

# 2024 ELECTIONS

## LET'S BUILD A TRULY SOCIAL EUROPE

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RECOMMENDATIONS  
OF EURODIACONIA  
IN VIEW OF THE  
UPCOMING  
EUROPEAN  
PARLIAMENT  
ELECTIONS

**Eurodiaconia**  | *Connecting faith  
and social justice  
through action*



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In preparation of the 2024 European elections, Eurodiaconia would like to bring to your attention some key recommendations for a more social and just European Union.

Eurodiaconia is a network of 59 organisations in 33 European countries providing health and social services and working for social justice. Founded in the Christian tradition, we work to ensure that our societies provide opportunities for all people to live in dignity and to reach their full potential. Our members, representing more than 30,000 social and healthcare providers, have strong and long-standing expertise in providing services to the most vulnerable in Europe.

In the last years, Europe has been going through successive crises: COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, rising energy prices and cost of living. This has been described as a permacrisis that is testing our societies' resilience and challenging our social protection systems. In fact, according to the European Parliament Autumn 2022 Survey, 93% of Europeans said that the rising cost of living is currently their most pressing concern, followed by poverty and social exclusion, with 82%. These numbers reflect a failure of our socioeconomic system, considering that Europe is one of the richest regions of the world.

Therefore, the next legislative period will be crucial to address the underlying structural problems of our social protection systems and regain people's trust. The next Parliament will have to strongly respond to these challenges and commit to a truly social Europe, stepping up social investment with strong social protection systems and a market that serves and provides for all people.

To build a strong social Europe, this will need to be accompanied by effective anti-discrimination measures and continued, targeted efforts to fully include people with a migrant background and from ethnic minorities.

Furthermore, strong social protection systems and effective social inclusion needs strong social and care services. Especially, in times of crisis, quality social and care services in Europe are urgently needed as they can ensure that everyone lives a life of dignity. However, there has been severe underinvestment in social and care services over the last decade. This needs to change and we call on the next European Parliament to show strong support for social and care services and recognize that they are essential for the well-functioning of our societies.

The European Pillar of Social Rights provides a strong basis for a more social and just Europe and the next European Parliament should aim at deepening and completing its implementation. Therefore, please find our recommendations in view of the European elections and your current work on election manifestoes, focusing on four essential areas for a strong social Europe:

- Adequate social protection systems
- Effective integration and social inclusion
- Quality social services for all
- A green and social deal

# ADEQUATE SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

**1. We need accessible and adequate social protection for all.** Social protection is a fundamental part of the European social model. Therefore, being able to access adequate social safety nets must be a right for all people in Europe, particularly for vulnerable groups. Thus, the European Parliament should call for a revision of the Council Recommendation including a call for a Directive on Social Protection.

**2. We need a Framework Directive on Minimum Income.** Adequate minimum income schemes are key to combatting poverty and should be at the center of strong social safety nets. Yet, in most EU countries the level of the minimum income is far from being adequate. After 20 years of unsuccessful soft law approaches, we need a Framework Directive on Minimum Income that sets minimum common standards and methodologies to guarantee accessible, enabling, and adequate minimum income schemes.

**3. Indexation of social benefits.** As a consequence of record inflation in Europe due to polycrises, the cost of living has been steadily augmenting for everyone but hitting low-income households the most. To help them cope with these and future crises, all social payments, from child allowance to pensions, should be automatically adjusted in line with inflation to effectively support people and tackle poverty.

**4. Protect children from poverty.** One in four children is at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU. The European Child Guarantee has the potential to adequately address and tackle child poverty, but its implementation needs to be closely monitored by the European Parliament, and its dedicated funds must be increased. Moreover, other measures such as targeted support to face the cost-of-living crisis, quality jobs, and progressive redistribution are also needed to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

**5. Urgently tackle energy poverty.** Energy must be a real public good. To achieve this, we need measures such as a ban on disconnections, targeted support for vulnerable groups, and the right to a minimum amount of energy. Likewise, a windfall tax on energy and other companies to ensure they are not allowed to speculate on this crisis must be put in place.

**6. Access to adequate housing is a human right.** We need to move from managing homelessness to eradicating it. Therefore, we need comprehensive national housing and homelessness strategies, that incorporate strong preventive and housing led approaches and address the housing market issues. Moreover, the European Parliament needs to strengthen its participation and support to the EU Platform for Combatting Homelessness to ensure its continuation and boost its relevance.

**7. Access to essential services is a human right.** Accessibility, availability, and affordability of essential services (water, sanitation, transport, digital services, financial services and energy) must be guaranteed for everyone. The sectorial legislation of these services should be reviewed to strengthen its social aspect and ensure equal access to essential services.

## EFFECTIVE INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

**1. European labour and skills shortages must be addressed through a humane and human-rights based approach,** with due consideration for third-country-nationals already residing in the EU and sustainable migration pathways. The European Parliament should ensure that legislative revisions and policy measures facilitating international recruitment, residence and work permits uphold social and labour rights, adhere to the principle of equal treatment, provide adequate protection to avoid exploitation and streamline administrative procedures.

**2. Champion successful integration and social inclusion by promoting access to adequate and decent employment.** We need to ensure equality of opportunities to access the labour market, with specific attention to those who experience intersectional barriers—for example, women with a migration background, or ethnic minorities, such as Roma. The access to employment of persons further away from the labour market should be realised within mainstream employment policies, EU funding and programming.

**3. Access to inclusive education and lifelong learning.** Ethnic minorities and third-country-nationals are overrepresented among the unemployed and NEETs. Inclusive access to education and skills is crucial for effectively ensuring equality of opportunities and that no one is left behind. The European Parliament should support targeted, inclusive and lifelong up-and-re-skilling measures and funding.

**4. Equal rights for all.** The European Union's response to the war in Ukraine should serve as a positive example for future reception and integration of refugees from all backgrounds, where human rights and dignified procedures should be at the core of migration and asylum policies. The successful practices derived from the EU Temporary Protection Directive, especially the wider access to the labour market, social rights and the right of freedom of movement, should be replicated to ensure equal access to rights for all refugees, regardless of their country of origin, ethnic background, or administrative situation.

**5. Guarantee EU mobile citizens' social rights.** EU Mobile citizens face significant barriers to effectively enjoy their social rights and access local labour markets, finding themselves falling in vulnerable situations such as destitution, homelessness, labour exploitation or human trafficking. However, this reality has been overlooked. We call for the reduction of administrative barriers, access to social services, accessible information, the revision of EU legislation on social security coordination, and the harmonisation of social security systems.

**6. Support effective and systematic channels for the participation of civil society organisations and minorities in decision-making processes.** Every policy development, and especially those mainstreaming anti-discrimination should guarantee the active participation in consultation, development, monitoring and reporting of citizens and civil society organisations representing ethnic and minority backgrounds.

**7. A Union of equality for all.** Anti-discrimination is an integral part of social inclusion, a basis for social cohesion. It must be mainstreamed in the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and all other relevant policies, such as migration, health, employment, education, housing, and social inclusion, among others. The EU Anti-Racism Action Plan and the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion must be maintained and reviewed in 2025 and 2027 respectively, these must be a priority of the next European Commission.

## QUALITY SOCIAL AND CARE SERVICES FOR ALL

**1. Build on the European Care Strategy by supporting the establishment of a European Care Guarantee.** An EU Care Guarantee will ensure that everyone living in the EU has access to integrated, affordable and quality care services throughout their life cycle.

**2. Make social care work jobs of aspiration and not desperation.** Promote campaigns across the EU on the better recognition of care work and enhance the attractiveness of the sector including better wages. The European Parliament should also champion campaigns to change public perspectives of care work, including tapping into the available resources to make care work a job of aspiration and not desperation. Campaigns should also target the gender stereotypes attached to the sector-care work, it is a job for men and women.

**3. We need quality workforce for quality social services.** We need substantial investment in skills development and upskilling, which will also help enhance the attractiveness of the sector. Furthermore, the harmonisation of social and care services workforce qualifications across Europe is urgently needed.

**4. We need better use of the Public Procurement Directive.** Implementing EU rules on public procurement remains a challenge across EU Member States. We are particularly concerned by the fact that contracts for social services continue to be awarded on several occasions based on the lowest price, which affects the quality of services provided and prevents not-for-profit social service providers from bid submission. Therefore, managing authorities should be encouraged to make better use of Socially Responsible Public Procurement to better meet the needs of Social Services.

**5. There should be a review of the Voluntary European Quality framework for Social Services (VEQFSS)** to ensure its principles and dimensions are up to date with current best practices and high quality standards. The review needs to take into account the increasing complexity of users' needs as well as new established practices and opportunities, for example in relation to the digitalisation of social services.

**6. Sustainable Financing is crucial.** Lack of sufficient funding threatens the sustainability of social and healthcare provision in our societies. Public expenditure and investment need to increase to match the current increase in the demand for services.

## A GREEN AND SOCIAL DEAL

**1. The Green Deal must be implemented in conjunction with the European Pillar of Social Rights.** A strong social safety net is needed to make sure that the green and digital transition can take place with broad support from the population and without leaving anyone behind. Ambitious implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights can be a good basis for such a well-equipped social safety net.

**2. The transition to a green and digital economy must reduce social injustice and generate opportunities for the most disadvantaged.** Renewable energies and new technologies need to benefit and be available to everyone. It needs to be ensured that job transition support and upskilling measures are reaching and effectively supporting low-skilled workers as well as vulnerable groups, such as migrants and ethnic minorities, to make sure that they can stay in the formal labour market or receive opportunities to enter it.

**3. Socially fair redistribution is needed to ensure that sustainable housing and consumption is affordable for everyone.** Climate taxes and the Social Climate Fund are examples of this. However, there is a high need of targeted support programmes for vulnerable households to facilitate investments in energy efficient household appliances and energy efficient housing. Social benefits will have to take into consideration the costs of climate protection policies and allow for ecological participation.

**4. Social impact assessments for policy measures under the Green Deal should be conducted and effective accompanying social protection measures put in place for each policy measure.** It is unavoidable that such a significant transformation will have social impacts on many different levels. Gaining a good understand of those impacts beforehand and implementing accompanying measures immediately is needed for a socially just transition.

**5. Social Economy actors, including not-for-profit social services providers, need the right legislative and financial framework in order to participate in the green transition.** Social services providers and other social economy actors represent a significant share of the economy in Europe. Enabling them to make sustainable choices in their daily management, can have a significant effect. This means earmarking funding and providing support for sustainable investments and financial room for more ecological practices.

**6. Social acceptance of the green transition needs the consultation and active involvement of civil society organisations and local communities.** These consultation processes should aim at empowering local communities to develop their own bottom-up approaches to socially fair decarbonising.

# Thank You



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