluntary sector and the support given to it have led to FBOs starting to gain greater social policy significance. In Sweden, the disentanglement of the traditional state-church unity has led to a growing presence of FBOs in the welfare sector, although social welfare provision has remained stable. In Germany, some changes have been made to the established denominations of the Catholic and Protestant churches, owing to the increasing religious diversity of society, but the position of FBOs has remained unchanged, as voluntary associations have remained the institutionalised partners of social welfare provision. In France, with decentralisation and democratisation in the social welfare sector, the role of both secular and faith-based organisations has grown, but FBOs are not considered a specific group among voluntary associations. In France, the *laicist* tradition has precluded the rise of religion in the public sphere. The article emphasised in all cases the increasing diversity of faiths represented in these organisations, as well as the singularity of the FBOs' relationship to the welfare state in every single country.

FBOs and the Social Pillar

The Social Pillar emphasises that the implementation of the bulk of its principles and rights remains the preserve of the Member States. Only principles and rights with 'dedicated measures or legislation to be adopted at the appropriate level' can be 'legally enforceable'. It also stresses that the principles and rights should be implemented according to the socio-economic context, with the social partners at Member State level, fully upholding the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. This means that Member States will have a free hand in the implementation process, and therefore in deciding the extent to which they involve FBOs in the process, depending on their respective welfare state context as discussed above.

There are several ways in which FBOs can contribute explicitly or indirectly to the implementation of the Social Pillar principles and rights: through direct programmes at local level, but also by influencing the development of legislation and policies, and through local, national and European-level funding schemes. For some grassroots examples, see the box below.

Several FBO umbrella organisations have welcomed the Social Pillar and explained how they could contribute to its implementation. Social Services Europe (SSE), the largest European umbrella organisation representing non-profit social and health care providers, including faith-based Eurodiaconia and Caritas Europa, as well as secular organisations, such as the European Council of Associations of General Interest (CEDAG), the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) and the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), issued a position paper on the implementation of the Social Pillar in April this year. The paper emphasised the important role social services provided by these organisations can play in implementing the Social Pillar. It also stressed that social services are not only indispensable for implementing at least ten of the principles and rights of the Social Pillar but that they also employ more than 10 % of the EU's workforce. Moreover, it claimed that SSE could be instrumental in implementing the principles and rights at grassroots level by mobilising national, regional and local actors.

In the case of SSE, secular and faith-based organisations work hand in hand for a common cause, which is often the case at local level too. When it comes funding, the EU does not distinguish between secular organisations and FBOs. FBOs can participate in and thus benefit from EU-funded projects through, for example, the European structural and investment funds and Erasmus+. In addition, for example, Eurodiaconia and Caritas Europe have signed a Framework Partnership Agreement with the European Commission Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion for the 2018-2021 period. Many of Eurodiaconia's planned activities involve supporting and monitoring the implementation of the Social Pillar. Eurodiaconia is also planning research with partner organisations on the impact of policy decisions at local, regional and national level in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, in particular in the fields of digitalisation in social care, the effectiveness of social inclusion policies in relation to migrants, and the effectiveness of support for the long-term unemployed. In the same context, Caritas Europa follows the impact of policies through its poverty observatory and produces national and European poverty reports. It also supports job creation and the development of the social economy in its member organisations.

FBOs can also be active partners in designing policies, and thus influence legislation or EU governance mechanisms, such as the European Semester. Caritas Europa, for example, issued a position paper on how the next MFF could support the promotion of social justice and recommends at least 30 % of the European Social Fund be spent on fighting poverty and social exclusion.[4] It emphasised the strong role the Social Pillar can play in meeting the UN sustainable development goals and argued that the European Parliament should have full budgetary and control authority in relation to the MFF, as its members are elected directly by the citizens. Eurodiaconia, meanwhile, pointed out that while placing greater emphasis on social and employment issues (59 % of the recommendations), the 2018 draft country-specific recommendations (CSRs) still put emphasis on employment issues. In this context, it came forward with a new tool, the European Semester Compass with specific information on the process and tips on how to engage with it and really translate it for the local and national actors.

FBO projects that are already contributing implicitly to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights

Diakonie housing counselling for asylum-seekers and refugees in Vienna (Austria) offers assistance to a very vulnerable group of disadvantaged minorities, challenged by limited access to housing. The project aims to help to prevent unlawful and forced evictions as well as to find adequate, stable and lasting accommodation to secure social inclusion and facilitate the integration process.

The Hungarian Maltese Charity Service launched a development programme in cooperation with social workers and volunteer organisations in the Roma settlement of Monor, close to Budapest (Hungary). One project initiative was to develop Sure Start children's centres with EU funding. Children up to five years of age could participate with their parents, leading to stronger integration in society.

The Aga Khan Foundation in Portugal is strongly engaged in improving quality of life for older people by developing intergenerational projects and increasing their community involvement. It also supports informal caregivers by developing their skills, as well as strengthening the skills of professional caregivers.

Hatzola is a volunteer ambulance team in North London (United Kingdom) which aims to provide medical treatment for anyone in need within a very short time.

Challenges and opportunities

The role of FBOs in implementing social and employment policies is under-researched, particularly when it comes to country-specific observations. There is even less information available in relation to the Member States that joined the EU since 2004.

Looking into the relationship between religion and social progress, a recent report emphasises that social development does not need to be associated with secularisation, and that FBOs, along with

governments, philanthropic actors and NGOs, have a grassroots presence in healthcare, education and welfare provision. Therefore, they are well placed to be critical partners in the pursuit of social progress. This can be all the more relevant as some would argue that faith has an important role in people's lives, and thus in their attitudes towards solving social problems. However, the question still remains whether in certain situations, FBOs might be more effective in implementing policies than their secular counterparts. Additionally, examining the evaluation of the effectiveness of faith-based social services, a systematic review in the US points to the limited methodological rigor of the evaluation studies, and hence doubts the accuracy of their results. It explains that previous studies focused mainly on client outcome, and so disregarded the broader context and the institutional setup, so there is rarely an explanation as so why certain programmes are effective. In addition, faith, spirituality and religion are rarely included as predictor variables in evaluation studies to explore their specific effects on client outcomes.

Finally, some[5] have observed a change in the old typology for the welfare state when analysing it in relation to the financial and economic crisis of 2008. They suggest that instead of clustering countries by welfare state regimes, it would be preferable to identify convergence in certain policy areas, such as greater protection for older people, more social investment in family policies and childcare provision, privatisation or individualisation of policies, as a response to austerity measures and budget constraints, etc., across regimes. This framework could allow for a new kind of analysis of the role of FBOs in implementing social and employment policies in the Member States.

MAIN REFERENCES

International Panel on Social Progress, Rethinking society for the 21st century, June 2018.

Milotay N., Social governance in the European Union: Governing complex systems, EPRS, European Parliament, November 2017.

ENDNOTES

1 The Charter's provisions apply to the EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies, with due regard for the principle of subsidiarity, and to Member States only when they are implementing EU law.

2 European Social Fund+ includes the European Social Fund (ESF), the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), the Fund for European Aid for the Most Deprived (FEAD), the Employment and Social Innovation Programme (EaSI) and the programme for the Union's action in the field of health (the Health Programme).

3 G. Esping-Andersen, *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*, 1990.

4 Since 2014, a minimum of 20 % of the European Social Fund has been earmarked for social inclusion and for combatting poverty. According to recent estimates, Member States are spending up to 25.6 % of ESF funds for these purposes.

5 P. Taylor-Gooby, B. Leruth and H. Chung, (eds.), *After austerity: welfare state transformation in Europe after the great recession*, Oxford University Press, August 2017.

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