

PP2-V FYEG Political Platform - A Social Europe

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Political Platform text

5. A Social Europe

For several decades we have witnessed one social crisis leading to the next. Each crisis either revealed or created more cracks in our social systems and shone a spotlight on our deeply dated healthcare systems and unstable European working environment.

Housing has become increasingly difficult to find, with wages stagnating while living and housing costs rise. We live in a society that tolerates the fact that some people are too poor to have a roof over their heads.

Instead of reducing inequalities and providing opportunities for all, education systems across Europe are being transformed by a neoliberal* and productivist* mindset and are reproducing inequalities from one generation to the next.

Those policies are still primarily dealt with at the national level, reinforcing inequalities between as well as within countries. We need a truly social Europe. This includes fighting inequalities, rethinking the way we work, and taking strong action on housing, health, and education. The system needs to change – now.

a. Fighting poverty

Dozens of million people across Europe are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, with certain parts of Europe experiencing an increase in poverty rates. At the same time, the rich are getting richer, with some individuals accumulating indecent amounts of wealth. Neoliberalism and myths such as trickle-down theory* have not delivered on their promises. Inequalities are on the rise, threatening the cohesion of our societies.

FYEG supports strong welfare states, which it considers essential in the fight against poverty and to guarantee the enforceability of fundamental rights. Their dismantling in several parts of Europe must end. Action to fight poverty should include but not be limited to ensuring that all individuals receive an income. Existing benefits must be fair, must allow people to live above the poverty line*, and should rise in line with average wage increases. Social services should help to ensure that everyone has access to a home, healthcare, and training and/or work. Our social policies must leave no one behind.

FYEG stands for the implementation of a minimum income across the EU, set at an amount matching the cost of living in each region. We see it as a first step towards the introduction of a universal basic income*, which would have a positive impact on working life and on the enforcement of fundamental rights. This should be financed by the higher taxation of the super-rich, among other measures (see chapter 4 – Fiscal policy).

At the same time, Europe must not forget its privileged position in the world and must also work towards eradicating inequalities worldwide (see chapter 6 – Trade and global justice).

b. The future of work

With technological progress, digitalisation, and the need to reduce the environmental impact of our economies, work is changing and is likely to continue to do so. It is important to reflect on the future of work to ensure these changes improve everyone's welfare and well-being.

FYEG supports a better balance between work and personal life. This will require a whole range of changes, including a reduction in working hours. Studies have shown that a reduction in working hours is accompanied by gains in efficiency. Reducing working hours is also a feminist demand as it enables the redistribution of unpaid care work. As a first step, we therefore propose a maximum 32-hour working week within the European Union while maintaining wage levels. We also support raising the number of paid holidays to a minimum of 40 days per year.

Work needs to be paid fairly. In order for people not to face economic difficulties when working fewer hours, we have to start changing wages immediately and start valuing work differently. Jobs that are traditionally occupied by women tend to be valued less, although they bring significant benefits to society. We should take into account not only the societal value of a job but also the level of mental and physical effort it demands in order to determine wage levels. To use the example of care work, jobs in this sector are systematically underpaid, with the mental and physical demands of the job not adequately reflected in the wages paid, and involve poor working conditions.

FYEG supports raising wages to above average levels for people who work in the care sector.

Wage differences across Europe are used by multinational companies to maximise their profits, exploiting workers in countries where wages are the lowest and firing workers in countries where wages are higher. In order to prevent the lowering of social standards and the deterioration of workers' rights, we support the introduction of an EU minimum wage scheme*, with minimum wages based on the cost of living in a particular country or region and a mechanism to progressively harmonise them. No one who works should live below the poverty line. Workers should be able to travel freely, seek employment, and work in the country of their choice. Strong protective measures are needed to ensure that the foreign posting of workers is not used to bypass national social protection schemes.

Interns and trainees also must receive fair pay in order to cover their living costs and in recognition of the value of the work they do. FYEG wants an immediate ban on unpaid internships.

It is easy to lose a job – and it can be extremely difficult to find another one. Unemployment is not an individual failure, but an inevitability in our broken economic system. The welfare state should be a safety net that leaves no one in poverty. People need to be protected during periods of unemployment. We fight for fair unemployment benefits* and the fair treatment of those trying to re-enter the labour market. Over the course of their lives, individuals change jobs far more frequently than in previous generations. We therefore support the reinforcement of lifelong learning schemes to allow people to study or train for new jobs at any point in their lives.

We support the introduction of parental leave* schemes across Europe that guarantee that every new parent, regardless of their gender, has access to a period of paid parental leave of at least three months. Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that parental leave schemes contribute to gender equality. Mandatory parental leave for new fathers can help to reduce the discrimination that new mothers face when applying for jobs, as well as promote the equal distribution of domestic tasks in the household.

FYEG recalls the right to unionise and considers that trade unions* play a crucial role in improving working conditions. The right to unionise as well as the right to strike must be recognised and protected across Europe. Moreover, bodies which represent employees' interests should be strengthened, and 50% of the seats on the boards of large companies should be reserved for employee representatives.

Digitalisation has led to new forms of work and employment such as the gig

economy, in which workers are not employed on regular work contracts which include social protection, but are instead paid for each task completed. While this can bring a flexibility that some workers enjoy, we must ensure that gig workers have equal social protection, including health and work-related accident insurance, protection against discrimination, parental benefits and rights, and pensions. We must also ensure that the platforms and companies who use gig workers are paying salary, tax, and other costs in line with other actors, as well as requiring platforms and other companies to officially employ “false self-employed” individuals in the event that they request this.

We also believe that work which has a positive impact on the environment and on society should be properly rewarded, for example through grants. We propose setting up a care income* in the form of a premium paid by states to reward those who care for people, society in general, and the environment on a non-professional basis.

We believe in fair retirement policies, such as a progressive retirement age which allows people to continue working after that age if they freely choose to do so. Many retired people, especially women, receive extremely low pensions. We support decent pension incomes for all which are sufficient for a dignified life.

c. Discrimination in the workplace

FYEG recognises that racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and ageism – which it believes to be inherent to neoliberal capitalism – do not stop at the doors of our workplaces, and stands for anti-discrimination policies in the workplace.

Every European company with over 20 employees should have a clear policy in relation to toxic behaviour including unconscious bias, hateful speech, and sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as organising regular trainings on this. We also want to strengthen European law in order to make it easier for people who have experienced sexual harassment to come forward and take legal action against their harassers.

A European regulation for equality in the workplace should be adopted, making it mandatory for companies with more than 20 employees to implement an equality plan, ensure gender balance and promote diversity in all levels of company governance (e.g. through quotas*), and have a clear plan to ensure the closure of any wage gap. Companies who fail to implement basic principles such as equal pay for equal work should be sanctioned.

FYEG stands for the full equality of all genders. We are calling on the European

Union to develop a strategy to end gender discrimination. This strategy must include non-binary and trans people.

Racism in workplaces must be fought, and finally ended. In order to achieve this, companies must commit to diversity internships, fellowships, and other programmes. Additionally, antiracism policies, diversity and inclusion reports, and regular training must be made mandatory. We support using testing to expose discrimination and condemn companies that discriminate against people.

We support freedom of movement*, as well as the freedom to stay*. The exploitation of migrant workers must be brought to an end. Working and employment conditions, as well as access to benefits, should be determined according to the country in which a person is working, not their nationality or background. Companies, governments, and courts should treat migrant workers the same as other workers. We are concerned about the current practice of several European countries to treat highly skilled migrant workers and other migrant workers differently. We call for the establishment of a universal right to migration for work purposes, as well as a common European policy framework for labour migration.

Young people all over Europe need to work in order to study or to support their families. They are often treated differently to their older colleagues. FYEG would require employers to pay young people (including minors) the same amount as their older colleagues for performing the same work. Union-supported and regulated wage increases based on the number of years working in a certain field or at a particular workplace could still be permitted.

d. Housing

FYEG stands for housing for all. For this to happen, housing must be affordable for all and no longer a profit-making activity. We aim towards a world in which housing is no longer a commodity but rather a human right. States should intervene on the housing market to prevent speculation* and ensure that everyone has a home.

We believe that affordable housing should also be decent and of good quality. With natural disasters becoming more and more frequent, it is more important than ever to build houses which can withstand natural disasters like flooding and earthquakes. In order to ensure that housing is truly a right for all, we believe that all new buildings must be made accessible for disabled people.

Many Europeans are still facing energy poverty* and are not able to heat their homes. Buildings are responsible for approximately 40% of energy consumption and 36% of CO2 emissions in the EU. We believe that all housing should be

energetically renovated within the next 10 years and that environmental standards for new builds should be higher.

We need higher taxation for property purchases that exceed individual needs. We also need better rental rights for people who cannot afford to buy a house and those who prefer not to own a home. In places where rents have increased in the last decades we support the introduction of rent control measures, which have already been implemented in several places. We also support cities who are putting restrictions on short-term tourist lets that drive up rental prices.

We have to increasingly invest in public housing* at local, regional, federal, and EU levels in order to combat overburdening by housing costs, which affects around 80 million people in the EU. In many countries, public housing is not evenly distributed between cities and districts, thus increasing inequalities. We support the introduction of public housing quotas by city and by neighbourhood.

While some people are overburdened with housing costs, others cannot afford housing at all. The number of homeless people in the EU has risen by 70% since 2010, and more than 700,000 people are now sleeping rough all over Europe. We must therefore launch a Europe-wide plan for everyone to have access to inclusive, climate friendly, and decent homes. We support approaches such as Housing First* that provide homeless people with housing without preconditions, seeing this as the first step towards integration.

e. Health

As stated in Article 25 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for [their] health and well-being”. A free and accessible universal healthcare system is essential to achieve these standards, based on physical and psychological well-being as well as social care and prevention. Healthcare should be inclusive of everyone without discrimination and be based on the best current scientific knowledge.

FYEG supports publicly funded healthcare. Health is not a commodity, but a human right. Healthcare that is free at point of use means that people are not expected to pay for accessing healthcare services (primary and secondary care). Instead, their health insurance is covered through tax. Healthcare workers are essential, and their working and employment conditions must be improved.

The huge disparities between rural and urban access to healthcare, such as emergency and specialised services, should be addressed, with investment made to support and increase the number of healthcare services and workers in rural areas.

Cooperation between companies and states allows health crises to be tackled more effectively and solutions to health issues more easily available to countries in need. International organisations such as the WHO should therefore be strengthened, while also being made more transparent and inclusive.

The European Union is beginning the process to establish a European Health Union. FYEG supports a mechanism to harmonise healthcare across Europe. To develop this, the EU should commit to properly funding its EU4Health programme*.

About 25 % of Europe's citizens suffer from mental health problems. As FYEG, we demand that mental health and related conditions be taken more seriously. We have to increase the availability of counselling and psychotherapy as well as funding for other mental health services in order to provide adequate and affordable care for every European citizen who is experiencing mental health problems, independent of their economic or social background.

Marginalised groups (for example women, LGBTQIA+, racialised people) often face issues when trying to access healthcare, such as stigma around their health needs and discrimination, to the point of being refused treatment or not taken seriously. Those with existing medical conditions (such as people with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses), may face difficulties receiving treatment for other conditions. All discrimination should be fought against, with awareness-raising and stigma-reducing campaigns and training for healthcare workers. Additionally, we demand more research to be conducted into mental health in marginalised groups, as well as initiatives that specifically target loneliness and the social isolation of specific groups such as elderly people, chronically ill people, and disabled people.

FYEG fights for sexual and reproductive health and rights (see chapter 1).

FYEG also supports a stronger focus on prevention in public health policy. Fighting air and water pollution, eliminating endocrine disruptors and carcinogenic substances, promoting healthy diets including the reduced consumption of heavily processed food, and promoting sport are all key actions to prevent severe chronic disease. Prevention policies on smoking and drinking should also be put in place, for example through information campaigns, taxation, the regulation of sales, and bans on advertising. FYEG supports a harm-reduction approach through prevention programmes within drug policy and the treatment of addiction. Alongside addiction awareness-raising, the stigma around addiction should be tackled. Addiction should be recognised as a medical condition, and social protection and medical and social support should be offered to those suffering from addiction.

We support the full legalisation of drugs across Europe, while increasing prevention measures. Drug legalisation would deprive organised crime structures

of a lucrative source of income. Tax revenues from drug sales should be used to fund the healthcare and prevention sectors and social services.

We demand a fair, publicly owned pharmaceutical sector. Large pharmaceutical companies should not hold the monopoly* on public safety, especially when this leads to unequal access to life-saving treatments. Additionally, life-saving drugs should not be sold at a profit. All contracts made between pharmaceutical companies and national governments or the European Union should be transparent and made publicly available.

Individuals' well-being, dignity, and wishes should be fully respected in the healthcare system. We fight for improving palliative care* and for allowing people to choose the way they die.

f. Education

Education is more than just learning how to spell, counting to 10 or training workers. It should also be the process of learning how to grow as a person and as a member of society. Education must be accessible to all genders, ages, sexualities, religions, and ethnicities, independent of ability, origin, place of residence, access to digital tools, wealth, or legal status.

Education should not depend on the balance of your bank account. It should be free and publicly funded, from kindergarten to university. Education should not focus on performance or economic profitability. Pressure should be taken off children and students, and special attention should be paid to their mental health.

Vocational colleges* and universities are of equal importance to institutions of higher education. Young people who want to pursue a more practical education should be given the same resources as those who are more academically inclined. We believe that young people who pursue a practical education should receive payment for the duration of their apprenticeship and be ensured qualified guidance throughout their education.

All types of curricula should be inclusive. Topics such as LGBTQIA+ issues, sex education, mental health, and anti-racism, among others, should feature in every school's curriculum. We believe that students from ethnic or linguistic minority groups should have access to, for example, their culture and/or language of origin in schools, either as an extra-curricular activity or as part of the main curriculum. It should be safe and possible to break gender norms and class norms in the educational system, and students should be encouraged to follow their dreams and passions instead of fulfilling social expectations.

288 FYEG also believes that European and international mobility should be accessible
289 to all from an early age. With that in mind, we support increasing the budget of
290 the Erasmus+ programme to guarantee that every young person has the opportunity
291 to take part in an international mobility programme before graduating from
292 secondary school and before graduating from university.