

The Covid-19 pandemic has widened the gap between rich and poor, how can Europe intervene on this aspect?

Yes, unfortunately, the pandemic is exacerbating existing inequalities and indeed the gap between rich and poor is widening. On one hand, it is high time for an ambitious programme to counteract this effectively. Such a program would have to include EU-wide minimum standards, such as minimum wages that actually protect against poverty, a minimum income or minimum pensions and social security systems. On the other hand, there must finally be an end to the bailout of large companies with billions, while at the same time these companies pay out bonuses and dividends and lay off their employees.

Due to the lockdown we have seen an increase in the gig economy, where workers' rights and wages are very low. Recently the Milan Public Prosecutor's Office ordered delivery companies to hire workers as employees, what are your thoughts on this?

I would like to emphasise two points here: First of all, employees in these economies are workers and must be treated as such, i.e. they must be allowed to organise and conclude collective agreements. Then the gig economy must pay taxes like all other companies. This means that we must finally ensure that there is fair taxation and that all loopholes are closed.

The closure of schools as a counter to the pandemic increases the gap between classes, how will we be able to close this gap? Does this also affect the different qualifications and therefore income between skilled and unskilled workers?

Please don't get me wrong - education and training are very important and access to education is a basic right that should be equally available to all. However, unfortunately we will not overcome the class question with this. What we need is a redistribution and much higher investments in social infrastructure, in health care, educational facilities etc. and a fair and universal access to good education for everyone.

In the resolution adopted on February 9, 2021 of which she was rapporteur, it is asked to introduce the minimum wage. There are 21 countries that have it and 6 do not, do you want to introduce a minimum wage that is the same for all European countries?

No, that is not my concern. What I want is that all workers are paid in such a way that they do not have to live in poverty. It must be guaranteed that the minimum wage in a country ensures that this is the case. The amount varies and is different in each country. What is needed, however, are thresholds, 60% of the median wage/ 50% of the average wage, in order to actually protect against poverty. Most of all we have to strengthen the trade unions and collective bargaining!

The minimum wage is principle no. 6 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, do you believe that it has been respected or are we moving too late?

Precarious employment, in-work-poverty, etc. all this was already at a peak before COVID-19. The crisis now will exacerbate the situation as the middle class and small business will disappear more and more. People with insecure jobs were the first to lose their work and this trend will unfortunately continue. In this respect, yesterday would have been the time to act. But it is now no longer just a question of timing, it is more a question of clear and effective instruments!

Another aspect of the wage gap is the gap between men and women, what needs to be done to combat the gender gap?

In this context, I very much welcome the fact that the issue of "pay transparency" is back on the table. Because what The Left and I have always advocated is: equal pay for equal work always and everywhere!

Immigrant workers are often exploited from a wage point of view, what can Europe do and what actions has the European Parliament taken, or will it have to activate?

There was an announcement by Commissioner Schmit to become active in this field at European level, but later it was said that national regulations are sufficient. In Germany, we see how unbearable the conditions are for example in the meat industry, among others. There is an urgent need for real occupational health and safety and much more control to ensure that working time laws are observed or that minimum wages are not undermined.

Can the NextGenerationEU act on ensuring decent wages for all by increasing equal rights and fighting poverty?

It is a good approach to help weak regions, to support digitalisation and to promote the green transition. Please don't get me wrong, I support all of this too, but the focus is a wrong. As long as competitiveness and growth are the focus and the allocation is not even tied to social conditions, poverty cannot really be fought. If we are serious about this, the social concerns of the people in the EU must finally take precedence over the free movement of goods and finances.

What do you think needs to be done to strengthen the European spirit in citizens and increase the awareness and inclusion of our peoples?

Social, social, social! We must strengthen the trade unions and put the interest of workers and the people at the centre of all our decisions.

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