

Article – Social Europe: what Parliament is doing on social policy



Competence in social policies: EU vs national governments

The EU has only [limited competence](#) when it comes to social issues as most of it is up to national governments.

The responsibility for employment and social policies **lies mostly with the member states** and their governments. This means that national governments – and not the EU – decide on issues such as wage regulations, including minimum wage, the role of collective bargaining, pensions systems and retirement age, and unemployment benefits.

However, over the years, the **EU has been working on social issues** throughout the European integration process and come up with a series of instruments in the social sector. These include EU laws, funds and tools to better coordinate and monitor national policies. The EU also encourages countries to share best practices on issues such as social inclusion, poverty and pensions.

The Treaty of Rome in 1957 already included fundamental principles such as **equal pay for women and men** as well as the **right of workers to move freely**

within the EU. To make this mobility possible, further provisions were adopted, such as rules for the mutual recognition of diplomas, guarantees regarding medical treatment when abroad and safeguards regarding already acquired pension rights.

In addition there are EU rules on **working conditions**, such as working time or part-time work, as well as legislation to tackle workplace discrimination and to ensure workers' health and safety.

The EU complements and supports EU countries in their efforts to organise healthcare and improve the health of Europeans through funding and legislation on a wide range of topics, such as health products and services, safe food, tackling diseases, clean air or healthy workplaces

In November 2017, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission proclaimed the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) to deliver new and more effective rights for people and support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. The pillar is based on 20 principles and comprises a number of initiatives linked to equal opportunities and access to the labour market; fair working conditions; and adequate and sustainable social protection.

Since the early stages of European integration, the European Parliament has often called for the EU to be more active on social issues and has supported the Commission proposals in this area.