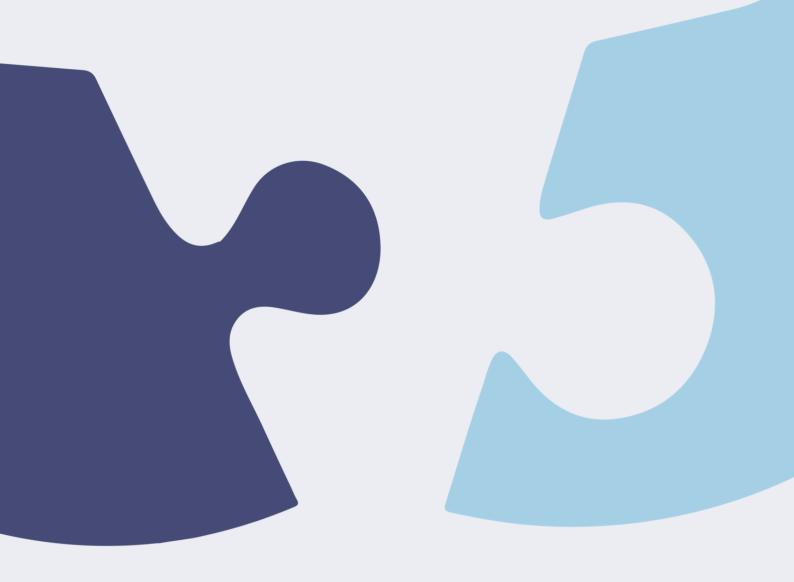# Position paper
EU Anti-Poverty Strategy

May 2025

Introduction

The first Sustainable Development Goal calls to end poverty in all its manifestations by 2030 across the globe. Yet, poverty remains a shameful systemic failure in the European Union, affecting millions of people. As the leading network of European civil society organisations working for a more social Europe, Social Platform believes that the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy needs to address the multidimensional nature of poverty and structural inequalities through binding measures, policy guidance and sufficient funding to ensure that no one is left behind.

Over the past decade, the European Pillar of Social Rights, EU legislative initiatives, and national policies have brought some much-needed progress in improving social rights. However, the EU's fragmented approach has failed to tackle the structural nature of poverty, lacking a coordinated and rights-based response. The ongoing cost-of-living crisis, rising energy prices, and the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have only deepened social and economic inequality, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities.

This is a pivotal moment in the fight to eradicate poverty. At the Porto Social Summit in 2021, the EU, social partners and civil society organisations agreed modest headline targets to be achieved by 2030. These targets included a commitment to reduce poverty by 15 million people – including 5 million children. However, from 2019 to 2023, poverty only decreased by1.6 million and child poverty actually increased.[1] At least 93.3 million people are currently at risk of poverty in the EU – including nearly 1 in 4 children.[2] This figure also includes 27.5 million people who are severely materially deprived. These overall figures also conceal huge disparities across groups in society. For example, over 80% of Roma experience poverty and social exclusion, rising to 98% in some EU Member States.[3]

The 2024-29 European Commission political guidelines commit to adopting the first-ever EU Anti-Poverty Strategy. Following the new Action Plan on implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights planned for end 2025,[4] the Commission proposal on the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy is expected to be published in early 2026. The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy must lay out a roadmap for ambitious actions, targets and available EU financial resources to achieve the eradication of poverty. It is of vital importance that it considers the views of people experiencing poverty and civil society organisations who work with people in all their diversity.

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1 European Commission, Employment and Social Developments in Europe Upward social convergence in the EU and the role of social investment, 2024.
2 Eurostat, Living conditions in Europe - poverty and social exclusion, 2025.
3 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Roma Survey 2021
4 For further information about Social Platforms' position on the new Action Plan on the Pillar of Social Rights see contribution to the call for evidence on new Action Plan, 2025

For the new Anti-Poverty Strategy to succeed, the EU must rethink old, ineffective approaches and strategies. For example, we have seen that despite periods of economic growth, the 'trickle-down' effect fails to benefit society as a whole, particularly those living in poverty or social exclusion. Instead, the narrow pursuit of growth serves to widen inequalities and leads to severe environmental degradation. Similarly, the focus on employment as a route out of poverty will not succeed if it relies on precarious, low-paid and low-quality jobs. Instrumentalising social policy to drive growth through labour productivity and competitiveness will undermine the European social model – as also argued by Mario Draghi[5]. Respecting the dignity of people must be the ultimate goal.

At the core of poverty is the unequal distribution of resources, wealth, income and power, actively compounded by discrimination and inadequate social protection. These root causes of poverty are systemic and passed on from generation to generation. To address them and to break this vicious cycle, the EU must adopt a transformative approach that tackles structural inequality, strengthens social protection, ensures equal access to rights and services, combats discrimination, promotes inclusive governance, and invests in prevention and early intervention policies, acknowledging that the prevalence of poverty is the result of a political choice and is a systemic, rather than individual failure. Only by addressing these root causes rather than merely alleviating symptoms, can the EU deliver a strategy that creates real and lasting change.

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5 _Mario Draghi, The future of European competitiveness – A competitiveness strategy for Europe (2024)_

Social Platform Recommendations

The Anti-Poverty Strategy must:

Be built on the horizontal principles of…

- Rights-based approach
- Intersectionality
- Holistic approach
- Both Universal and Targeted Approaches
- Investment and Life-Cycle Approach

Be a comprehensive framework that addresses poverty's multidimensional nature

This framework should be structured around three pillars

1 access to adequate resources: Ensuring financial security through adequate income support and quality jobs.

2 access to quality services: Guaranteeing universal access to affordable, inclusive, high-quality services.

3 empowerment, participation and inclusion: Empowering people experiencing poverty to take an active role in policy-making and implementation.

Recommend that Member States establish clear structures

In order to develop, implement and monitor their anti-poverty strategies clear structures are needed to ensure effective coordination and integration of effort across all relevant government departments and ministries and the mainstreaming of poverty as an issue across government.

Recommend that Member States produce national and regional anti-poverty strategies

These strategies must set clear targets and priorities for poverty reduction, and following the same structure and in line with existing thematic enabling condition for the use of European Social Fund Plus, European Regional Development Fund.

The Anti-Poverty Strategy must:

Ensure that EU resources under the next MFF are used effectively and have specific earmarkings

Earmarking must be used to support local initiatives aimed at reducing poverty and social exclusion (e.g. European Social Fund Plus, European Regional Development Fund, Just Transition Fund, programmes supporting education, research, inclusion, integration, civil engagement objectives).

Have strong monitoring and implementation mechanisms

- Improving the collection of disaggregated data on poverty and inequality, by various factors, such as gender, age, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, ensuring that policies are evidence-based and responsive to emerging challenges.

- Ensuring that its implementation is adequately monitored through the European Semester process by proposing Country-Specific Recommendations on poverty reduction for all Member States, which need to make progress to achieve, and ideally exceed, the targets of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) as measured by the Social Scoreboard as well as national poverty reduction targets.

- Add more indicators and strengthen the methodology of the Social Convergence Framework to adequately detect poor performances or provide sufficient incentive to improve.

- Designate an EU Anti-Poverty Coordinator in the European Commission to oversee the implementation of the Anti-Poverty Strategy; and to liaise with national and regional authorities, civil society, social economy actors and people experiencing poverty.

- Establish a formal EU Civil Society Monitoring Mechanism that brings together relevant stakeholders and organises a yearly report assessing progress made alongside recommendations.

Horizontal Principles

A robust EU Anti-Poverty Strategy should be built on key horizontal underpinning principles that ensure its effectiveness, sustainability, and equity. These principles should guide policy-making and implementation across all levels of governance. Below are some fundamental principles that should be included:

Rights-based approach:
Poverty is not merely an economic or social issue but is rooted in multiple violations of fundamental rights. The strategy should be anchored in Article 2 of the Treaty of the EU, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and international human rights frameworks, including the European Social Charter, ensuring that policies actively combat discrimination, ensure adequate income, and guarantee access to essential services. The EU Member States are duty bearers according to international human rights law.

Intersectionality
Poverty disproportionately affects children, young people, women, single parents, ethnic minorities such as the Roma, migrants, people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ people and other marginalised groups. The strategy must take an intersectional approach and address how multiple forms of discrimination compound socio-economic disadvantage.

The fight against discrimination must be a foundational principle of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their background, have equal access to opportunities, resources, and protections. Ensuring equality before the law, actively addressing institutional biases, and enforcing anti-discrimination policies supporting access to employment, housing, education, healthcare, social services and social protection, and participation are crucial for breaking the cycle of poverty. The strategy must also promote inclusive policy-making by integrating an intersectional approach to address overlapping disadvantages.

The strategy should acknowledge that punitive migration policies lead to increases in poverty for migrant communities seek to rectify this, and ensure that the implementation of the Migration Pact and the proposed new Return Regulation does not lead to the further erosion of social rights for migrants. The EU cannot implement the Anti-Poverty Strategy if its migration policies lead to the impoverishment of migrant communities.

Existing EU initiatives aimed at tackling poverty and social exclusion of certain groups of the population in vulnerable situations, such as the Child Guarantee or the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness need to be acknowledged by the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy as valuable contributions. The strategy should furthermore link to the Union of Equality and the implementation or renewal of its strategies aimed at protecting some of the most marginalised people in society.

A strong commitment to the fight against discrimination and the promotion of intersectional and intergenerational fairness will not only strengthen social cohesion but also ensure that the fight against poverty is truly inclusive, leaving no one behind.

Holistic approach
Poverty is multidimensional and requires coordinated action across various policy areas, including social protection, employment, housing, education, health, and digital inclusion. The strategy must take a cross-sectoral approach ensuring that economic, social, and environmental policies contribute to poverty eradication rather than exacerbating inequalities. For example, climate policies must integrate social safeguards to prevent energy poverty, and employment policies must guarantee inclusive access to quality jobs for all, including persons with disabilities, single parents and other disadvantaged groups.

A holistic approach is essential for an effective EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, recognising that poverty is not limited to income insecurity but exacerbated by exclusion from or limited access to quality housing, education, healthcare, social care and support services, decent work, and social participation. Even if people's basic needs are met, they can experience social exclusion due to rising inequality. Addressing poverty in isolation through fragmented policies leads to limited impact. Only by acknowledging the various dimensions of poverty and social exclusion, and by tackling its root causes across multiple sectors can the EU create lasting solutions.

This means improving synergies and integration between different policy areas and services and encouraging an integrated approach so that services reinforce each other, with policies and programmes delivered in an integrated way at local level.[6] A holistic strategy also requires strong governance and coordination at and between EU, national, and regional levels. For instance, investing in comprehensive family support and in enabling services that help and empower parents to build a decent life for their families, are equally essential.

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6 De Schutter, O., Frazer, H., Guio, A.-C., & Marlier, E. (2023). *The Escape from Poverty: Breaking the Vicious Cycles Perpetuating Disadvantage. (Policy Press Shorts Research). Policy Press.*

Both Universal and Targeted Approaches

An effective EU Anti-Poverty Strategy must strike the right balance between universal and targeted approaches to effectively address as well as prevent poverty and social exclusion. A universal-only approach, aimed at promoting the wellbeing of all members of society, often fails to reach the most vulnerable; while an overly targeted approach, aimed at supporting the most disadvantaged, can create stigma, fragmentation, and exclusion. The most effective anti-poverty strategies combine universal and targeted policies to ensure fairness, efficiency, and long-term impact. This requires cross-sectoral coordination to align interventions and prevention measures across health, education, employment and social services, addressing poverty's multidimensional nature.

Investments in universal healthcare, education, childcare, and social protection benefit entire societies, not just the poorest, leading to a more inclusive, cohesive and productive economy. Yet some groups face higher risks of poverty due to historical discrimination, labour market barriers, or lack of access to social protections, social services. Targeted policies help reach groups in the most vulnerable situations to ensure they are not left behind.

Investment and Life-Cycle Approach

Poverty affects both present and future generations. Children born into poverty are likely to grow up to live in poverty as adults. It is therefore important to focus on prevention and on breaking the intergenerational perpetuation of poverty. Without sufficient resources, anti-poverty commitments can remain empty promises. The strategy must be backed by EU and national funding with specific financial earmarking to ensure that social policies are properly financed and have political support across the Member States.

A successful EU Anti-Poverty Strategy must prioritise adequate investment and adopt a life-cycle approach to ensure that policies address poverty at all stages of life. These two elements are crucial for breaking the cycle of poverty, fostering long-term social cohesion, and enabling all individuals to participate fully in society. Poverty affects people differently at various stages of life. A life-cycle approach recognises that risks of poverty emerge from childhood through to later life and must be addressed proactively rather than seeking to deal with the consequences. Critically, an ecosystemic perspective must recognise that poverty is rarely an isolated experience. Families function as interdependent units, where unmet needs in one member ripple across others, compounding situations of vulnerability.

This approach would include strengthening the European Child Guarantee to ensure it is sufficiently funded and fully implemented, providing every child with access to nutrition,

education (including early childhood education and care), healthcare, housing, and social protection. A life-cycle approach also necessitates access to comprehensive and inclusive healthcare across all stages of life, including maternal health services, which are critical for the wellbeing of mothers but also for giving children an equal start in life.

An investment approach also means providing quality jobs and fair working conditions with a specific attention to disadvantaged workers and expanding youth employment and training programmes, ensuring that every person, regardless of their background has the opportunity to thrive. To support people in later life, we must guarantee adequate pensions, tackle gender disparities, and invest in affordable healthcare and long-term care services. Member States must also ensure the adequacy, accessibility and coverage of minimum income systems to ensure everyone is supported throughout the life-cycle.

These horizontal principles are key to ensuring the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy is effective and can become a roadmap for poverty eradication.

Comprehensive Framework

To effectively combat poverty, the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy must be built on a comprehensive framework that ensures coherence, sustainability, and impact. Furthermore, it must favour an integrated systemic approach across all its pillars to tackle poverty. This necessitates developing cross-sectoral frameworks that address poverty's multidimensional nature through coordinated action across employment, education, health, housing and social services - replacing fragmented initiatives with synergistic solutions.

This framework should be structured around three pillars:

1. **Access to Adequate Resources:** Ensuring financial security through adequate income support and quality jobs.

2. **Access to Quality Services:** Guaranteeing universal access to affordable, inclusive, high-quality services.

3. **Empowerment, Participation and Inclusion:** Empowering people experiencing poverty to take an active role in policy-making and implementation.

Pillar 1: Access to Adequate Resources

As a first component, any anti-poverty strategy must ensure that everyone has access to sufficient financial resources to meet their basic needs and participate fully in society. This requires:

Adequate Social Protection

Inadequate social protection contributes to the persistence of poverty in the European Union. In 2024, 2 out of 3 unemployed persons were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.[7] Well-designed social protection systems are a cornerstone of any strategy to prevent and reduce poverty. However, across the EU, many people fall into or remain trapped in poverty due to insufficient, inaccessible, or overly conditional and bureaucratic social protection systems. Rather than serving as a reliable safety net, current systems often leave gaps that allow individuals and families to slip through, especially during moments of vulnerability such as job loss, illness, disability, life transitions or family changes. This inadequacy leaves many recipients in persistent poverty, unable to afford basic goods such as healthy food or heating. It particularly affects people with multiple risks of social exclusion and with multiple support needs. The lack of automatic indexation of social protection benefits in many Member States further erodes the value of support over time.

In order to effectively address poverty, the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy must encourage Member States to improve the adequacy, accessibility, and coverage of their social protection systems in line with the recommendations of the High-Level Group on the Future of Social Protection and of the Welfare State in the EU.[8]

Unfortunately, poverty also contributes to child-family separation. Low household incomes, challenges in meeting basic needs of children, and limited access to essential services and social protection systems for the family can lead to the placement of children in alternative care, further perpetuating the cycle of disadvantage. Better income support for families with children with a particular concern for low-resourced families, coupled with a comprehensive set of family support services boosts resilience in the face of risks[9].Moreover, protection systems can better prevent poverty, especially among women, by improving the adequacy of pensions, including by compensating for periods of unpaid work during which the parent of a child or the caregiver of a person in need of care makes limited or no pension contributions.

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7 *Eurostat, Living conditions in Europe - poverty and social exclusion, 2025.*
8 *European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, The future of social protection and of the welfare state in the EU, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023.*
9 *Daly, M., Gosme, E., Shorey, H. and Uzunalioğlu, M. (2025) Policy Priorities for Family Resilience, rEUsilience Working Paper Series: 17*

Minimum income schemes are a crucial policy tool to ensure social inclusion, and are one of the last defences against poverty, particularly in a cost-of-living crisis. Currently not one EU Member State has an adequate minimum income scheme set above the poverty line. Young people are further disadvantaged with a number of member states either directly excluding young people through age-based access criteria and/or indirectly through the means by which the level of support provided is decided. Despite the OECD warning it may take up to five generations for a young person from a low-income background to reach the average national income.[10] Furthermore, between 30-50% of people across the EU do not receive the minimum income benefits to which they are entitled.[11] The reasons for non-take-up vary but can be due to complexity of administrative procedures, fear of being sanctioned, discriminatory attitudes towards people experiencing poverty, lack of information, literacy, language or digital skills[12]. Non-take-up is not merely a logistical issue but one that is deeply emotional and psychological for many people. Feelings of shame and failure often accompany the need to seek assistance. For example, many parents, particularly single mothers, report feeling as though they are begging or that they have failed in their role as providers and caregivers. We must make proactive efforts to reach those at risk of poverty, rather than presuming they are not struggling if they have not applied. There are some positive examples for addressing non-take-up in some Member States that have acknowledged issues with non-take-up and taken proactive measures to ensure more people can access the scheme by reducing bureaucratic hurdles, actively identifying and reaching out to those who meet the eligibility criteria, and providing clearer guidance to applicants.

The Council Recommendation on adequate minimum income was adopted in January 2023 and the European Commission will publish a report on the implementation of the Minimum Income Recommendation in 2025. This should inform how the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy seeks to strengthen minimum income schemes to ensure all Member States provide adequate, accessible, and non-discriminatory income support that lifts everyone above the poverty line. We have not yet seen meaningful progress and the last 30 years have made it clear: soft law measures consistently fail to deliver the urgent change that is needed. The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy should propose a framework Directive on Adequate Minimum Income to ensure that Member States improve the adequacy, coverage and accessibility of minimum income schemes.

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10 OECD (2019), Under Pressure: The Squeezed Middle Class, OECD Publishing, Paris.
11 European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and Social Protection Committee (SPC), The 2022 minimum income. Volume I, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022.
12 Eurofound (2024), Social protection 2.0: Unemployment and minimum income benefits, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg

Fair Wages and Socially Just Employment Policies

Despite overall labour market resilience in the EU, data reveal persistent exclusion of the most vulnerable groups. In-work poverty affects 10.9% of employed people[13], rising even higher among persons with disabilities, highlighting the prevalence of low-paid, insecure jobs, inadequate social protection, and lack of access to services. Vulnerable individuals often face structural barriers, such as discrimination, lack of tailored support, and limited access to quality employment, trapping them in cycles of exclusion. To address this, the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy must invest in social employment pathways, strengthen active labour market measures, improve job quality, and scale up the role of Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) in fostering access to decent work for the most vulnerable.

The EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages was adopted in 2022 and can play a role in reducing poverty through promoting collective bargaining, higher minimum wages and reducing in-work poverty. The Anti-Poverty Strategy should support the implementation of the Directive and assess whether the Directive is having a tangible impact in reducing precarious, low-paid employment and addressing in-work poverty.

The Platform Work Directive was adopted in 2024 with the aim of improving the working conditions and social protection for platform workers. The Directive obliges Member States to set criteria for determining whether someone is a genuinely self-employed or should be reclassified as an employee. The Anti-Poverty Strategy should assess whether further interventions are needed to tackle bogus self-employment and algorithmic management in the workplace or to protect atypical workers from in-work poverty and other forms of social exclusion.

The adoption of the Work-Life Balance Directive was a positive step forward, though it has not been fully transposed by several Member States. The Directive sets out minimum standards for parental leave, introducing a minimum of 10 days for paternity leave. Yet it does not regulate the pay levels sufficiently, meaning that compensation can be as low as sick pay levels. Implementation is dependent on the political will of Member States. Member States will submit comprehensive information regarding the implementation of the Directive by August 2027 to inform a review by the European Commission, which will be accompanied by a legislative proposal if appropriate. This would be key to strengthen work-life-balance measures across the EU, to update the directive to the changing world of work and to close the childcare gap.

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13 *Eurostat, Living conditions in Europe - poverty and social exclusion, 2025.*

The childcare gap remains one of the most pressing challenges for new parents across Europe today. This gap arises when well-paid parental leave has been exhausted, but access to state-supported full-time Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is not yet available. During this critical window, families are left navigating the complexities of childcare without adequate support. To this date, only 5 EU countries guarantee a statutory entitlement to state-supported ECEC after the end of the paid leave period.[14] High-quality and inclusive ECEC is important for children's development and wellbeing and can be a support for families in vulnerable situations. However, in many countries, participation of children in vulnerable situations in ECEC is significantly lower than other children (average of 15 percentage points).[15] Moreover, a revised Work-Life Balance Directive could also promote the effective take-up of carers' leave through adequate payment and specify conditions where flexible working arrangements shall be granted by the employer.

Care responsibilities, particularly informal care within families, present a significant challenge to extended working lives, especially for women. This comes along with lower retirement savings due to fragmented employment trajectories and lower earnings, leading to financial gender gaps and financial insecurity in older age. This disparity can result in women being more economically vulnerable than men in retirement. Implementing paid leave when taking care of relatives and supporting pension crediting for caregivers could prevent the loss of income, reduce the risk poverty in old age, and allow for a better balance between caregiving and employment.

Implement the Quality Jobs Roadmap
The Quality Jobs Roadmap that is due to be proposed by the end of 2025 should clearly define quality jobs, and the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy should support a move to quality jobs and away from precarious employment. The European Commission aims for the quality jobs roadmap to "support fair wages, good working conditions, training and fair job transitions for workers and self-employed people, notably by increasing collective bargaining coverage".

The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy must build on this roadmap and support its delivery. It is a key opportunity to ensure all people have access to adequately paid and high-quality employment, particularly addressing in-work poverty. The specific needs of sectors such as healthcare, social services and care sectors, such as gender disparity, low wages and

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14 *European Observatory on Family Policy, COFACE Families Europe, Families Studies Centre of Odisee hogeschool, Factsheet on Childcare gap in the European Union, A 2025 Overview*
15 *Monitoring Framework on European Child Guarantee.*

lack of professional development. These challenges contribute to ongoing labour shortages in the sectors. Furthermore, the roadmap should also ensure support for quality employment for disadvantaged groups furthest away from the labour market. The roadmap should complement the existing employment target of 78% employment by 2030 with a quality jobs target, aiming to achieve that an ambitious percentage of jobs across Europe qualifies as a "quality job".

A quality job should, as a minimum standard: combine fair wages; good working conditions; job security and adequate social protection; access to paid for training; reskilling and/or upskilling without costs and during working time; adequate health and safety at the work place; work-life balance; equality and non-discrimination; as well as collective bargaining and full respect for workers and trade union rights, regardless of their employment status.

Measuring progress towards such a target would require a multifaceted composite indicator measuring key components of a quality job. To do so, it would be necessary to develop additional comparable quality indicators. As a basis for this work, the EU could take inspiration from the OECD framework to measure and assess the quality of jobs that considers three objective and measurable dimensions: earnings quality, labour market security and the working environment.[16]

The Quality Jobs Roadmap should promote worker-owned cooperatives as a tried-and-tested model consistently providing better working conditions, more equal pay, and higher worker satisfaction resulting from worker participation. The Roadmap can also play an important role in fostering employment for disadvantaged groups such as persons with disabilities.

It also should tackle the growing issue of atypical and non-standard contracts by providing workers with more rights to transfer to more secure forms of employment and effectively ban zero-hour contracts, neither of which were achieved by the 2019 Directive on transparent and predictable working conditions. Cooperatives should be promoted as a way to secure better working conditions for non-standard workers through solidarity and mutualisation.

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16 *Cazes, S., A. Hijzen and A. Saint-Martin (2015), "Measuring and Assessing Job Quality: The OECD Job Quality Framework", OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 174, OECD Publishing, Paris.*

European Job Guarantee

Building on the existing pilot project, the European Commission should scale up existing Job Guarantee schemes and propose a European Job Guarantee to improve the availability of decent work. A European Job Guarantee should be funded by the EU, national governments and local authorities and implemented at national, regional and local level to reduce involuntary, long-term unemployment by creating a safety net of publicly funded employment. It should promote quality sustainable jobs and prevent in-work poverty by ensuring sustainable contracts, strong employment rights, including adequate wages above minimum wage level, and social security provisions as well as workplace learning, upskilling and reskilling.

Participation in the Job Guarantee programme must be voluntary, and existing benefits should not be withdrawn or reduced if someone decides not to participate. It is necessary to implement personalised pathway approaches rooted in individual circumstances. The inclusion of civil society organisations, trade unions, and social economy actors, notably Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs), in Job Guarantee schemes is key to facilitate access to quality employment for long-term unemployed persons and persons in situations of vulnerability in crucial sectors.

Pillar 2. Access to Quality Services

Poverty cannot be tackled through just addressing income alone. Everyone must also have access to affordable, inclusive, high-quality services of general interest that support well-being and enable social mobility. This should come alongside targeted support for the most vulnerable, ensuring they receive equal access to both essential services and social services. Strengthening coordination across agencies, policies, and governance levels is key to improving services for groups in vulnerable situations. Agencies pooling budgets can support a more integrated approach. For example, it has been shown that when local services focus on child-centred methods, early intervention, and actively involve disadvantaged families and communities through a community-driven model, the impact on child poverty reduction is significant.[17]

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17 *De Schutter, O., Frazer, H., Guio, A., & Marlier, E. (2023). The Escape from Poverty. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.*

The strategy must ensure:

Universal Accessible and Affordable Social Services

To ensure access to social services, the European Commission should suggest an Action Plan for Social Services to create an enabling regulatory and financial framework for not-for-profit social service providers. The Action Plan should aim to develop a resilient ecosystem for social services. While the Social Protection Committee agreed in 2010 on a Voluntary European Quality Framework for Social Services, this has not been taken further in recent years and lacks any common approach to measure and compare the quality of social services across the EU.[18] Therefore, the Action Plan for Social Services should establish ambitious common quality standards embedded in human rights, ensuring services are available, accessible, affordable and adequate. It should support the creation of the right public funding and investment conditions for social services by using and adapting all available EU instruments that impact such conditions, including by making relevant funds from the next MFF accessible to not-for-profit social service providers.

To advance a progressive, ecosystemic approach to support services, the Action Plan should embrace the development of a flagship European Reference Framework for Service Coordination. This framework would foster cross-sectoral collaboration, aligning policies and implementation efforts. By offering structured guidance, it would help countries dismantle silos, harmonise fragmented initiatives, and strengthen holistic interventions.

The Action Plan for Social Services should entail measures aiming to increase the job creation potential of social services by making the sector more attractive to work in with better working conditions, fair wages, up-and reskilling, better career paths, collective bargaining and improved health and safety standards for workers. It should also improve the recognition of formal and informal care work, including the skills developed while caring for others. Carers and parents develop a new set of soft skills that contribute to social inclusion, personal development, empowerment, and employability. Recognising and validating these skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning requires a life-cycle approach to education.

Moreover, it should support widespread access to information about available services; the take-up of social rights, especially regarding vulnerable groups; the reduction of administrative burden, and the highest degree of inclusivity and non-discrimination.

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18 *Social Platform, Quality Social Services for All, 2021.*

Finally, it should support the digitalisation of social services, while making sure that negative side effects, including the digital divide, digital poverty and accessibility concerns are tackled, and the quality of services is ensured.

Affordable Housing, Homelessness and Energy Access

The Anti-Poverty Strategy must also focus on expanding social housing and implementing measures to combat homelessness and energy poverty, by recognising housing as a fundamental right. We welcome the creation of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness and the upcoming European Affordable Housing Plan. It is positive that the plan will "address structural drivers, develop a strategy for housing construction, offer technical assistance to cities and Member States and focus on investment" and that the European Commission is already working with the European Investment Bank (EIB) on a pan-European investment platform for affordable and sustainable housing. As part of this effort, the operationalisation of affordability must consider whether the remaining income after housing costs is sufficient to cover other basic needs. This should go hand-in-hand with a reassessment of the current overburden threshold to ensure a more accurate reflection of the real impact of housing costs on households.

Such investments must contain strong social conditionalities - safeguards to ensure not only the long-term sustainability of social and affordable housing, but also a measurable increase in the overall social housing stock. We also welcome the announcement that upcoming revisions of EU state aid rules will enable housing support measures, especially for affordable energy-efficient and social housing. Indeed, the revision of the rules must enable social, public, cooperative, and community-led housing providers to meet the evolving needs of low and middle-income groups. Finally, adequate support via the Social Climate Fund with renovations and access to affordable energy-efficient housing is crucial.

The Anti-Poverty Strategy must work in tandem with the Affordable Housing Action Plan and the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness with an overarching ambition to eradicate homelessness and support the availability of adequate, quality, accessible, and affordable housing for all, especially those in the most vulnerable situations, including people experiencing homelessness. Support for investment in housing must especially focus on quality affordable, public, cooperative, and social housing to support people most affected by the ongoing housing crisis, including those at highest risk of homelessness and housing exclusion. In parallel, it is essential to prevent fiscal consolidation from hindering crucial investments in the sector. The Housing First model has proven successful by providing immediate housing to people

experiencing homelessness without preconditions. This helps break the cycle of chronic homelessness and supports social inclusion. The Housing First approach should be integrated into the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and supported using EU funds.

The recently published Affordable Energy Action Plan takes some positive steps by committing to lowering energy taxes, promoting flexible billing options for households, and accelerating renewable energy, but more must be done to solve the structural causes of energy poverty in Europe, going beyond temporary relief. The Citizen's Energy Package set to be published in Q3 of 2025 offers an opportunity to support those most affected by energy poverty. Investment in social housing renovation should be prioritised to ensure that the least efficient homes are upgraded to meet energy efficiency standards. In the context of the just transition, it is key that support, such as via the Social Climate Fund, protects poorer tenants and homeowners with renovations, avoiding renovictions, gentrification and protecting them from climate-related housing risks.

The Affordable Housing Plan should require Member States to adopt or, if they already exist, strengthen national and regional strategies that support sustainable, long-term funding for affordable quality and sustainable housing. Recognising the importance of collaboration with social, health, care, and employment services, the Affordable Housing Plan should not only be anchored in the ambitions to tackle poverty and homelessness in particular but also connect with existing initiatives to ensure community involvement in housing matters. Finally, the new European Commission Housing Taskforce should support the implementation of all aspects of the Affordable Energy Action Plan across European Commission services.

Education policies

Investing in quality and inclusive education, including early childhood education contribute largely to preventing social exclusion in society.

In recent years, the EU has advanced several initiatives on education, training, and skills, recognising education as a key driver of labour market participation and employment, especially through higher education. However, we see a need to shift beyond a narrow focus on labour market skills towards a broader understanding of education and lifelong learning, ensuring better access for disadvantaged groups, starting from early childhood. We also need a strengthened focus on and support for providers of non-formal and informal learning, such as vocational education and training providers and social economy enterprises, which play a key role in reaching disadvantaged groups and making education more inclusive. To achieve a more inclusive skills strategy, we propose

improving recognition of informal learning, introducing a right to transnational paid educational leave, and expanding definition of skills in the Basic Skills Action Plan – published as part of the 2025 Union of Skills – should be expanded to include key skills like personal, social and learning-to-learn (PSL) competences, civic engagement, carers-parenting soft skills, critical thinking and media literacy.

Pillar 3. Empowerment, Participation and Inclusion

People experiencing poverty must be recognised as agents of change and policies should be shaped with their direct input. Too often EU policies are top-down and decisions are not taken with the meaningful consultation of the people who are affected.

The strategy should establish mechanisms for meaningful participation, ensuring that people with lived experience of poverty, civil society organisations and social economy actors are involved in the design, implementation and monitoring at local, national, and EU levels. This would enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of policy interventions. Effective inter-service coordination is critical to this process, enabling practitioners to act as facilitators by connecting individuals and families in need with the full range of services available beyond their own remit, through seamless referral systems. Civil society organisations and social economy enterprises, including not-for-profit social service providers, play a crucial role in poverty reduction. The strategy should strengthen partnerships with such actors, ensuring that their expertise and reach are leveraged to implement innovative and community-driven solutions.

The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy must actively promote democratic participation and social inclusion by:
- *Empowering Civil Society and People Experiencing Poverty in Decision-Making and Implementation:* Establishing formal mechanisms for meaningful participation in design, implementation and monitoring of policies and funding at the EU, national, and regional levels.
- *Fostering Social Inclusion and Community Engagement:* Supporting, including financially, programmes that provide capacity-building, combat discrimination, and support social inclusion and migrant integration, ensuring that everyone can participate in society with dignity. Promote and support social cooperatives as community-driven initiatives that also empower their members via participation in decision-making within the cooperative.
- *Embedding an Intersectional Approach:* Recognising the multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination that different groups face and designing policies that address their barriers to participation.

Establish clear structures

Poverty manifests differently across the EU and some regions experience higher levels of deprivation due to economic, or demographic factors. A one-size-fits-all approach would be ineffective, so the strategy must:

- Ensure all Member States adopt comprehensive national anti-poverty strategies in line with the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, including the setting of a national poverty reduction target and using the thematic enabling conditions on social inclusion and poverty reduction applicable to structural funds.
- Encourage national and regional governments to tailor policies based on local needs while upholding EU-wide social rights.
- Strengthen local data collection and analysis to enable evidence-based decision-making, identify service gaps, and coordinate cross-sectoral responses.
- Ensure that EU funds (e.g. European Social Fund Plus, European Regional Development Fund, Just Transition Fund) are used effectively and have specific earmarkings to support local initiatives aimed at reducing poverty and social exclusion.
- Promote peer learning and exchange of best practices between Member States and regions, and civil society and social economy actors.

National and Regional Anti-Poverty Strategies

For the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy to be truly effective, it must be closely linked with national and regional strategies, ensuring a coordinated and multi-level approach to poverty reduction, and supported by public resources from EU and national level. While the EU can provide overarching policy direction, funding, and legal frameworks, national governments and regional and local authorities play the leading role in implementation, adaptation, and the delivery of services.

Critically, this requires a layered governance model: national frameworks must ensure policy coherence, monitor progress toward EU-wide targets, and guarantee accountability, while regional actors tailor interventions to local disparities. Only by integrating the national level's oversight with the regional level's granular responsiveness can strategies address both systemic inequities and place-specific deprivation.

Ensure strong financial support from the EU budget

The upcoming negotiations on the post-2027 EU budget offer a unique opportunity to provide ambitious financial support to the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy. Under the next Multiannual Financial Framework resources need to be channelled into supporting Member States with implementing their anti-poverty strategies. It is crucial that the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) maintains its role in triggering long-term structural reforms that progress towards the eradication of poverty and social exclusion, with a minimum earmarking of 25% for social inclusion in every Member State, and 5% earmarking for child poverty in all Member States, with higher allocations for Member States with high levels of child poverty. The ESF+ also plays a crucial role in tackling material deprivation in the EU and this should be further strengthened. Furthermore, the current thematic enabling condition in the Common Provisions Regulation related to poverty reduction must be kept as it helps ensure that policy reforms funded through the ESF+, and the ERDF are aligned with relevant (national or regional) strategic policy frameworks on poverty reduction.[19]

The recent announcement of the ReArm EU plan indicating that cohesion policy funds may be used for defence and the proposed amendments to the current regulations of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) are concerning. Redirecting funds away from social inclusion, inclusive employment, and support for groups in vulnerable situations threatens to erode progress made over decades, deepening inequality and weakening the very foundations of a secure and competitive Europe.

Beyond the support through cohesion policy funds, the links to other programmes supporting education, research, health policy, inclusion, integration, civic engagement and the work of civil society should also be explored.[20]

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19 Common Provisions Regulation 2021-27, thematic enabling condition 4.4: "A national or regional strategic policy or legislative framework for social inclusion and poverty reduction is in place that includes:

1. *Evidence-based diagnosis of poverty and social exclusion, including child poverty, in particular as regards equal access to quality services for children in vulnerable situations as well as homelessness, spatial and educational segregation, limited access to essential services and infrastructure, and the specific needs of vulnerable people of all ages.*
2. *Measures to prevent and combat segregation in all fields, including social protection, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services for vulnerable people, including migrants and refugees.*
3. *Measures for the shift from institutional to family- and community-based care.*
4. *Arrangements for ensuring that its design, implementation, monitoring and review is conducted in close cooperation with relevant stakeholders, including social partners and relevant civil society organisations."*

20 For further information please consult Social Platform's policy position on A post-2027 MFF for Social Europe (2025)

In particular, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), or its successor programme, can also play an important role in tackling poverty in migrant communities if there is sufficient funding devoted to supporting third-country nationals to integrate into communities from day one and to allow them to avail of their social rights. The future funding instrument for asylum and migration must have a strong component of integration and socio-economic inclusion, dedicated to third-country nationals in the EU. This should be in addition to the mainstream socio-economic inclusion and integration measures supported by ESF+.

Strong Monitoring and Implementation Mechanisms

For the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy to be effective, it requires robust monitoring and implementation mechanisms that ensure accountability, track progress, and enable policy and funding adjustments based on evidence. Implementation should be monitored through a mix of EU-wide reporting, national-level commitments, civil society participation, and independent assessments. A qualitative and data-driven approach will be crucial to measuring impact and ensuring that poverty reduction remains a political and policy priority across Member States. The EU must improve the collection of disaggregated data on poverty and inequality, ensuring that policies are evidence-based and responsive to emerging challenges. This data should include gender, age, disability, ethnicity, and migration status to capture inequalities more effectively.

The European Semester, the EU's framework for economic and social policy coordination, should be a key tool for monitoring the implementation of the strategy. This can be achieved by:

- *Supporting the implementation of the Anti-Poverty Strategy through the European Semester process:* Propose Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) on poverty reduction for Member States, which need to make progress to achieve their poverty reduction targets.
- *Expanding and improving disaggregation in the Social Scoreboard*: Introduce clear, measurable poverty reduction indicators, including in-work poverty, minimum income adequacy, and access to essential services. More headline indicators are needed to improve monitoring in the first stage assessment of the Social Convergence Framework and secondary indicators to extensively cover all 20 Social Pillar principles. It must also better disaggregate data by various factors, including gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status etc. This is necessary to properly

measure the impact of policies on various groups, particularly those in vulnerable situations.[21]

- Improvement of monitoring through the Social Scoreboard: impacting on the first stage assessment of the Social Convergence Framework. Categorising Member States based on averages rather than based on quantitative or qualitative targets is limited. If in a certain policy area many Member States perform poorly, this approach does not adequately detect poor performances or provide sufficient incentive to improve.
- Improving the methodology of the Social Convergence Framework (SCF): The SCF has been a welcome step to strengthen social monitoring in the Semester process. However, there is scope to improve its methodology, especially with regards to the first-stage assessment.[22]
- Strengthening Social Reporting under the European Semester: Encourage Member States -through relevant CSRs- to include detailed anti-poverty actions in their medium-term fiscal-structural plans, while detailing progress in annual progress reports to be assessed by the European Commission.

Effective coordination requires strong governance structures that connect EU, national, and regional authorities. The strategy should:

- Establish formal coordination mechanisms to monitor progress and ensure dialogue between the EU and Member States.
- Involve regional and local authorities, who are often best placed to implement anti-poverty measures.
- Empower civil society organisations and people experiencing poverty to have a direct role in policy design, implementation, and evaluation.

The EU should appoint an EU Anti-Poverty Coordinator to oversee the implementation of the Anti-Poverty Strategy and to liaise with national and regional authorities, civil society, social economy actors and people experiencing poverty. This person should work with an inter-sectoral coordination group spanning across Directorates-General of the European Commission. Its role should also be to enable, guide, and support cross-sectoral anti-poverty policies and their implementation at the country level.

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21 For more information, see *Social Platform, Open letter on the revision of the Social Scoreboard, 2021.*
22 For more information, see *Social Platform, Open letter on the Social Convergence Framework, 2023.*
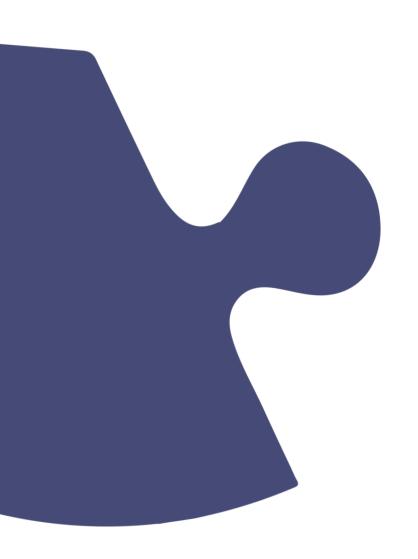
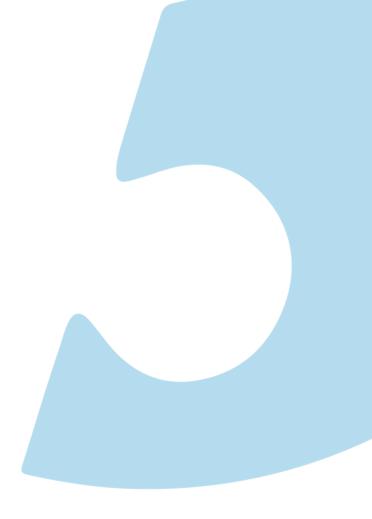The coordinator should establish a formal EU Civil Society Monitoring Mechanism:

- Strengthen evidence on implementation and organise mutual learning activities with Member States, civil society organisations, social economy entities, social partners, and people with lived experience of poverty.
- Organising annual civil society hearings on poverty reduction progress and the use of EU resources aimed at poverty reduction.
- Enabling structured participation in the European Semester process, including consultations on CSRs and National Reform Programs.

This monitoring should include a yearly report assessing progress that has been made and issuing recommendations.

Conclusion

The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy comes at a pivotal moment, when greater ambition and coordination are urgently needed amidst a cost-of-living crisis to support the growing number of individuals experiencing hardship and social exclusion across the Union. The EU must clearly affirm its dedication to eradicating poverty and advancing its social agenda. Social Platform expects the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy to fulfil these ambitions in an integrated approach, by effectively linking policy coordination with financial support for structural reforms through the EU budget.