

BRIEFING NOTE: WHAT IS THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL PILLAR?

The European Commission launched a year-long consultation on the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) (the Social Pillar). Throughout 2016 and beyond, the Social Pillar will be a key area of work for MHE so we really want to get our members involved!

WHAT IS THE SOCIAL PILLAR AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

In recent years it has become increasingly evident that the social agenda of the European Union has stalled, particularly following the financial crisis. The Social Pillar is a novel initiative which is intended to act as fresh driver for social change in Europe. It will act as a framework of social rights and once established, this framework will be used to screen the employment and social performance of participating Member States in order to drive reforms at national level.

The Social Pillar is a new opportunity for MHE and its members to further advocate for a more social Europe (better healthcare, more investment in people etc) and for the rights of persons with psychosocial disabilities. The [core working document](#) of the Social Pillar focuses on 3 'categories' and 20 domains/rights, some of which are very relevant for mental health including:

1) [EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET](#)

which includes active support to employment and ensuring equal opportunities for persons with disabilities

2) [FAIR WORKING CONDITIONS](#)

which includes rights to fair working conditions, a minimum wage and health and safety at work.

3) [ADEQUATE AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL PROTECTION](#)

which includes the need to provide better integrated social benefits, such as disability and unemployment benefits, social services and other essential services such as housing and healthcare.

HOW WILL THE SOCIAL PILLAR WORK?

The current proposal is that the Social Pillar will build on and complement, the [EU social "acquis"](#) (the European legal order which is made up of treaty provisions, regulations, directives, policies, European Court decisions and other non-binding legal measures). However, it remains unclear how it will be received at national level, how it will be implemented in practice and how it will feed into other pre-existing processes like the Europe 2020 Strategy. At national level, civil society organisations will need to push for the Social Pillar to be implemented. [HOW THIS WILL REALLY WORK IN PRACTICE IS UP TO US!](#)

LIMITATIONS OF THE SOCIAL PILLAR

Following initial analysis of the Social Pillar, the MHE Secretariat has identified the following concerns:

1. [LIMITED SCOPE, ECONOMY AND EMPLOYMENT FOCUSED](#)

(only applies to the Eurozone with option to opt-in for other States)

2. [LACK OF REFERENCE TO BROADER INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK](#)

(risk of downgrading rights in the Social Pillar below pre-existing international human rights standards)

3. [UN CRPD NOT MAINSTREAMED THROUGHOUT THE SOCIAL PILLAR](#)

HOW TO GET INVOLVED?

1.

Attend your [national event](#) on the Social Pillar.

2.

Send MHE your views on the Social Pillar in order to contribute to our response to the consultation.

3.

Respond to the consultation independently of MHE so that you can highlight issues that are important to you and give your own national context [Click here](#) to access the consultation. (Deadline is 31st December 2016)