

A green vision for a social Europe

Setting the scene

The Green vision : an inclusive and cohesive society

European Greens stand for a Europe which guarantees all citizens the possibility to emancipate themselves, to establish their own lives in diversity and to participate in society. Citizens must enjoy equal opportunities and equal rights and benefit from an active social policy and a robust social protection. In our perspective, these objectives are as important as the ecological and economic objectives. The Greens reject a neo liberal globalization which increases insecurity and the competition of all against all. Solidarity and responsibility must be the cornerstones of an inclusive and cohesive society.

It is the responsibility of society to create conditions for citizens to realize their talents and ambitions, to choose their lives and to participate. It has to take care of social justice and social inclusion for all. That means for example universal access to health care, to education, to housing, to good work, to social services etc.... We need a strong welfare system to protect citizens against social risks. Society has to ensure that no one is being discriminated on grounds of gender, ethnic or social origin, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, disability. Also, if social policy aims at enabling people, then it must choose for individual approaches, avoiding the "one size fits all" trap. If society is to live up to all its responsibilities, it has to devote substantial financial and human means to social policy. For us Greens, this is an investment in people, not just a burden on the government's budget. A socially sustainable society is at the very heart of the responsibilities of government. It has to define the rules and enforce them; it has to organize the funding of social policy and to guarantee equal access. We Greens stand against privatizing social security systems.

A socially sustainable society is also a corporate responsibility. Enterprises, institutions and organized civil society play an important role in creating a socially sustainable society, as these organizations are the co-creators of important parts of people's lives – especially their working lives. We want them to offer decent jobs, to allow for a sustainable work/life balance, for the possibility of life-long learning ... Furthermore, they must be a key financial contributor to the funding of social policies.

For us Greens, an inclusive and cohesive society is not a one-way street from the state to the citizens. We believe we all have responsibilities for our own lives, towards one another and to society. We want every citizen to participate in a multi-active society, where paid work is one way of participating, but certainly not the only one. Taking care of relatives, voluntary work, involving oneself into community initiatives... are all forms of participation are essential to a sustainable society and therefore must be recognized by society. Citizens taking responsibility is a necessary part of creating a socially sustainable society. This is why it is essential to motivate and enable them to do so.

A number of long-standing objectives of our social policy, like bridging the gender gap or putting an end to poverty... remain to be achieved. On top of that, new challenges have emerged, including the increasing rate of job turnover, the growing number of precarious workers, the advent of globalization, the migrations, the aging of our societies. This is why we need an ambitious transformation of our social policies and of their funding, one that puts solidarity at their heart.

For us Greens, building a social Europe means a strong social policy at all levels of government – local, regional, national *and* at the level of the European Union. A social Union means that social inclusion becomes one of the main objectives of the EU policies. Instead of rigid uniform solutions we support a welfare model that gives people equal opportunities and enables people to choose to live their lives in different ways.

Why We Cannot Stay on the Current Course

The challenge European societies are facing are enormous. Europe looks richer than ever however poverty and social exclusion are rising. In the last 20 years, economic distribution has become more unequal in almost all European countries : the relative share of wages in the GDP has gone down vs. that of the capital, while inequalities in income have sharply gone up. At the same time, rigid zero-budget deficit policies and tax competition have reduced the room for maneuver for compensating and redistributive social policies. Globalisation that encourages a race to the bottom in social standards, an ageing population, deep technological changes, increasing social inequalities are some of the factors that are challenging the European solidarity model. The fact that the energy crisis leads to skyrocketing prices of oil as well as the increase in food prices is creating additional social disruption.

The reality is that the Barroso commission as well as the conservative majority dominating the EU Council and Parliament have not answered these challenges. Instead, their policies have been increasingly undermining the European welfare states. A very recent and significant example of that trend was the Council's proposal on the directive on working time that will make maximum weekly working hours of 60 to 65 or more on average possible. Also the Services Directive is a good example of the direction which the

Commission is going in. Even if the finally adopted directive is far removed from the original Bolkestein proposal it still includes a large number of loopholes.

Important measures like a directive on the Services of General Interest, in order to ensure access to high-quality health and social services, are not taken. There is an increasing tendency of the Commission, under the leadership of José Manuel Barroso to sideline matters of social inclusion; the rules of the internal market continue to be given priority over fundamental social rights.

Too often, e.g. on the services directive or on the taxation of financial speculation, the Greens have been alone in proposing a credible alternative to the conservative and neo-liberal policies which have dominated Europe's political agenda. Besides, many who claim an aspiration to a social Europe actually oppose any role for the EU in that space.

Currently, the EU's principal instrument in the social field has been the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Thus far, it has failed to strengthen Europe's social dimension, as it is subordinated to the one-sided economic and budgetary objectives of the Stability and Growth Pact and to Lisbon's single market agenda. This subordination must be broken if we want the OMC to deliver results.

European Greens also strongly criticize recent decisions by the European Court of Justice in labor-market related cases (Laval, Viking and Rüffert) which undermine workers' social rights and the trade unions' right to organize and fight for the working peoples' interests.

We cannot stand the current course; its dire social consequences are all too obvious.

Even if the EU is one of the economically most prosperous regions of the world, the statistics show that Europe is facing a serious poverty problem. In all, 76 millions of EU citizens live below the poverty line (a household income that is 60% or less of the national median household income) and 36 millions have to be considered on the borderline of that risk.

Nearly 20% or 18 million children and youngsters under 18 are at risk of poverty. The last three decades have seen a significant increase in child poverty rates which in all member states are higher than among the population as a whole. Children with the highest risk of poverty live in single parent families and in migrant families. While in general the situation of old people has improved in the last decades, a high number of old people still live in poverty. According to the EU Commission one out of six elderly people, mainly women, live in poverty.

Poverty goes hand in hand with high unemployment rates. Youth unemployment is still close to 20% across the EU and twice as high as the overall unemployment rate. Moreover, Europe has an increasing rate of working poor. For instance, even if the employment rate for women has increased in the last years, many new jobs created for women in the services sector are precarious and badly paid. Compared with 6,6% of men, 30,5% of

working women in the EU have a part-time job, a choice often forced upon them by a lack of affordable childcare facilities. Moreover, an increasing number of people are being forced to accept temporary work contracts without equal social protection. All in all, as many as 8% of the employed people have to be considered at poverty risk due to their precarious situation or to low wages.

The transformation to a more knowledge based economy is increasing the risk of a dual society as a growing number of people with a lower level of education face the risk of becoming structurally redundant. At the same time our educational systems are not able yet to develop the talents of all. In many countries, the quality of education suffers from the lack of personnel and of good infrastructure. Moreover, continuous individual support and innovative learning methods are not widely implemented. Currently the social background is largely determining the educational curriculum of young people. Too many children from low-income families and from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds drop out of our educational systems.

The increasing movement of citizens for work, holiday and study calls for a better coordination of health policies and health systems in EU. This need is strengthened by an increasing movement of patients and health professionals seeking and offering health care across borders. This need for better European coordination is raising at a time, when health care systems throughout EU have increasing difficulties in meeting public expectations, the ageing of populations, introduction of new health technologies and techniques within the available resources.

We need a strong European social policy that complements and supports the national welfare systems in guaranteeing social rights and achieving the goal of a truly inclusive society.

A truly just and sustainable Social Europe needs to include a global perspective. Current unfair and aggressive trade and migration policies towards developing countries are destructive. In the long run a more egalitarian distribution of income and wealth is needed - not only within Europe but around the world. In order to reach that goal the EU should adopt the principal aim to promote a fundamental transition towards a model of balanced and equitable globalisation and development. In relationships with developing countries this includes trading relations based on non-reciprocity and specific assistance to fulfil human rights and environmental and social sustainability standards. Furthermore policies for stable and development-friendly financial markets, more development aid and a comprehensive human security strategy are urgently needed.

What is a social Europe? Our proposals

People participate in society in many different roles in different domains : family, working life, community, social networks, education, markets, democracy... The European Greens acknowledge that the lack of possibility to have decent access to one or more of these may result in social segregation and lead to exclusion. A society accepting exclusion is harmful to its members and to itself. Social inclusion of all members of a society therefore is not only a moral imperative, but an unalienable right of any citizen as well as a basic requirement for a free, participatory, peaceful but also innovative and dynamic society. Social inclusion is also a precondition for a gender-balanced and discrimination-free society.

Our idea of social inclusion comprehends the basic social rights, including the right to income, to affordable housing, to health care, to education, to work, to a good environment, to culture etc. and a guarantee of social security. It includes as well fair working income, sufficient benefits for those who need them, free access to public services like child-care but also an individual entitlement to all basic goods and services of general interest : energy, water, mobility supported by a well developed public transport-system; public space for children and young people to realize their ideas, public support in adapting apartments and public space in an ecological way, healthy food and a high level of useful and barrier-free social support-services. Life is more than sleeping, eating and working.

Within Europe, the organization of the welfare state has so far been a national competency. While we believe the European Union should not aim at developing a “one size fits all” welfare state which should replace those in force at national level, we believe it has an increasing role to play in that field. The greens are not striving for a total harmonization of an EU-social model, but rather for minimum standards that every welfare state should fulfill. Beyond that, the different cultures and models of the member states can remain as the citizens want them to.

First, as we want to increase the social justice both within and between member states, we believe the EU should act in order to foster the convergence of the social standards among its members. There are no second-rate citizens in the EU. As an example, we Greens believe the EU Stability and Growth Pact should be replaced with one which also takes into account the sustainable development objectives that we want to put at the core of the EU strategy. Concretely speaking, it should for instance include binding targets in terms of greenhouse gas emission reductions, employment rates, poverty levels – especially for children - and the level of natural capital depletion... Economic and social policy have to complement each other in a sustainable and just way.

Second, as free movement is a right of EU citizens, much remains to be done in order to ensure that those legally resident in the EU enjoy a solid social coverage when they live, study, work or simply visit another Member State.

Furthermore, in a spirit of extended solidarity, the Greens believe the EU should encourage cooperation between any number of its Member States to develop common initiatives in the social policy area, on a voluntary basis.

Ensuring a decent income

The lack of economic capacity is one of the main factors of social exclusion. Employment may not be the only way to participate in society but it provides income, enables social contact, allows political and social organization, gives in many cases access to social security benefits. Having a decent income is crucial for social inclusion, therefore we Greens want to maximize the access for everyone to a decent job and to provide income (unemployment benefits, parental leave, pensions, social allowances, student allowances...) during periods of life without full-time paid work

Non-standard employment has entered our working life for good and the definition of work has also changed; we need to accommodate our legislation according to this. Social security for the temporarily employed, the project workers and the entrepreneurs is weak. A considerable number of the adult population find themselves in a marginalized position on the job market : worthwhile employment isn't available and the terms and conditions of social security hinder their ability to get or to take a job. We need to create a welfare model that guarantees the same safety e.g. to temporary workers, to people who combine free lance work, entrepreneurship and scholarship for their regular income as for "regular workers". We need a social security and tax reform to enhance basic security and encourage activity.

Therefore, we Greens propose :

- **Fair pay for fair work** : see the chapter on "Good Work"
- **A minimum income**, guaranteed by social security, above the poverty line for all in need. This income may include contributions in kind. Moreover, in order to improve social security, we Greens propose to study the possibility and implications of basic income models, addressing the issues of conditionality and of universality.
- **That all social security allowances be indexed** to the increases of national income per capita so as to ensure at least a stable replacement rate between social benefits and other incomes.
- **Equitable and progressive income tax** : For Greens, in order to ensure equity, income tax should take into account all sources of income. Taxation of incomes, above a minimum threshold, must be progressive to ensure that people contribute according to

their ability to pay. Tax reliefs must be socially and environmentally just and encourage sustainable investment.

Services of general interest : an essential enabler of inclusion

In order to achieve a cohesive and inclusive society, it is the responsibility of governments to ensure that a range of high-quality services of general interest are provided and accessible to all citizens. These should cover health care, education, social security, energy and water, public transportation, child care, waste management, access to information and communication networks, postal services.... The public sector is obviously the best way to produce public goods such as the justice system, internal and external security, administration, infrastructure... But some economic activities might also be run by public enterprises if the community considers it as best for all.

The Greens do not have an ideological position over the ownership of services and industries and different solutions will be appropriate in the different circumstances of different countries. What we want is equal and affordable access, high quality of service, and the inclusion of the global environmental and social costs. We note that in the field of public utilities, there is no clear cut empirical evidence that private sector fulfills any better than the public sector, in an any more efficient or effective way. We further believe that public services have a particular role to play in providing social cohesion. In sectors like education, healthcare, water and public transportation, the public sector must remain the primary actor because the cold logic of the market tends to exclude the poorest and to build in further inequities.

The opening of the market is not an objective in itself, but eventually a means to facilitate the achievement of a high-quality universal service. In case of a contradiction between the objective of universal service and liberalisation, other means of ensuring universal service must be found or maintained. It is crucial to ensure that the general interest prevails over competition rules in all cases, including in economic services. Indeed, the achievement of sustainable development requires that the public interest is taken into account in all activities, economic as well as non economic.

Furthermore liberalisation and privatisation in public services e.g. postal services or public transport has in many cases had a detrimental impact on employment. General characteristics of employment in the public sector like high levels of union membership, extensive bargaining coverage and relatively homogeneous employment and working conditions have been increasingly put into question with the liberalisation and privatisation of public services in some countries.

In several sectors and countries, new competitors are covered by no or different collective agreements and profit from lower employment standards (lower wages and longer or more flexible working hours). Due to this lack of a level playing field, competition in these sectors threatens to start a downward spiral with the result that some providers use wage dumping as a method to increase their competitiveness.

Therefore we Greens propose :

- **Guaranteed basic threshold of water and energy supply :** Water and energy are basic needs of life; Greens support that guaranteed minimum quantities are provided, combined with progressive tariffs which see price increasing with quantities, encouraging responsible resource usage.
- **Democratize decision making on SGI's :** in order to ensure equal life chances the policymakers have to involve the citizens in discussing and defining service levels and standards of quality of all services of general interest. The universal service obligations should be defined in each member States by governments ensuring participation of interested stakeholders, including consumer protection organisations and social partners.
- **Decent employment and working conditions** that impact positively productivity and quality of service. New providers have to be covered in the collective bargaining system, and offering regular working contracts and decent income in order prevent dumping processes in a liberalised sector.
- **Self-determination on which ways to ensure equal access to public services.** Member States should be allowed to require the provision in all parts of their territory of a full range of universal service obligations. It is up to each member state how to ensure quality standards of public services such as equal access to postal services in remote and thinly populated areas – for instance by national monopolies or by subsidising universal service obligations in thinly populated areas.
- **An EU directive on Services of General Interest (SGI).** In order to develop the social dimension of the European Union it is important to have an EU directive on Services of General Interest (SGI), which gives public services a firm and independent legal basis, which exclude free market goals from dominating the public services is produced and distributed. Services of general interest are those which are placed under the control of a competent public authority within the framework of a system of public service or universal service obligations.

Education, the foundation of a sustainable society

Education is much more than getting an educational attainment. It is a key ingredient that allows every person to develop his or her capabilities, to build his or her life in an autonomous, self-fulfilling and solidarity-based way. It is at the center of the vision that Greens have of a sustainable society. It is a moral imperative, as all human beings are born equal in their rights and it is a key tool to break down the strict determination of one's life by his or hers social background.. Enforcing everyone's right to education is also a basic requirement if we want a creative Europe to assume its full role and responsibility in building a sustainable world. Therefore, education must be one of the priorities of our government's budgets.

Many ills – exclusion, discrimination, unemployment, poverty,... - of our societies have a failed education among their root causes. Too often, the school fails at reducing the social inequalities between children, and even sometimes aggravates them. It is a place where inclusion – or exclusion – of a person starts. It must therefore aim at the success of everyone, ensuring that everyone gets access to knowledge and skills and the appropriate support – both intellectual and practical – and avoiding orienting children too early into narrow education schemes.

For us Greens, education is not just an academic concept. The school is also the place where the child will be able to develop his/her personality and abilities in all fields such as arts, nature, sports. Our education systems have to integrate all these dimensions from the earliest ages, and include learning by experience. This demands a stronger cooperation between educational institutions and many types of local associations.

The kindergarten, then the school are the first places outside the family, where children experience social life. To a large extent, they determine the way they will shape their vision of society. Therefore it is crucial that educational institutions function as a place where values such as democracy, solidarity, non-violence and ecological awareness are not only taught, but lived on an everyday basis. In that sense, it is key to us that all stakeholders – pupils and students, teachers, parents as well as concerned external partners – be associated with the management of educational institutions. It should also be the place where one learns to live in a multi-cultural society and to value diversity and inter-cultural exchanges. Strong cross-border partnerships between educational institutions are excellent tools to enlarge the horizons of students and to promote open-mindedness.

In addition to being a place of learning, educational institutions are also a place where people spend a large part of their active life. It must therefore provide them with a safe and healthy working environment, which is a pre-condition to the development of everyone's personality and abilities.

Also, education is not something that you solely acquire in your youth years; in a changing world, the aspirations and needs of individuals will evolve over time. The opportunity must

be given to everyone to receive education throughout one's life.

As education is a basic right and need, we Greens stand totally opposed to have it governed by market mechanisms, at whichever level. We consider it to be one of the most important services of general interest, hence the governments must retain the responsibility of defining the objectives of their education systems, independently of short-term economic interests, and of providing the appropriate means to achieve them. Within that framework, educational institutions must enjoy a degree of autonomy that allows them to decide how to best achieve the objectives.

Therefore, we Greens propose :

- **Free education** : governments must provide kindergarten, primary and secondary school education for free to all, without discrimination Higher education should also be free; no country can afford to waste their resources and only guarantee higher education to its wealthy citizens.
- **Anti-discrimination and de-segregation measures** : in order to reduce the number of school drop-outs, Greens are supporting increased efforts (personnel, infrastructures) that aim at enabling the most vulnerable social groups to achieve real integration into our education systems. Therefore we promote the creation of integrative schools, which aim at bringing and keeping together pupils and students from diverse social backgrounds. Schools that are located in areas with a higher degree of ethnic or social diversity should enjoy positive discrimination. The content itself of education has to be more open to cultural diversity.
- All education institutions must take an active part in achieving gender equality in our societies. This entails introducing related topics into the curricula, combating sexist prejudices in the curricula as well as in textbooks as well as a special attention to gender balance among teachers as well as in the management bodies of the schools. Sexist prejudices must actively be combated at school.
- **Transform kindergartens** into places of learning and exchange for both children and their parents, where workshops and individual consultation will be offered to support parents in their educational role.
- Getting more **personnel with high pedagogical qualification into the kindergarten.**
- **To open a space at the kindergarten and at school for more individually determined and project-based activities** that make "learning by experience" possible.
- An **education based on individual support** to give pupils and students enough help and orientation in their learning process. That requires smaller classes and more teachers at school.

- **The creation of school materials that widen the national perspective** on history and culture to a European and global one.
- **Democratic participation of pupils and students** in decisions about the use of their school's/university's resources and the priorities of their curricula.
- **An education allowance** open to every student and linked to an active participation to the curriculum so that every young person can engage in university studies independently from his/her social background;
- **Expand the EU student exchange programmes to everyone** : one of the success stories of the EU in the field of education has been the various student exchange programs (Erasmus, Comenius,...). Greens support their expansion and the introduction of cross-border study programs to deepen the transnational exchange. Our objective is that each European student should have at least one opportunity during his/her curriculum (secondary or higher education) to participate in one of these programs. Additionally, we call for similar financial support for programmes concerning training and education during the professional life (e.g. Leonardo da Vinci ...) especially for low-skilled sectors. The possibility to live, study and work abroad should be given to all European citizens regardless of their academic or economic background.
- **Encouraging a sustainable development-oriented education** : As Europe has an opportunity to become a leader in making sustainable development a reality, Greens advocate programs that encourage students to choose curricula, in both technical as human disciplines, that support this objective. At the same time, sustainable development must be integrated in the curricula as an inter-disciplinary dimension.
- **Life-long learning** is a basic right, from which all individuals, regardless of age or social position, benefit and society as a whole as well. Governments should develop low threshold facilities, especially focusing on those who don't have access to them. See also under 'good work.
- **That governments remain fully responsible for the funding of the education systems**, including higher education. We stand totally opposed to the interpretation of the EU internal competition rules that claims that such a funding is discriminatory against private providers. Similarly, the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the education systems must firmly remain a competence of governments, as opposed to private rating and accreditation agencies.

An inclusive society for the elderly ...

It is an historic improvement that, thanks to growing wealth and longer life expectancy, most people in the European countries can have the possibility of living well after their work life. Even when confronted with the demographic change in the European countries, the European Greens want to secure and develop the equal possibilities for all to live a decent third age. We believe that all elderly people deserve equal chances to choose and create their own lives and do it as well and as long as possible. This is part of our vision of a society with equal opportunities for development and self-realization. The right to be in charge of and create your own life, to participate actively in society should apply to all people irrespective of age.

It is the responsibility of the political society – on a local, regional, national and European level - to ensure this. In all European countries the chances of the elderly are far from equal; it is our common political duty to form an environment promoting continuity, self-determination and use of one's own capabilities, preserving the identities of the elderly.

Within our societies, many older people are left with inadequate support due to changing cultures in families and working life, an inadequate social care systems and governments pressing down on public expenditure. In many cases, it is one's purchasing power that determines who will have the best chances to live the kind of life they want. Due to a lack of quality public care facilities, elderly people and their families are left alone to deal with these situations. Together with a rising inequality in pensions this is developing new kinds of social disparity in life chances among elderly in European countries.

Therefore we Greens propose :

- **Preventive measures :** The European Greens put the emphasis on preventive measures during working life, on a healthy living environment and a life style enabling a long life with minimal illness¹. We give a high priority to preventive measures having a beneficial effect on social groups with the least chances of life.
- **The necessary practical help, rehabilitation and care equally and free.** Society must offer the necessary practical help, rehabilitation and individual care in a way that strengthens the opportunity for the elderly to choose their life, including facilitating the development of social networks involving the elderly and others.
- **Flexible housing facilities :** Greens want all elderly people to have the possibility to live at home and independently as long as they can and so desire. Governments must promote new types of housing in order to allow community care, such as inter-generational houses, community housing... They should encourage housing

¹ See the chapters on health care, on working conditions ... for examples

construction standards that allow for life long occupancy.

- **Increased diversity in our care systems** : As the first generation of immigrants is retiring, the care for elderly has to adapt itself to a greater degree of ethnic diversity in all its provisions. Individual care should now include meeting new needs and demands e.g. specific meal provisions, religious facilities,...

... and for the children

The European Greens believe that the development and maximizing the life chances of all children has to be one of the most important objectives of all European societies. Children must be put on the centre stage of European welfare societies of the 21st century for at least two reasons. First, the European Greens believe that the development of our children is a major end in itself, enabling everyone in the coming generations to participate in society and working life. Second, the support to families in all their diversity, and the development of children have important social benefits. They help achieving a mixture of generations within our societies; they are a way to strengthen solidarity between generations; they give all parents a fair and affordable possibility to combine work, career and family life, tackling one of the main roots of gender discrimination. Finally, investing in securing personal development and a rising level of education to all children is a must if we want European societies to contribute to meeting the challenges facing our planet.

The traditionalist views that the care and development of our children was the sole responsibility of the family, and that family was composed of a breadwinning man and his wife are still at the heart of social policies across Europe. This is counter-productive as families are becoming more unstable, women want to work and pursue a career, more men want to be involved in family life, and a single income family is no longer able to secure reasonable living standards. Sticking to the traditional views and family policies impedes tackling the citizens' desire to raise children and reduces life chances to many children, both matters of rising importance in modern European societies.

The European Greens believe that the political society - on a local, regional, national and European level - has the responsibility for eliminating the social constraints on having children and ensure optimal opportunities for the development of children.

Therefore we, the Greens, propose :

- **Eliminating child poverty.** Children living in families suffering from economic poverty and income insecurity are not only in short of clothes, healthy food, housing and social activities. They also have less access to education and lower chances of personal development. The European Greens propose a binding target of eliminating child poverty in the next 5 years.
- **Family friendly work life balance policies** The European Greens propose family friendly work life balance policies and guaranteed rights for employees (e.g. reduced working time, working from home, employee-oriented work flexibility...) to help combine work with responsibilities and choices outside of the workplace such as raising children.
- **Universal and affordable child care for all.** Universal child care for all will matter a lot in meeting the citizens' desires to have children. At the same time it is effectively preventing lifetime income losses and securing equal possibilities in working life, especially for women. In consequence universal and affordable child care will contribute to growth of the workforce. EU Governments should therefore stick to the goals they agreed upon as part of the Lisbon strategy to make child care universal and affordable. We Greens believe it should be equally available for all children under 3 and free to families with low income. By investing in the infrastructure and in the quality of child care, we contribute efficiently to the development of social, cognitive skills and the personality of children creating equal life chance to the coming generations, including children who are most likely to be excluded.
- **Longer maternity leave and minimum of 12 months paid parental leave : We support the Commission's proposal to increase in line with the ILO recommendation the minimum period of maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks and to pay women 100% of their salary beyond the current minimum of paying at least equivalent to sick pay.** To give parents a fair chance of giving care to children without resigning from the labour market the European Greens propose to go beyond the current EU directive and give a right to a minimum of 12 months of paid parental leave. **We need** incentives to encourage both parents to take advantage of the leave. The parental leave should therefore be divided between both parents. The right to parental leave must be combined with the right to job security, with measures to facilitate the re-entry into the job, and non-discrimination of pregnant women.

....and for persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities cannot lead a self-determined life without accessibility on all levels (especially infrastructure such as schools, public transport, etc.). Accessibility for

persons with disability is a positive fundamental right, not a matter of pity. Equal rights for persons with disabilities need to be included in development cooperation.

Persons with disabilities represent 10 percent of the world's population, 80% thereof live in developing countries. The new UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities entered into force on 3 May 2008 as the first legally binding international document regarding the rights of persons with disabilities. The UN Convention ensures equal rights of persons with disabilities in all areas of life and politics, including development cooperation.

Therefore we, the Greens, propose :

- The EU has to adopt the proposal of the Commission for a fifth anti-discrimination directive to fight discrimination outside employment on grounds of disability, age, religion or belief and sexual orientation.
- Equal opportunities for persons with disabilities have to be included in all EU policies
- a swift ratification and implementation of the new UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, therefore:
- Development cooperation in Europe has to support developing countries in their strive to implement the rights of persons with disabilities according to Art. 32 of the UN Convention; the rights of persons with disabilities thus have to be included in EU developing cooperation policy.

Good work – a promise to be fulfilled today

Greens promote the concept of “good work”, which combines advanced labour standards with the possibility for everyone to fulfill one's own aspirations and to contribute to a sustainable society.

For Greens fair working conditions means much more than simply promoting the core ILO labour standards, which include the worker's right to information and consultation, right of collective bargaining and action, protection in the event of unjustified dismissal, fair and just working conditions. They also include : job security, a healthy and safe working environment, sufficient and equal pay, strong employment protection, reasonable working hours, lifelong learning, equal opportunities, anti-discrimination measures, workers rights to assert their interests and to participate, family-friendly working arrangements, arrangements to adapt working life to the demands of life outside work, integration of migrant workers, social security and benefits.

Greens are strongly opposing the current trends of cutting on workers rights in the name of flexibility and competitiveness. We strongly believe that the high level of worker's protection and employment standards forms the basis of our societies and is fully compatible with high employment.

To ensure fair working conditions and make "good work" a reality, Greens propose :

- **Flexibility with full security:** The concept which marries flexibility with security is very green indeed. This concept requires a sufficient level of social protection, social security and unemployment benefits, active labour market policies and training/lifelong learning opportunities, as well as broad welfare provisions including universal access to services of general interest. However, the term "flexicurity" is too often misused as a disguise for unrestrained flexibility and deregulation. While flexibility is important to allow our societies and our economies to respond to the challenges of a changing world, security is no less important. For the Greens, a key instrument to guarantee the right balance between these objectives is a strong institutionalized dialogue between the social partners, representing the citizens at work and the employers. This has a key role to play in shaping the rules and the instruments (contract conditions, wages, benefits...) of the labour market. This requires strong and representative trade unions. **We Greens strive within the trade union movement for a more solidarity-based policy towards women and migrants and a more inclusive political strategy regarding non-standard and irregular employment.**
- **Working time adaptability:** Regular working hours are important for quality of life and balancing professional and family and other responsibilities. This includes reasonable working hours per week as well as possibilities to reduce working time individually for certain periods, for both men and women. In that perspective, during the recent revision of the EU Working Time Directive, the EU Council pushed to raise the maximum **average** working time from 48 to 60, 65 or even more hours a week; this is strongly opposed by the Greens. Provisions regarding working time should allow sufficient time for citizens to develop activities outside their job and be organized in order to maximize their impact in terms of job creation. Part-time work is predominantly a feature of female employment, as it is often a compromise strategy that women follow because of the lack of accessible and affordable facilities for childcare and dependent persons care.
- **Decent minimum wages :** In order to protect workers, especially those with the most basic skills, from exploitation by employers and to tackle poverty Greens propose that minimum wages are implemented in each country of the European Union. The way to set those minimum wages – law, collective labor agreements at various levels - must be left at the discretion of each country. They must allow

for differences, e.g. on a sector or geographical basis. If this is to contribute to a higher level of equality within and between the European countries, the level of that minimum wage has to be related to the average level of wages in each country. In order to be effective it is important to also cover the non-standard employment by minimum wage provisions.

- **Fighting the gender pay gap:** Although the legal framework of the EU with regard to equal pay is quite extensive, the persistence of the gender pay gap in all European countries is still a fact. It will be essential to formulate concrete objectives (see section on “Access to good work”) and timetables on the closing of the gender pay gap at the European level. We claim equal pay policies aimed at tackling direct or indirect gender wage discrimination; equal opportunities policy aimed at encouraging women to have continuous employment patterns, and at desegregation of employment by gender; and wage policies aimed at reducing wage inequality and improving the remuneration of low-paid and/or female-dominated jobs in sectors.
- **Equal treatment and pay for posted workers:** Anyone should have the right to work anywhere in the EU and it is more than regretful that this fundamental right is not applied uniformly in all EU member states. However, the free movement of workers and services has to be balanced against fundamental rights and the possibility for governments and trade unions to ensure non-discrimination and equal treatment. We can not turn a blind eye when posted migrant workers are paid less than national workers because they are considered as "services". In addition, situations where workers in host countries are pressured by low wage competition of posted workers could lead to xenophobia and counterproductive anger against the EU. It is therefore in everybody's interest that workers enjoy equal conditions, whether national or migrant. Greens are calling on member states that the principle of equal treatment is applied from the first day on of posting. We believe that we have to ensure by changes in EU legislation that the principle of equal pay for equal work, the rights of workers, including the right to strike as well as collective agreements agreed upon at national or regional levels are not eliminated by the rules of the internal market.
- **Combating irregular employment :** Whereas non-standard employment may be beneficial if it suits the circumstances of workers and is voluntary, Greens cast a critical eye on the growing numbers of temporary employment, irregular conditions of employment and non-standard contracts. In many cases, non-standard employment is not chosen and many workers - especially young people, migrants and women - are falling outside the scope of fundamental labour and social rights, thereby undermining the principles of equal treatment. We therefore condemn any abusive replacement of regular employment with irregular employment without any imperative economic necessity, at the expense of employees and of the general public. Greens propose to ensure all

workers core rights as adequate employment security and protection, independently of their contractual agreements. Legislation is needed to ensure that the same core rules and wages immediately apply to temporary workers as if they were employed directly by the enterprises;

- **Fight against undeclared work** : The raising trends in different EU countries of undeclared work and underground economy damages the economy, leaves workers unprotected, is detrimental to consumers, reduces tax revenues and leads to unfair competition between firms. We therefore need a clear and strong coordination between EU government enforcement agencies, labour inspections and trade unions, social security administration and tax authorities. The restriction on working permits for some EU citizens and migrant workers from third countries leads to a growing informal economy and exploitation of undocumented workers. We need to focus on instruments and mechanisms based on the fundamental human rights of workers to tackle exploitation, to regulate liability in the subcontracting and outsourcing of workers and to make legal employment easier. We call for EU legislation to define self-employment and employees with a dependent employment relationship to fight "bogus self-employment" as well as legislation to combat letterbox-companies which are created for the sole purpose of offering "services" to host countries, to avoid the full application of those country rules and regulations especially with regard to wages and working conditions.
- **Antidiscrimination and Diversity Management**: A working place of equal chances and non-discrimination is the basis for a sustainable working environment. Greens call for proper implementation of the EU antidiscrimination directives, the promotion of diversity management at work and propose a European black list of companies violating core social and working rights including antidiscrimination law.
- **Life-long learning** : Developing one's abilities throughout life is the best way for everyone to have a good work. In an increasingly knowledge-based economy, it is also a must for our enterprises to be successful and an essential asset for our societies in meeting the challenges they face especially the deep changes we will need to adopt in order to successfully combat climate change. This is true for every person, in every sector, including personal services where at first sight, some may believe that no particular skills are required. Lifelong learning for all is an essential way to fight low pay and to increase the quality of products and services. Greens propose instituting a new right to lifelong learning for all, supported by an increase in EU funds in this area and special training programmes but also adequate legislation that enables individuals to pursue education throughout their lives (e.g. support to life-long education schemes, flexibility to take sabbaticals during one's career, obligation for employers to provide or allow for paid education, ...)

Stimulating the access of everyone to good work

We Greens share the objective of empowering all individuals and encouraging them to get more actively involved in employment or in self-employed activities through the development of their autonomy and of their innovative capacities. On the other hand, we underline that the responsibility of participating in the labour market should never be borne solely by the individuals, especially when they belong to vulnerable categories of the society. In a truly "active social state", it is the responsibility of public authorities to set up a framework in which individuals will be stimulated to get a job while protecting their quality of life and their level of life even in case of failure to find a job. Employers should also be "activated" in the sense that they too bear a responsibility for not leaving behind the more vulnerable categories. The responsibilities of governments, enterprises and individuals should be equally enforced.

Several Member States have been quite successful in fighting mass unemployment; they are those whose governments have been able to create a protective and enabling framework for the individuals. Unfortunately, the so-called active policies have mainly consisted, in many Member States, in chasing the unemployed when they fail to find a job. While we Greens agree that abuses have to be combated, we also consider that completely excluding individuals from all social benefits is a social backwardness and ultimately counter-productive.

Furthermore, as developed in the previous chapter, we Greens do not share the vision that all economic activities worth equally and therefore that "a job is a job" and should be accepted by the unemployed whatever the working conditions, the sector of activity and the geographical distance between home and work. These factors should all be taken into consideration when assessing the individual situations of job seekers.

Finally, public authorities should refrain from unconditional cuts in tax and social costs, which can only lead to fiscal and social dumping. A policy of modulation of those costs in function of job creation and of the social composition of the companies' workforce will be much more efficient.

Concretely, we Greens make proposals in 4 complementary aspects.

- **Stimulate creation of activities :**

- ✚ public authorities should invest in priority in green economy and in sectors which are employment-intensive and offer a social added-value (personal services, health, education,...) ;

- ✚ public authorities should discriminate positively in favour of the social economy (reduction of social costs for persons employed in the non-profit sector and for economic activities which fulfill social economy criteria) ;
 - ✚ public authorities should set up coherent local development strategies based on partnerships between all the local economic, social and cultural actors so that they cooperate to develop activities linked to the local needs, resources and specificities.
- **Stimulate job-readiness:**
 - ✚ public authorities in conjunction with social partners and public employment agencies should define coherent and structured employment and integration pathways, especially for the vulnerable categories of the population ;
 - ✚ structured pathways should not focus only on enhancing technical skills but should also take into account the various dimensions of exclusion: housing, health, culture, access to public services, transport,... ;
 - ✚ content of the training should focus on the acquisition of basic skills (literacy,...) and on personal empowerment (self-confidence) ; pathways should include all the steps from training to work ;
 - ✚ public authorities should set up a protection framework which guarantees that individuals will keep unemployment allowances as long as they participate in a structured pathway scheme and which preserves unconditional right to a minimum income ; in the notion of "flexicurity", the "security" element should come first, and the "flexibility" element comes second, provided that a prior appropriate and effective protection system exists ;
 - ✚ the unsustainable nature of a job (sector of activity, working conditions, distance from home) should be recognised as a valid justification for an unemployed person to refuse a job offer.
 - **Stimulate working time distribution:**
 - ✚ on the collective side, public authorities in conjunction with the social partners should tend to reduce the working time ceilings either on national level or at sectoral level ; given the current political context, the priority is to reject policies which increase those working time ceilings ("*travailler plus pour gagner plus*") ;

- ✚ The productivity of work increases with the employees well being. The employers of both the public and the private sectors should enable the employees themselves to define their use of time according to their life situations, e.g. do they want to have more free time instead of earning more money. This would be important especially for parents of small children. Possibilities for study leaves and job alternation leaves also increase both well being and productivity.
 - ✚ public authorities in conjunction with social partners should favour progressive retirement so that older employees are encouraged to reduce step by step their working hours instead of going directly from full-time job to full-time retirement.
- **Stimulate equal access to employment:**
 - ✚ The parental costs should be equally divided between the employers of mothers and fathers in order to ensure that social security payments do not discriminate between sexes.
 - ✚ so called social enterprises that employ e.g long-time unemployed should be favoured by tax concessions etc.
 - ✚ Equality could be promoted through positive discrimination measures. The public sector should set an example by hiring from equally qualified and competent applicants the man/woman who represent the sex that is underrepresented.
 - ✚ public authorities and social partners should fight actively all forms of discrimination on the labour market and encourage diversity at work in all its dimensions : ethnic, gender, disability, religion or belief, age, sexual orientation. They are to be seen as asset for the economy rather than as a burden.

Sustainable and universal pensions

As European Greens we vow that we will make fighting poverty during old age and guaranteeing a decent life to the elderly one of the social priorities of our common endeavours.

Social security for the elderly regardless of class or status has been a political goal even long before the modern welfare state was created. Poverty as a widely prevalent condition for old people was one of the great social illnesses the welfare state was designed to deal with. Yet more than a century after the first beginnings of modern social policy, there is not a single European

country in which poverty among elderly people has been eradicated. Countries have made a lot of progress, and in some countries we find less poverty among the older generation today than at any previous point in history. But we also find new tendencies of increasing poverty or clear indications that poverty will definitely increase over the next 10-15 years among old people, if not checked.

The pension systems of the individual EU member countries are manifold, and their development lies within the political responsibility of these member countries. On the other hand, we see common challenges with regard to the pension systems that all our societies have to address.

It is not for the EGP to define the architecture of pensions systems which are deeply rooted in national traditions. But, whatever the system and while we oppose the market-oriented dogma that pension systems must be privatised to remain stable under demographic and competitive conditions, in order

To make pensions sustainable and truly universal, we Greens propose :

- **That governments assumed their responsibility** of strengthening the public pension schemes and making them sustainable, as they are universal and solidarity-based;
- **That any pension system ensures social justice and inclusiveness**, overcoming the fundamental shortcomings and flaws that form a basis for poverty among the old. Our most basic demand is, that protection against poverty *in old age* has to be universal, including women and men, natives and migrants, people from different professions, people that were successful in securing employment and others that suffered extended unemployment *or never did paid work*. Whether to achieve this goal through the pension system or the social benefit system, is up to each member state.
- **There should be no socially unjust tax incentives for private based schemes**.
- **The necessary increase of the pension expenditures** is one of the main reasons for a structural reform of social security financing, which is tackled in the last chapter of this document.
- **Reorienting the investments of the pension funds** : A huge proportion of pension funds are currently used for speculation and investment in socially irresponsible and unsustainable activities; the Greens want mandatory measures to re-orientate their investments towards sustainable development and socially responsible activities.
- **Achieving gender justice in pension systems** : Insofar as pension systems attribute transfers according to the number of years of employment, women are often disadvantaged. Also the gender pay gap often leads to lower pensions of women. We

want to overcome that, because we believe in gender justice. As precarious working relations expand in many labour markets, those working under those difficult conditions are often directly heading towards poverty at old age. We want to change that, because we want to guarantee every individual a living standard above the poverty line.

- **Making the public pensions schemes really universal** : As an increasing number of people is self-employed and because of that not participating in legally mandated or company initiated pension systems, but doesn't earn enough to be able to opt for privately financed alternatives, these people are increasingly in danger of not having old age protection at all. We want to change that by including these people into the public pension systems.
- **Ensuring portability of rights while respecting tax obligations** : As more and more people move between different EU member countries during their work life, they encounter numerous administrative problems when they want to make sure they don't lose any of the old age protection they have earned. We want to overcome that by making all pension benefits portable throughout the EU, ensuring however the respect of every individual's tax obligations.
- **Giving the right to a third age to all** : Thanks to public pension schemes, private pensions and better health conditions an increasing number of people in the EU member countries has the freedom to choose their third age, **that is to live a decent life between retirement and becoming impaired by serious illness**. This possibility is lacking to others with less healthy life years and with small or no pension schemes. We want to develop flexible pension schemes giving all the right to a third age. This might imply early retirement possibilities to some and possibilities of postponed pensions to others.
- **Fostering the collaboration among EU Member States** : EU member countries' governments should agree to create within the EU a mutual reporting and discussion mechanism on a yearly basis concerning their respective pension systems. This should create more transparency and make it possible to compare the different degrees of effectiveness with which national pension systems are designed to alleviate the poverty problem, particularly among more disadvantaged groups like elderly women, migrants, parents of large families, people with precarious employment or the unemployed. The European Parliament as well as the national parliaments should be invited to discuss these reports, helping the latter in drafting legislation that may be instrumental in overcoming poverty at old age.

Living in a good health – a basic human right

Good health is a basic condition of a good life, and for the Greens, preventing damages to our health is the first step in achieving that goal. Our health is affected by the quality of our

environment, especially the water and the atmosphere. Our societies face diseases such as cancer on such a scale that they have become the first cause of mortality. Climate change will present us with new health challenges as the pattern of disease changes and high summer temperatures will affect the vulnerable. Our health is also affected by the quality of the food we eat, by the working conditions we live in, by the quality of our housing, by the way we move in our environment... For us, it makes little sense to try and remedy the impact of all those factors on our health, if we do not tackle the root causes first.

As living in a good health is one of the most basic human rights, we Greens believe that the responsibility of defining health policy in both its preventive and care dimensions lies with governments. Health care is a service of general interest and therefore, in this space, in case of contradiction, the general interest must prevail over the logic of the market.

The first objective that governments must have is to ensure that everyone in society, has access to quality health care. No-one should be left without healthcare, whatever their status in our society. This requires a special focus on those social groups who are the most vulnerable, hence universal coverage and affordability must be key goals of any sustainable health policy. Furthermore, we Greens believe that people must have access to health care, including mental health care, as close as possible to where they live; this requires a dense and diversified network of health care providers, ranging from general practitioners, community associations and local hospitals to large institutions able to tackle the most difficult cases. In that perspective, we consider the general practitioner and other first-line specialists (pediatricians, gynaecologists, dentists...), who enjoys a lasting and privileged relationship with his/her patients to have a key role to play in ensuring an effective and efficient health care.

Many concrete measures, especially preventative measures, contributing to a healthy society are outlined elsewhere in this and other EGP documents; more specifically as regards health care,

We Greens propose :

- **That governments actively encourage healthy lifestyles** promoting healthy behaviours as far as food, physical exercise, free-time activities, consumption of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, family education, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (incl. HIV),... are concerned. A special attention should be devoted to responsible driving behaviours as road accidents are still a major cause of mortality across Europe. This should be achieved by stepping up awareness campaigns and increasing educational programs targeted at children.
- **That the EU and governments improve the legislation on a safe and healthy working environment.** We believe workers should be protected from hazards such as: noise, solar and other radiation, working in excessive temperatures and long working hours. Law enforcement efforts in this domain have to be increased.
- **That the EU suppresses all remaining subsidies to the tobacco industry** which are still part of the common agricultural policy.

- **That the EU encourages the member states to cooperate** on developing the quality of their health care systems. We Greens propose EU-wide action plans to raise standards of treatment for specific conditions, as is already underway in terms of cancer care. Ultimately, EU legislation should define minimum quality standards in health care.
- **That governments undertake actions to ensure that sufficient numbers of well-trained medical personnel are available** across the EU now and in the coming years. Doctors, especially those who are on the first line with patients, nurses, para-medical personnel must be trained and given access to their profession in adequate numbers to allow a dense and diversified care network to be ensured.
- **On cross-border health care issues**, to improve coordination of the health services between the member states, in order to ensure that the growing number of people moving from one country to another don't face unnecessary problems. In addition, measures must be taken in order to clarify liability in the case of cross-border health care, and to ensure that the possibility for citizens to choose to be treated abroad within the E.U. and be reimbursed is not jeopardizing the sustainability of national social security and healthcare systems.
- **A coordination at the EU level to tackle fraud and corruption** in health services across borders and ensure the money is spent on healthcare. For example, we advocate a better administration of the cross-border coordination on healthcare provision as well as combating more effectively the sale and use of counterfeited medicine.
- **That healthcare infrastructures be developed** and maintained which are not dependent on schemes such as so-called private/public partnerships which provide facilities today but at a huge cost to tomorrow's tax-payers.
- **That democratic governance of the national healthcare systems** be encouraged through, for instance, the involvement of patients.

Social welfare – a value, not just a cost

The way the welfare state is financed varies from one country to another. Funding is provided either through taxes paid by taxpayers, or through social contributions based on labour. Most of countries tend to have a mix of the two funding sources.

Most of welfare state systems have gone through financial difficulties over the last two decades for different reasons. First of all, unemployment and social exclusion have increased spending in many countries. Second, healthcare needs have expanded due to the aging of our societies, the development of new diseases and increasingly expensive treatments. Third, the aging of population means the amount of money society needs to spend in pensions has increased : more

pensioners live on pensions for a longer period, and the welfare state is required to meet a rising demand : dependency in the fourth age. Fourth, in an economic competition where workers skills are key, States have to spend more money on education. Last but not least, tax competition and tax heavens have reduced the resources available to the Member States to finance these growing demands. As an example, corporate taxes have decreased on average by ten points in real terms in the UE for the last ten years due to fiscal competition between member states.

We recognize the necessity of addressing the financial issues facing our welfare systems, but we do not believe the solution to be in the usual combination of privatisation and of a weakening of the welfare provisions. For many people, social benefits (pensions, job seeker allowances...) provide the only income or are an investment to built the future upon (education...).

As we have never been so « rich », as measured by GDP, it would be paradoxical not to be able to finance social programs to meet risks we were able to meet previously. In order to meet both the demographic evolution and to improve the social inclusion in Europe, we Greens are convinced that the percentage of GDP dedicated to welfare as a whole will need to be increased, even taking into account the positive impact of preventive health care and of a reduction of unemployment. We value this both as an ethical obligation as well as an investment in our future.

In this context, we Greens propose the following measures

- **A new Green deal** : A concerted initiative by the EU and its Member States to foster a new wave of green investments to prepare our economy for post oil era and to prevent further climate change. This will at the same time increase welfare system revenue while cutting unemployment as these investments will create millions of jobs in areas such as renewable energy, collective transportation, organic agriculture, green construction, ... (See the paper “A Green economic vision for Europe” for more details).
- **To make preventative health care a priority** and to move away from healthcare systems that are only cure-oriented. Prevention can dramatically reduce the overall cost of care (with less leaves of absence, less prescriptions, etc.), meaning a more effective and efficient healthcare system, good for our health and for the economy.
- **That the financing base of welfare systems be broadened** e.g. by including proceeds from taxes on profits, capital gains and energy consumption... Capital and corporations must assume their fair share of taxes and social contributions, which implies raising the intensity and effectiveness of the combat against fiscal and social fraud and evasion. A point where the European Union can be most useful is to set and enforce harmonised tax bases as well as differentiated² minimum tax rates in these domains. A truly social Europe does not go without a fiscal Europe.
- **Suppressing unjust tax incentives for private pensions** : States have introduced tax

² i.e. a relatively low minimum tax rate for the new member states during the catch-up period and a higher one for the old EU Member States

incentives to encourage people to save on their own for their pensions. In many cases, this public money would be more fairly and efficiently spent if injected in the public pension schemes. There should be no socially unjust tax incentives for private based schemes.

- **Scrutinize tax breaks and social contribution discounts for employers** : Many European countries have awarded employers all sorts of tax breaks or discounts on social contributions. We believe these should be given careful scrutiny in terms of efficiency (e.g. number and quality of jobs created). We Greens are in favour of modulating taxes and social contributions according to social and environmental criteria.

The way forward

Building a social Europe has been a mantra that many have repeated for decades. However, while our Union enjoys living standards that are among the highest on Earth, our continent is facing serious social issues. Inequalities in revenues are growing, illnesses that we believed extinct are coming back, too many children are falling out of our education systems, while many elderly live in indecent conditions; discrimination is still a reality in too many places; the funding of pension and health systems is coming at risk.

For us Greens, a social Europe is not just a nice to have add-on to the European Single Market. A social Europe, one that really enables and empowers everyone to live a fulfilling life, within the limits of this planet and in solidarity with all its people and the future generations, is an integral part of the European identity and a key ingredient to our future success. Living in good health, with decent income, in homes that deserves that name, enjoying the opportunity to develop one's abilities and skills throughout life, working on jobs that bring fulfillment and create value for the individual and for the society, having the possibility to build a family, to live a long and healthy life in a society that does not discriminate : this is all part of the promise Europe has for all its citizens, regardless of their ethnic origin, their age, their gender, their religion or belief, their sexual orientation or any disability.

Fulfilling that promise must now come back at the heart of the action of Governments across Europe. At the highest level, the European Union must demonstrate leadership and initiative in defining ambitious goals and setting standards in the area of social policies. And these must not be less binding than those which permitted the creation of the single market or the Euro; for the Greens, social goals are no less hard than economic and financial goals.

As history has shown, rising social standards are not going opposite to economic development. On the contrary, undermining those standards is the surest way for Europe to enter a downwards spiral that will leave it poorer as a whole. True enough, Europe was at the forefront of the exploitation of this planet, but also of the building of a more socially sustainable society. At a moment when all around us, we see peoples of the world craving not just for material comfort, but also for a substantial improvement in their quality of life, now is not the time to give up on that dream. Rather, now is the time for all the people of this planet to enter together a path of sustainable development, one that will learn from the past in drastically reducing our consumption of non-renewable resources and our emissions of greenhouse gases.

Finding the path to this new deal for the citizens of Europe and of the World will not happen all by itself. The challenges are daunting : providing education, ensuring health and make this affordable for all, fighting poverty and discrimination while keeping the social systems financially sound is not an easy thing to do. It will require the involvement of all players. Governments, from the local to the European level, accountable to their citizens, must regain the initiative, redefining priorities towards social goals. In short, people must come back to the center of the agenda. Enterprises of all sizes must also embrace these new challenges; creating shareholder value as a goal will need to be replaced by creating stakeholder value, in a balanced way. But it is also up to all of us citizens, in our various capacities, for example as consumers, as students, as workers (employed or not) or as business leaders, to behave in a responsible way. While all of us stand to benefit from a really social Europe, it will not come true without us all taking our share, in whatever small or big way, to build this new society.

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