



Social Platform's analysis of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy

Introduction

The EU's first ever Anti-Poverty Strategy launched this year is a significant opportunity to make a real and lasting difference to the lives of millions of people across Europe.

Poverty and social exclusion in the EU remains at an alarming level (above 20% of the total EU population). While there has been a slight decrease in the number of people at risk in the EU since 2024, stronger measures are undoubtedly needed to speed up progress and ensure the EU meets its goal of eradicating poverty by 2050.

As Social Platform, we have long campaigned for policy measures that can meaningfully tackle the systemic root causes of poverty and protect those in vulnerable situations. Our network's expertise on how to eradicate poverty was compiled in our position paper on the Anti-Poverty Strategy which put forward key recommendations and policy proposals.

Many of our demands have been reflected in the final Strategy, but there are also areas where the proposed measures do not go far enough.

The Strategy's basis

The founding principles of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy do largely align with what civil society has been calling for.

The person-centred approach, whereby the multiple challenges of living in poverty are recognised by policy-makers, is a welcome premise. As is the recognition of multifaceted challenges requiring integrated working and a holistic overall guidance.

The main thread weaving through the Commission's proposal is that of the life-cycle approach: highlighting the main challenges and proposals to support children, youth, work-age population, and older people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The transitions between life phases are also present, as is the ambition of preventing poverty as opposed to only 'fighting' it.

Less convincing is the Strategy's limited grounding in human rights, equality and anti-discrimination frameworks. These are essential to protecting people from stigma and exclusion, and should have been more clearly embedded throughout the Strategy.



The driver of national strategies

Social Platform's main messages addressed the way comprehensive anti-poverty strategies are best designed to be able to accommodate different national/regional realities and challenges whilst staying inclusive and reaching those most in need. Social Platform has consistently argued that the European Commission should promote national anti-poverty strategies that combine flexibility for national realities with a comprehensive approach that reflects poverty's multidimensional nature¹.

The Commission's Communication indeed makes a clear call on governments to set up a formal coordination mechanism and nominate an Anti-Poverty Coordinator. *The Staff Working Document on principles for effective anti-poverty strategies* basically guides national/regional/local authorities in designing a comprehensive policy framework. This implies setting national objectives and targets within timelines consistent of the EU 2030 poverty reduction target and the EU 2050 ambition of eradicating poverty.

Many of the building blocks we called for are now reflected in the Strategy, including:

- adequate and inclusive income protection, including minimum income and child and family benefits;
- supporting those who can work to enter the labour market, including through minimum wages, work-life balance measures and the social economy;
- Access to affordable and quality services mentions all areas of the Child Guarantee², as well as psychological support, sport and culture, or children and young people leaving care;
- Involving social partners and other key stakeholders, including civil society and people experiencing poverty, early and regularly in the diagnosis of challenges, and in the design, implementation and monitoring of the strategy;
- Identifying and supporting groups at higher risk of poverty or social exclusion, and the use of disaggregated data and relevant indicators for this purpose

We also appreciate that comprehensive frameworks developed in the past are recycled – such as the active inclusion or the investing in children frameworks - which also aimed to bridge silos.

1 (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.

2 Children in need have access to free early childhood education and care, free education (including school-based activities and at least one healthy meal each school day), free healthcare, healthy nutrition and adequate housing



Implementation

The success of the proposal will depend on its uptake and implementation. The tools used to support its realisation are therefore key. It is promising that several upcoming initiatives were announced to support the anti-poverty agenda before the end of the current Commission's term. These include-

- EU action to support the activation of persons excluded from the labour market and equality between women and men with regard to labour market opportunities
- Proposal Council Recommendation on easier and integrated access to services
- Commission Recommendation providing evidence-based policy guidance to prevent and combat in-work poverty in the EU

It is worth noting, however, that all announced instruments are non-binding — Recommendations, Compendiums of good practices, and high-level exchanges. The track record of Country Specific Recommendations on social matters shows they are among the least implemented in the European Semester cycle. Moreover, almost all announced initiatives are concentrated in 2026-2027, with no clear roadmap or review mechanism bridging these early steps to the 2050 ambition. The absence of even one binding instrument, combined with this short implementation horizon, raises serious questions about the enforceability and long-term credibility of the Strategy.

Delivering on the Strategy will require sustained public investment, yet the Communication devotes more attention to mobilising private capital than to safeguarding EU funding for social inclusion under the next financial framework. At a time when negotiations on the next long-term EU budget are already raising concerns about the future of social spending, this omission risks weakening the Strategy's delivery.

The European Semester, the macroeconomic coordination guiding Member States large scale policy reforms and investments, is referenced as a means of implementation. It is indeed a place where, through consistent country-specific recommendations, country analyses and additional scrutiny on social convergence, governments can be encouraged to invest more in social inclusion and poverty reduction - beyond the usual channels of social policy coordination. The draft Employment Guidelines, presented shortly after the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy as part of the European Semester Spring Package, specifically encourages Member States to ensure anti-poverty policy frameworks are in place.

Together, these three key components - national strategies, coordinated reforms through the European Semester and adequate EU funding - could create a coherent



framework for reducing poverty across Europe. But only if they are backed by political commitment, meaningful investment and genuine accountability. Otherwise, the ambition of eradicating poverty by 2050 risks remaining just that: an ambition.

One particularly positive element of the Strategy is the clear recognition that anti-poverty policies are more effective when they are developed with, rather than for, the people they affect. The accompanying guidance encourages Member States to involve civil society organisations, social partners and people experiencing poverty early and throughout the policy cycle: from identifying challenges to designing, implementing and monitoring national strategies. Importantly, it also recognises that meaningful participation requires adequate support so that organisations and people with lived experience can contribute effectively, rather than being consulted as a box-ticking exercise. This reflects a long-standing call from Social Platform that civil society organisations and not-for-profit social service providers should be treated as essential partners whose expertise, community reach and trusted relationships strengthen both policy design and delivery. We particularly called for a formal EU Civil Society Monitoring Mechanism that brings together relevant stakeholders and organises a yearly report assessing progress made alongside recommendations.