



**Position paper**  
**A post-2027**  
**Multiannual Financial**  
**Framework for**  
**Social Europe**

**March 2025**



## Introduction

The starting point for the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is markedly different from seven years ago when the current EU budget was established. Policy priorities have shifted significantly due to global developments such as the digital transition, changes in political leadership, and the state of global security.

However, there is no doubt that the biggest challenges facing our continent—including a rise in poverty, inequality and discrimination, climate change, changes in the labour market, and regional conflicts near the European Union's borders—all require greater public investment rather than cuts in order to adequately respond to these needs.

In this paper, Social Platform aims to outline the key aspects that the next MFF must consider if the EU is to create a budget that supports long-term investment in an inclusive society.

## Matching social investment gaps to investment needs

The EU has a growing focus on competitiveness in the global economy. However, the Competitiveness Compass, launched in January 2025 by the European Commission fails to acknowledge the competitive advantage of investing in our social model, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights which supports people's wellbeing, resilience, social inclusion and participation.

The investment needs to tackle Europe's challenges are significant. The Draghi report on competitiveness estimated that a minimum annual additional investment of €750 to €800 billion is needed to achieve its objectives.<sup>1</sup> Additional investment needs in social infrastructure have been estimated at €192 billion per year.<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime, however, the EU has revised its fiscal rules which cannot offer an adequate response to these challenges. A recent report found that only three countries (Denmark, Sweden, Ireland) can afford to meet social and green investment needs under the new fiscal rules. It argues that to allow all member states to meet their social and green public investment needs, an additional €300 to €420 billion a year (2.1-2.9% of EU GDP) is required.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [\*Mario Draghi, The future of European competitiveness, 2024.\*](#)

<sup>2</sup> [\*European Commission, Identifying Europe's recovery needs, 2020.\*](#)

<sup>3</sup> [\*Joint ETUC-NEF report by Sebastian Mang and Dominic Caddick, Navigating Constraints for Progress: Examining the Impact of EU Fiscal Rules on Social and Green Investments, 2024.\*](#)



Furthermore, the mid-term review of the 2021-2027 MFF led to cuts in programmes supporting social and health priorities, research and cohesion policy funds, thereby impacting Europe's ability to plan and invest in its social resilience in the long term.

At the La Hulpe Social Summit in June 2024, an interinstitutional declaration was adopted to promote a stronger social dimension in the next EU Strategic Agenda for 2024-2029. This declaration was co-signed by the Social Platform alongside the EU institutions. As one of the key proposals from the second von der Leyen Commission, the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework must reflect this commitment to socially inclusive progress.

The mission letter to the Commissioner for Budget, Piotr Serafin, calls for a simpler, more focused, and responsive budget that effectively addresses EU priorities. The challenge will be to preserve what works while reforming what is necessary in the next MFF.

**This paper argues that the EU budget's vital role in triggering socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable structural reforms needs to be prominent in the design of the next framework.**



# Recommendations for the EU Multiannual Financial Framework post 2027

**Recommendation 1: The size of the post-2027 MFF must be larger than the current MFF and the Next Generation EU programme together, i.e. above EUR 2 trillion.**

Given the current circumstances, it is crucial for the EU budget to prioritise investments in social progress and the reduction of poverty and inequalities. Compared to the existing financial framework, additional resources are necessary to enhance regional and social cohesion. This includes addressing poverty, social exclusion, and discrimination, as well as ensuring that labour market reforms and the digital and green transitions leave no one behind.

The 2021-2027 EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), along with the Next Generation EU, amounts to €2 trillion (current prices).

Precisely in light of the shifting global policy priorities and pressures, it is crucial for the EU to allocate more financial resources to the next long-term EU budget. Investing in addressing inequalities and fostering social inclusion is as important at times of crisis as preparedness and security.

As representatives of civil society organisations protecting the rights of the most marginalised, the notion of reallocating public financing from social security to the military capacity is unnecessary and unacceptable. Adequate social investments are at the core of thriving societies. Together with strong social safety nets they help to ensure people and families are resilient to shocks. These are of geopolitical importance for ensuring a strong European Union in the face of the digital, demographic and green transitions.

This investment is only feasible if the **overall budget is increased**, and social spending is fully supported and further expanded.



## Recommendation 2: Cohesion Policy must remain a key pillar of the MFF, and its partnership principle should be retained and reinforced.

Cohesion policy has a long history of successfully strengthening economic, social and regional cohesion across the EU. As we see an increasing focus on competitiveness as a primary objective of the EU, we stress that increasing social cohesion in the EU is a prerequisite to increasing competitiveness. Europe's future competitiveness is also dependent upon tapping into the potential of all its territories and people, as highlighted by the report of the Group of High-Level Specialists on the Future of Cohesion Policy.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the fund on the ground is often undermined by bureaucratic requirements such as excessive reporting. Implementation of the funds must become significantly more efficient for project implementing organisations fighting against poverty at local level. Such simplifications can be reached by measures such as maintaining the single rulebook of the funds of the Common Provisions Regulation; enhancing a strict single audit approach to reduce the administrative burden; or maintaining simplified cost options (SCO).

It is essential to increase EU co-financing rates for the Structural Funds to support project implementing organisations in the social sector. For socially innovative projects or projects aimed at supporting groups at risk or in vulnerable situations a co-financing rate of at least 90% is necessary, even in more developed regions.

The place-based approach has been crucial for the success of cohesion policy, helping to bring 'Europe closer to its citizens'. The partnership principle and shared management has long been at the heart of cohesion policy. Shared management and multilevel governance lead to correct identification of needs and responses on the ground. Therefore, it must be guaranteed that regional, local and territorial territories work together with civil society and social partners through a participatory approach in programme planning, implementation and evaluation.

It is therefore important to maintain the **European Code of Conduct on Partnership** in the next programming period - integrated into the Common Provisions Regulation. Furthermore, civil society representatives should be included in the ESF+ Committee chaired by the European Commission; and their active, meaningful participation and

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<sup>4</sup> European Commission: Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, *Forging a sustainable future together – Cohesion for a competitive and inclusive Europe – Report of the High-Level Group on the Future of Cohesion Policy*, February 2024, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2776/974536>



involvement should be guaranteed in monitoring committees at national and regional level. An adequate and sufficient percentage of the ESF+ should be allocated to the administrative capacity building of social partners and civil society organisations.

**Recommendation 3: Keep both horizontal and thematic enabling conditions in the Common Provisions Regulation to ensure accountability and delivery on investments linked to the European Pillar of Social Rights.**

One of the most important levers of social policy guidance from the European Union manifests in the use of cohesion policy funds. Both the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) support investments in social cohesion.

The thematic enabling conditions in the Common Provisions Regulation corresponding to the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights help ensure that policy reforms funded through the ESF+ and the ERDF are aligned with (national or regional) strategic policy frameworks for active labour market policies, gender equality, education and training, social inclusion and poverty reduction, Roma inclusion, and health when resources are invested under these priorities.<sup>5</sup>

For example, the enabling condition requiring a national or regional strategic policy or legislative framework for social inclusion and poverty reduction can be adopted to support Member States to align with the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, especially if the latter will recommend Member States to implement national anti-poverty strategies. The enabling conditions also help ensure stakeholder engagement as such strategies are to be designed, implemented, monitored and reviewed in close cooperation with relevant stakeholders, including social partners and relevant civil society organisations. Stakeholder engagement is a key aspect of the enabling conditions and is necessary to ensure accessibility and efficiency of EU funds, in particular for civil society organisations, non-for-profit social service providers, and social economy entities.

The horizontal enabling conditions ensure the application and implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the implementation of all funds covered by the Common Provisions-

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<sup>5</sup> *Common Provisions Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 ANNEX IV Thematic enabling conditions applicable to ERDF, ESF+ and the Cohesion Fund*



Regulation. These horizontal enabling conditions are potentially a strong safeguard to ensure that EU funds are not misused and do not breach fundamental rights and the other UN conventions by ensuring that Member States have in place functional monitoring systems for the implementation of EU funds.

Enabling conditions should not be a box-ticking exercise, but a means to increase accountability of Member States and the impact of the funds, without adding extra burden for project-implementing organisations.

#### **Recommendation 4: The European Social Fund+ (ESF+) must be retained as a standalone fund supporting social inclusion.**

The **European Social Fund (ESF)** has been a standalone instrument supporting Member States for decades bringing the EU closer to its citizens and has a strong history of addressing poverty, social and regional imbalances across the EU. The expanded European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) 2021-27 currently supports and complements the policies of the Member States in order to ensure equal opportunities, equal access to the labour market, to quality services, to quality education, social protection and inclusion of marginalised communities and Roma people. The ESF+ is the only EU fund primarily focused on social policies, supporting Member States to achieve high employment levels with quality jobs paying adequate wages, providing decent working conditions, adequate social protections and social security, with the aims of eradicating poverty and delivering on the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and its Action Plan (2021).

The successor of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) should remain a standalone instrument for supporting the Member States, people and regions in strengthening the social dimension of the Union. The implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights should stay at the core of the ESF+. The EU is currently not on track to meet its 2030 target of reducing the number of people at risk of poverty by 15 million, including 5 million children as agreed at the Porto Social Summit in 2021. Yet, poverty has only decreased by 1.6 million since the target was adopted in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan in 2021, and child poverty has actually increased since 2021 with 20 million children at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Ensuring sufficient EU funding in social cohesion through the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will be crucial if we are to achieve these modest targets by 2030, to move towards the eradication of poverty and ensure the availability and accessibility of quality social and support services, and high-quality jobs.



In this context, we would be concerned by any potential proposal to decrease funding and split or merge the ESF+ with other funds as this would dilute its impact, hinder its monitoring by stakeholders, and prevent further progress on poverty reduction and social inclusion, particularly for marginalised groups including Roma communities.

### **Recommendation 5: The earmarking for social inclusion under ESF+ should go beyond the current 25% for all Member States.**

The ESF+ has the potential to catalyse social structural reforms. Not only has the fund been effective in addressing education, training, skills, employment aspects, but also in ensuring the availability, affordability and accessibility of quality social and support services including food and material aid, the promotion of social economy actors and networks, addressing the social inclusion of underrepresented groups, and supporting eco-solidarity innovations.

It is crucial that the ESF+ maintains its role in triggering long-term structural reforms that progress towards the eradication of poverty and social exclusion, with an earmarking of minimum expenditures higher than the current 25% to social inclusion in every Member State under the ESF+. The current target group-specific earmarkings (at least 5% to tackling child poverty; at least 12.5% to the youth guarantee) have also proven to be effective and we encourage such earmarkings under the new framework. To effectively address child poverty, the ESF+ post-2027 should dedicate at least 5% of their ESF+ funds to the Child Guarantee in all Member States — and more where child poverty exceeds the EU average.

In addition, the ESF+ must involve close collaboration with local authorities, social economy actors, civil society organisations, and other key stakeholders who can provide on-the-ground expertise and ensure that interventions reflect the real needs of vulnerable communities. This participatory approach will enhance the relevance and impact of the funds.

The ESF+ should also prioritise funding for social innovation projects, including pilot initiatives that explore new approaches to social inclusion, employment support, and education. Supporting these projects will help drive long-term systemic change and allow successful solutions to be scaled up across Member States. Equally, the ESF+ should continue to allocate targeted support to European networks of civil society-





organisations representing different groups in vulnerable situations as well as social economy actors at different levels, including through operational grants to EU networks to prevent and tackle poverty, to promote social and green entrepreneurship, an inclusive circular economy, work integration, and social innovation.

**Recommendation 6: Recognise the value of public investment in research beyond industrial competitiveness. The EU needs a successor to Horizon Europe that supports research in the areas of social inclusion and fundamental rights, with the aim of improving the wellbeing of its people.**

The objective of the current Horizon Europe programme is to tackle climate change, help achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and boost the EU's competitiveness and growth.

In its political guidelines,<sup>6</sup> the European Commission announced a European Competitiveness Fund, to be included in the 2028-2034 budget that would invest in strategic technologies and their manufacturing in Europe and support Important Projects of Common Interest (IPCEIs). Channelling all of the EU's research funding via a new competitiveness fund is highly concerning, as it would risk limiting research and innovation funding merely to the objective of supporting economic/industrial competitiveness.

The Competitiveness Compass, which is expected to guide the European Competitiveness Fund, briefly references the importance of effective social policies built around the EPSR for shaping a competitive Europe. However, it then predominantly focuses on skills, labour market participation and briefly refers to early childhood education and care, long-term care, housing and social protection reforms, but only from a perspective of supporting employment. It therefore lacks a comprehensive social dimension.

The design of the current Horizon Europe programmes ensures a social and sustainability dimension, which a fund mainly focused on competitiveness could not guarantee. It is key to maintain a balanced focus in the financial instrument supporting research, with a strong social inclusion and fundamental rights dimension that promotes research and innovation into ways of tackling a variety of EU priorities.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648\\_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029\\_EN.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf)



**Recommendation 7: A more comprehensive framework on Just Transition is needed with a broader geographical focus and strong social conditionalities. The focus of the Just Transition Fund (JTF) should be expanded beyond employment to address the broader social needs of disadvantaged groups impacted by the green transition and align with the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR).**

Tackling the climate crisis will continue to be an urgent priority for the future of our planet and the safety and wellbeing of people. While the EU is taking important steps towards achieving a green transition, the next MFF must make sure that adequate funding is provided to ensure the transition is just and fair. Many proposed measures will disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups.<sup>7</sup>

**The Just Transition Fund (JTF)**, a part of the Just Transition Mechanism, aims to support carbon-intensive industries and regions. Currently, the JTF focuses narrowly on employment, research, and innovation. The JTF has an insufficient social dimension. The JTF must expand to create social, work integration, and training opportunities for all, including under-represented groups. As highlighted in the regulation underpinning the Fund, the JTF should align with the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), for instance by better supporting socially driven actors that are pioneers in the green transition, like reuse and repair social enterprises.

Member States should meaningfully engage with civil society, and those directly impacted in developing Territorial Just Transition Plans to ensure funds address the needs of those most in need. Engagement with these actors can foster social inclusion and support the implementation of Article 8 of the JTF regulation, which allows JTF funds to be used for social investments. Currently many plans fail to meaningfully consider the needs of groups in vulnerable situations, and the funds are not being adequately directed towards social investments. The JTF must not allocate funds to large for-profit corporations, including extractive industries, which should instead contribute to the fund rather than benefit from it through research and innovation grants.

Furthermore, the JTF has a limited geographical focus on carbon-intensive regions. The Competitiveness Compass states that more investment is needed to finance the green-

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<sup>7</sup> *Social Platform, Position Paper – Rebalancing the European Green Deal: Towards a Green and Social Deal, 2024*



transition. However, extensive funding is also required to ensure this transition is truly just for all, which also helps to prevent a democratic deficit. The new Competitiveness Fund must integrate the just transition into its measures for a decarbonised, clean, and competitive Europe, including a dedicated fund to achieve this goal. Strong social conditionalities must be applied to these funds to ensure that they provide protection and equitable opportunities for all affected communities. It would further ensure alignment with the European Pillar of Social Rights if the social thematic enabling conditions also applied to the JTF.

**Recommendation 8: Increase the Social Climate Fund budget. Ensure that 100% of revenues from ETS2 are allocated to the SCF and extend it beyond the year 2032, to effectively mitigate its social consequences.**

The Social Climate Fund (SCF) has been established to mitigate the negative consequences of the European Emissions Trading Scheme 2 (ETS2). The ETS2 is set to increase energy costs by placing a tax on carbon-based energy use in homes and transport from 2027. A carbon tax will disproportionately impact low-income groups, who spend a larger share of their income on energy and transport. Many will struggle to cope with rising costs, putting them increasingly at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

The SCF aims to support disadvantaged households, transport users, and micro-businesses to manage these additional costs. Implementation will take place between 2026 to 2032, with the EU allocating 65 billion to the fund. In addition, Member States must allocate 25% of ETS2 revenues, meaning the fund will amount to 86.7 billion euros. However, according to various estimates, this is nowhere near enough to adequately offset the impact of this tax on groups in vulnerable situations.<sup>8</sup> To adequately negate the social consequences of ETS2, 100% of ETS2 revenues should be allocated to the Social Climate Fund and the EU should increase its budget. Furthermore, the SCF should be extended beyond the year 2032, as it otherwise risks leaving people in need unsupported.

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<sup>8</sup> *Social Platform, Position Paper – Rebalancing the European Green Deal: Towards a Green and Social Deal, 2024*



**Recommendation 9: The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Value programme (CERV) must be retained as a standalone fund supporting a vibrant civil society, supporting, defending and promoting human rights.**

The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme has the objective to protect and promote rights and values as enshrined in the EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights by supporting civil society organisations active at local, regional, national and transnational level. In this climate of growing inequalities, in the next MFF it is necessary to keep the focus on this programme that aims to sustain and develop open, rights-based, democratic, equal and inclusive societies based on the rule of law. The current budget should be confirmed or enlarged.

Civil society and their democratic space are narrowing in several EU countries. As reported yearly by the European Commission annual rule of law report, civil society and activists are more and more under attack. Financial and fiscal pressure is one of the tools used by governments to weaken civil society organisations. In the current MFF, CERV represents 0.4% of the MFF 2021-2027. The size of the CERV Programme should be considerably increased to take up these challenges.

This is why it is now more important than ever to reinforce a programme that includes a scope to support vibrant and empowered civil society, encouraging people's democratic, civic and social participation and cultivating the rich diversity of European society, based on our common values, history and memory.

The programme should continue its structure with strands on union values, equality and rights including gender equality and women's rights, citizen's engagement<sup>8</sup> and participation, tackling violence against women and children, Roma communities, and minorities. All strands are crucial and should remain priorities in the next cycle, as they address important dimensions of rights and values as well as democratic participation.

Moreover, the direct management of CERV Programme by the European Commission is positive as in certain countries it can be a crucial support for independent civil society working in hostile environments, who are not supported or are targeted by their governments. These CSOs - working on gender-based violence, gender equality, LGBTIQ+ rights, women's and reproductive rights, the rights of racialised communities, migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees or undocumented people, people with disabilities and other people living in marginal situations or underrepresented and marginalised communities - are particularly at risk to lose their funding and the CERV programme plays a key role in supporting them. However, to structurally support a vibrant civil society, the programme should strengthen the funding of operating grants, aligning the co-financing with other programmes to 10%.



**Recommendation 10: The Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) must continue to support both integration and socio-economic inclusion of third-country nationals.**

The Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF) was established for the 2014-2020 funding cycle, merging previous funds which supported asylum, integration, returns and border procedures, and it was maintained in the current 2021-2027 funding cycle. The AMIF has so far been the only fund specifically supporting the integration of third-country nationals living in the EU and is complemented by mainstream social inclusion programmes through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). Integration programmes funded through AMIF focus on both early integration measures such as language support, education and civil orientation, and longer-term integration measures.

Following the adoption of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum (2021), there will likely be an increased focus on migration funds in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and Member States will be seeking EU financial support for its implementation. Despite the increased focus on the externalisation of migration and agreements with third countries, the AMIF should remain focused on spending within the European Union and funding should not be diverted to spending in third countries to seek to prevent migration to the European Union.

Since 2022, EU Member States have provided a safe home for millions of Ukrainians displaced by Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. The Temporary Protection Directive is due to expire in March 2026 and Member States are now planning to provide for long-term residency pathways for those Ukrainians who wish to stay. Many will have built a life in the Union and are living, working, and studying in our communities. An EU-wide and coordinated approach that offers a more durable status and pathway to long-term residence would be beneficial not only for people displaced from Ukraine, but also for the local communities where they live.

It is vitally important that the inclusion and integration aspect of the AMIF Fund is supported and strengthened in the next funding period to ensure that 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. Third-country nationals should be able to avail of integration and inclusion supports regardless of their migration status to avoid discrimination. 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+.



Building on the example of FAST-CARE<sup>9</sup> and the use of AMIF for integration activities,<sup>10</sup> the successor of AMIF should enhance funding effectiveness by earmarking 30% of its resources for civil society and local/regional authorities through shared, direct, and indirect funding modalities.

### **Recommendation 11: Pre-Accession Assistance funding must prioritise social inclusion and compliance with fundamental rights standards.**

The successor of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance must put fundamental rights to the fore and align it with objectives and measures included in the EU cohesion policy instruments, such as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) or the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), linking it with the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights principles. The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance must be aligned with EU frameworks which seek to advance the rights of groups in vulnerable situation, including children, women, older people, persons with disabilities, families and people with care responsibilities, LGBTIQ+ people, the Roma community, and ethnic minorities.

The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance must adequately address the high number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including children, and strengthen social protection systems. It is crucial to maintain the current funding's clause of not supporting actions that contribute to any form of segregation or social exclusion while promoting the transition from institutional to family and community-based care.

### **Recommendation 12: Ensure strong and sustained EU investment in health to build resilient and accessible healthcare systems. Propose a well-financed successor to EU4Health**

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need for well-funded, resilient health systems that can respond to crises and address ongoing public health challenges. However, recent developments, such as the disproportionate redeployment of €1 billion from the EU4Health budget in 2024, have raised concerns about the EU's commitment to prioritising health. In addition, delays in the release of the EU4Health 2025 Work Programme and growing restrictions on civil society organisations threaten to weaken the voice of patient and health advocacy groups, limiting their ability to contribute to evidence-based policymaking.

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<sup>9</sup> 'Flexible Assistance to Territories' (FAST-CARE) is a package proposed by the European Commission in June 2022, extending the support already provided under [Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe](#) (CARE)

<sup>10</sup> See recommendation 6 of the report "Integration of people fleeing Ukraine in the EU" (May 2023), drafted by Lodewik Asscher, Special Adviser for Ukraine to the European Commission.



To correct this course and safeguard health as a fundamental priority, the EU must ensure a substantial and stable budget allocation for a well-financed successor to EU4Health, reinforcing Europe's capacity to respond to health crisis and public health needs. A strong health programme is essential to:

- Support healthcare systems in preparing for current and future health challenges, ensuring timely access to affordable, high-quality healthcare for all.
- Strengthen public health initiatives that promote mental health and wellbeing across all ages and create sustainable, healthy environments.
- Guarantee financial support for health-focused civil society organisations, including their policy and advocacy activities, recognising their vital role in shaping and informing health policy decisions.

### **Recommendation 13: Increase funding for ERASMUS+ fivefold to ensure accessibility for all students and life-long learners.**

The Erasmus+ Programme requires renewed investment to increase its outreach to young people and broader communities in Europe and better include those with fewer opportunities. This fund needs to be designed so that it is inclusive and accessible to all types of learners including persons with disabilities, children, youth, families and carers, making different types of education (formal, non-formal, informal) opportunities accessible and inclusive. Insufficient resources, combined with structural barriers such as rigid financial frameworks, complex administrative procedures, and insufficient support for grassroots organisations, makes it harder for youth-led and volunteer-driven groups to participate.

Following the recommendation in the Draghi Report, a fivefold increase in funding is required for Erasmus+ to ensure these programmes are accessible and impactful for all students and life-long learners. Moreover, the youth strand of the programme must be tailored away from the current one-model-fits-all to ensure the needs and realities of the youth sector are adequately reflected in Erasmus+.

To address this imbalance, administrative requirements must be simplified, grant procedures tailored to the needs of grassroots organisations, and lower-budget grants made subject to proportionally simpler application and monitoring processes. Moreover, youth organisations need to be recognised as key stakeholders in the implementation of the programme.



## Conclusions

With the growing focus on competitiveness, productivity, and defence in the current mandate, we see a significant risk that socially focused funding would be deprioritised or redirected. Indeed, the new Competitiveness Compass argues to continue redirecting cohesion funds towards “strategic objectives”, as has already been done in the current MFF with the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP).

Financing a socially just transition and a competitive economy that values its social model will require large investments. EU funding supporting social cohesion, inclusion, integration or equality are investments in the wellbeing of people, their resilience to successfully adapt to fast-changing societies.

As Mario Draghi put it in his report, a European approach to innovation “must ensure that productivity growth and social inclusion go hand-in-hand”.<sup>11</sup> Europe cannot be competitive if its people – our biggest resource – are left behind in the process. In fact, public investments are needed in Europe’s social and sustainable infrastructure. These social investments must not be viewed as a cost. Nor should investments in social cohesion, social protection and inclusion under the next MFF be reduced or redirected to other priorities.

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<sup>11</sup> *The Draghi report: A competitiveness strategy for Europe (Part A)*





# Social Platform's 13 Recommendations to support long-term investment in an inclusive society.

- 1** The size of the post-2027 MFF must be larger than the current MFF and the Next Generation EU programme together, i.e. above EUR 2 trillion.
- 2** Cohesion Policy must remain a key pillar of the MFF, and its partnership principle should be retained and reinforced.
- 3** Keep both horizontal and thematic enabling conditions in the Common Provisions Regulation to ensure accountability and delivery on investments linked to the European Pillar of Social Rights.
- 4** The European Social Fund+ (ESF+) must be retained as a standalone fund supporting social inclusion.
- 5** The earmarking for social inclusion under ESF+ should go beyond the current 25% for all Member States.
- 6** Recognise the value of public investment in research beyond industrial competitiveness. The EU needs a successor to Horizon Europe that supports research in the areas of social inclusion and fundamental rights, with the aim of improving the wellbeing of its people.
- 7** A more comprehensive framework on Just Transition is needed with a broader geographical focus and strong social conditionalities. The focus of the Just Transition Fund (JTF) should be expanded beyond employment to address the broader social needs of disadvantaged groups impacted by the green transition and align with the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR).



- 8** Increase the Social Climate Fund budget. Ensure that 100% of revenues from ETS2 are allocated to the SCF and extend it beyond the year 2032, to effectively mitigate its social consequences.
- 9** The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Value programme (CERV) must be retained as a standalone fund supporting a vibrant civil society, supporting, defending and promoting human rights.
- 10** The Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) must continue to support both integration and socio-economic inclusion of third-country nationals.
- 11** Pre-Accession Assistance funding must prioritise social inclusion and compliance with fundamental rights standards.
- 12** Ensure strong and sustained EU investment in health to build resilient and accessible healthcare systems. Propose a well-financed successor to EU4Health.
- 13** Increase funding for ERASMUS+ fivefold to ensure accessibility for all students and life-long learners.



Social Platform is the largest, leading organisation working on social issues. We have strength in numbers and put power back into people's hands who want a more Social Europe. Collectively we unite and give a voice to tens of thousands of organisations and hundreds of millions of people in Europe in all their diversity.



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