RECOMMENDATIONS: REPORT ON THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF A EUROPEAN ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

This short paper has been prepared by Birthe, John, and Ana, based on a consultation process with the Association of Social Workers in Europe, as well as on data and research from European networks such as the European Social Network, and the results of research projects, including the study on responsiveness in social services. A more detailed document will be provided later, drawing on the discussions held during the delegates’ meeting.

1. Integrated community care to support people in overcoming poverty

Not all European countries have integrated services, and many are not properly funded. Developing an Integrated Care and Support is in line with the OECD recommendations (2024) and European Social Network based on the consultation process with the social services in Europe (2018-2021).

Recommendations:

a. The European Commission should support Member States to adopt integrated service delivery as part of their national anti-poverty strategies. This means bringing together key sectors—social assistance, health, education, employment, and housing—to help people with complex needs.

b. Governments should set up clear coordination across ministries and agencies. Integrated services should be delivered by multidisciplinary teams led by qualified social workers, who can assess people’s needs and provide continuous, tailored support.

c. The Commission should also provide guidance, share good practices between countries, and support common standards for data, case management, and service access. These steps will make services more effective, reduce gaps, and help people move out of poverty in a sustainable way.

These recommendations are endorsed by social workers, including those in Denmark, who advocate replacing one-size-fits-all activation requirements with individualized plans for citizens facing severe social or disability challenges.

The survey of social worker associations indicates that, while 40% of respondents report the existence of services designed to prevent poverty or provide direct support that are well integrated across sectors (e.g., social assistance, health, education, employment, housing), the majority (60%) note that such services exist but remain largely separate and uncoordinated. Survey responses show that social workers can contribute in many ways, including: helping people know their rights; supporting people in their day-to-day living; helping people set up or join community groups; teaching people skills or providing training; writing reports to demonstrate progress; including relevant information about people’s situations; creating services that directly address needs; advocating for individuals and groups; covering existing roles and responsibilities; linking lack of access to services with poverty; engaging in political involvement and advocacy; and working with policymakers to promote change (70-100% of respondents)

2. Strengthening responsive social services as a pillar of social inclusion

Responsiveness refers to an ongoing organisational process of learning from and reacting to the perspectives, needs, and actions of diverse citizens—especially those who use the services. Responsive services evolve by taking citizen contributions seriously and integrating them into decision-making, service design, delivery, and preparedness strategies. Hi recommendation is in line with a recent research done in Europe in the project: Responsiveness in social services. Survey data from IFSW Europe (2025) shows that limited responsiveness in social services reduces their impact, as too few organisations consistently turn citizen input into meaningful change.

Recommendations:

The European Commission should support the development of social services that are participatory and democratic, valuing citizen input as a source of knowledge. This means:

a. Ensuring diverse user representation, especially from marginalised groups, creating clear processes to act on feedback and complaints, and strengthening accountability by communicating results back.

b. It also requires institutionalising peer worker roles and advisory boards led by people with lived experience of social services.

c. The Commission needs to set the policy direction, fund the implementation, and monitor progress, while empowering Member States to build inclusive and participatory social services.

These recommendations are endorsed by social workers in Denmark who consider that is compulsory to provide clear, accessible information on rights and services to build confidence and reduce barriers.

3. Advancing preventive social actions for combating poverty

A preventive approach in social work is very important for fighting poverty. It means tackling the root causes of problems before they become bigger and harder to solve. Early help—like access to education, job training, or mental health support—can stop people from falling into long-term poverty and lower the risk of deeper problems later on.

a. Recommendations: The European Commission should prioritise the development and funding of preventive social services, which are currently lacking in many Member States. Integrated programmes are needed to tackle the root causes of poverty before problems escalate. Multidisciplinary teams, led by social workers, should identify at-risk individuals early and provide tailored, person-centred support, ensuring access to education, housing, healthcare, and employment services.

b. The Commission should also support cross-country learning and the sharing of best practices, helping Member States build inclusive, resilient systems where prevention effectively reduces poverty, limits inequalities, and promotes long-term social inclusion.

This recommendation is sustained by social workers in Denmark who consider that is necessary to create municipal advisory councils where users and families

influence social and disability policies, to restore autonomy to social workers, ensuring decisions are guided by expertise and direct knowledge of citizens’ needs and require impact assessments for structural changes or budget adjustments to protect citizens’ dignity, security, and ability to live fulfilling lives. To address Europe’s growing housing crisis, social workers from the homeless sector call for stronger EU action to promote affordable, inclusive, and innovative housing solutions. This includes targeted funding for new affordable homes, support for alternative housing models, and better use of public land. EU instruments such as ESF+ and ERDF should be expanded to cover housing allowances, pilot projects like tiny houses, and Housing First strategies to combat homelessness. Simplified access to microfinance for vulnerable groups must also be prioritized to ensure fair and inclusive housing opportunities across Member States.

The survey of associations of social workers asked what their organisations could do to help ensure that poverty remains a priority on the social work agenda (multiple responses allowed). The most frequently selected actions were making poverty a real part of the political agenda (86.7%) and abiding by the National Poverty Strategy while advocating for more resources (86.7%). Collaborating with other organisations or authorities (80%) and promoting internal discussions and awareness among social workers (80%) were also highly endorsed. Integrating poverty-related objectives into service delivery received moderate support (46.7%), while educating teenagers about social services and their rights was selected by only a small minority (6.7%).

4. Supporting continuous training for social services workers

Demand on social services is increasing. More people living in poverty are asking for help, and new, specialized services are needed that don’t yet exist. At the same time, many services struggle with staff shortages, an aging workforce, and difficulty recruiting and keeping skilled professionals. A good workforce strategy—one that includes ongoing training, attention to citizen needs, strong leadership, and clear role distribution—can help social services work better and be more resilient.

Recommendation:

a. The European Commission should support Member States in building strong workforce strategies for social services. This includes investing in recruitment, retention, and continuous training, supporting strong leadership, and making sure roles are clearly organised. Workforce strategies should equip social services to provide person-centred support to people living in poverty and respond effectively to social crises.

b. Member States should also encourage careful planning of staff roles, so skilled w

Workers handle complex cases while the system stays flexible and service users remain involved in decisions. Investing in professional development now ensures that staff are ready for future challenges and that systems can adapt, innovate, and maintain high-quality, person-centred care. With better resources, planning, and training, social services can have a bigger impact, reduce poverty, and improve long-term outcomes for vulnerable people.

The survey of associations of social workers asked what their organisations could do to promote knowledge and skills about the issue of poverty in their

country (multiple responses allowed). The most frequently selected actions were working with political representatives (73.3%) and encouraging participation in national or international networks (73.3%). Providing training or workshops for social workers on poverty (66.7%), organising peer-learning or mentoring programs (66.7%), and adapting the current organisation of the association to support these activities (66.7%) were also highly endorsed.

This recommendation is particularly sustained by social works in Denmark who consider that is necessary to establish transition teams that ensure continuous, tailored support from childhood to adulthood and guarantee minimum staffing and service levels in childcare, special education, healthcare, youth support, and homelessness prevention.

Endorsement letter from The Danish Association of Social Workers

Denmark is one of the world’s most prosperous countries, with relatively small income gaps, a high standard of living, and a strong welfare state.

A recent survey shows that 18.0% of the Danish population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion—slightly higher than Sweden (17.5%) and above Finland (16.8%) and Norway (15.7%). Denmark also has higher levels of severe material and social deprivation (4.0%) compared to Finland (3.7%), Sweden (3.0%), and Norway (2.8%).

While the gaps with Nordic neighbors have narrowed recently, these figures highlight ongoing challenges in reducing poverty and social exclusion in Denmark.

(Source: Økonomisk udsathed, 16 August 2025, Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd)

A manager from our social work team at the Social Emergency Service in Copenhagen provides a clear description of the potential consequences of political reforms:

"No matter what problem a person faces, it becomes worse when resources are scarce. Illness, addiction, unemployment, violence, social control, or other forms of vulnerability hit harder if one is also living in poverty. Poverty is stressful. It makes it harder to plan, act, and handle both big and small problems—simply because the constant mental pressure leaves very little capacity.

We know a lot about the costs of growing up in poverty—and about the long-term consequences for health, social networks, and life opportunities. We know that when finances are tight, family conflicts increase, raising the risk of both physical and psychological violence. We also know that a strained economy intensifies social isolation.

In fact, we know so much about poverty that it is astonishing that, as a wealthy society, we seem to think we can afford it. Even more incomprehensible is that politicians knowingly choose to increase poverty for some of the groups already hardest hit. The social assistance reform may seem irrelevant to many, but it affects us all, because the reduced rates will lower the quality of life for people we, as a society, should be protecting.

For us as professionals, the social assistance reform is one of those pitfalls that will make it significantly harder to do good social work—regardless of where we are employed. What use is our well-designed methods, carefully planned interventions,

and all our skills if citizens end up on the streets because the rent became unaffordable?

The Danish Association of Social Workers, together with other concerned parties, has warned that this is a reform with frightening consequences. We must promise each other to continue shedding light on these consequences—and insist that we can afford welfare far more than we can afford to let people live in poverty.