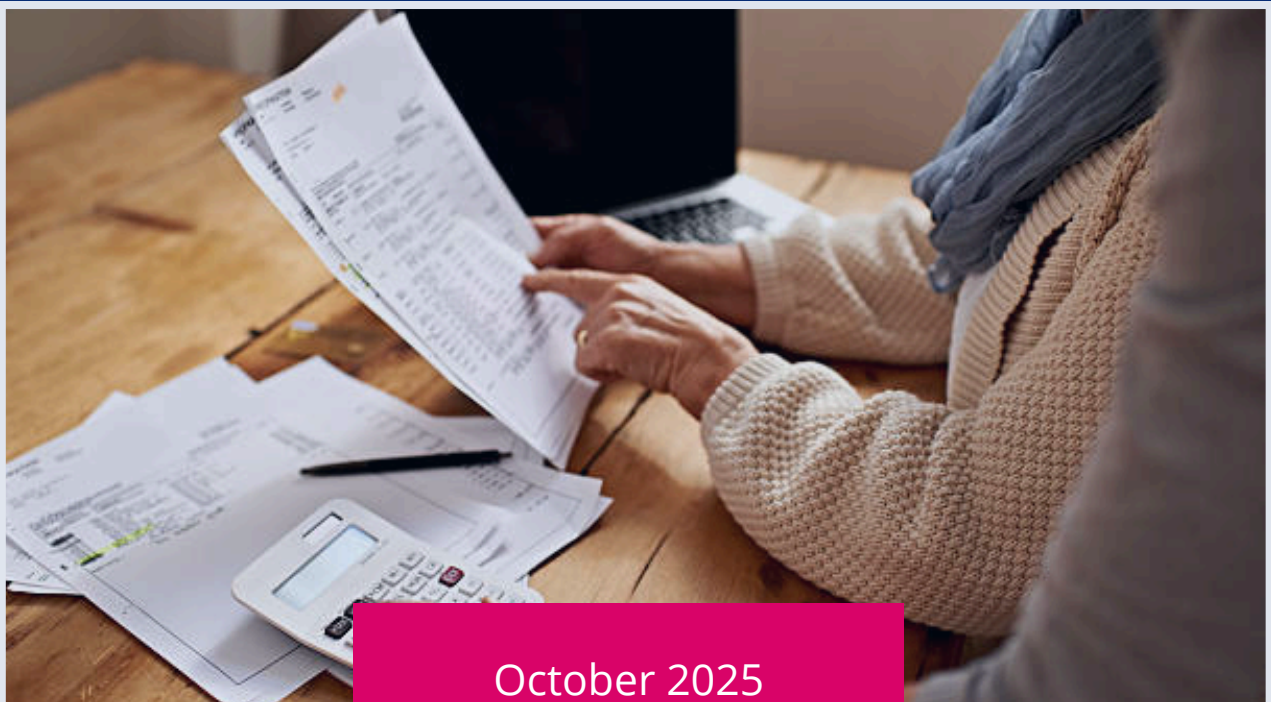


COMBATTING POVERTY IN THE EU

Eurodiaconia's vision for the Anti-Poverty Strategy



October 2025

Eurodiaconia is a European network of churches and Christian NGOs providing social and healthcare services and advocating social justice.



OUR MISSION AND VISION

Inspired by our Christian faith, our vision is of a Europe where social injustice is eradicated and each person is valued, included, and empowered to realize their fullest potential, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalized. Together we work for just and transformative social change across Europe.

WHO WE ARE

Eurodiaconia is a European network of churches and Christian NGOs with 62 national and regional organisations providing social and healthcare services, as well as advocating for social justice. Eurodiaconia members provide diverse services to persons in need, working to see everyone live in dignity and their human rights are respected and protected. Services offered range from health care, child-care, elderly care, hospice and palliative care, youth inclusion programmes, employment and inclusion services to vulnerable groups such as migrants and Roma, housing services for persons experiencing homelessness and services to persons with disabilities.

Eurodiaconia represents over 33.000 service centres, with approximately 1.000.000 staff and over a million volunteers are involved in providing diaconal services. For example one of our members Diakonie Deutschland is one of the largest providers of facilities for the care, support and persons in need in Germany. It offers 33.374 services and has a capacity of 1.18 million beds/spaces, it employs approximately 627.349 qualified staff and has over 700.000 volunteers. Similarly, one of our members in Czechia, Slezska Diakonie, is one of the largest non-profit organisations providing quality social services in Český Těšín region. It offers more than 100 social services in more than 60 centres and has over 1200 employees. In France, our member Fédération de l'Entraide Protestante (FEP) represents approximately 370 member associations and foundations and provides more than 1000 services, with 24.000 employees and over 15.000 volunteers. These three organisations are just examples of the breadth of the delivery of the mission and vision of Eurodiaconia.

Author: Annika Sparrer

Editors: Heather Roy

Design: Dalia Sleiman & Donal Brady

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INTRODUCTION

Eurodiaconia welcomes the European Commission's commitment to addressing the root causes of poverty through the development of the first-ever EU Anti-Poverty Strategy. This initiative comes at a crucial time, as poverty and social exclusion continue to affect millions across Europe, exacerbated by economic uncertainties, growing inequalities, and the ongoing impacts of the cost of living and energy crisis.

Furthermore, at a time when narratives around poverty and social exclusion are increasingly negative, focusing on the burden to public spending plans, it is essential that the European Commission adopts a positive proactive approach that enables each person to achieve autonomy in their lives, reduce inequalities, be able to work where possible, access essential and social and health care services or receive financial support that allows them to live in dignity.

Eurodiaconia advocates for a 'people and places' approach, which means identifying the needs of people in vulnerable situations and ensuring that the services and other support needed is available in an easily accessible way, close to where people are, and territorial inequalities are removed. By placing people at the centre and supporting holistic, integrated approaches, the EU has a historic opportunity to deliver tangible change for people across the continent.

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon, based on a diversity of root causes which are well known. Such a multilayered approach must therefore also be included in the Anti-Poverty Strategy, ensuring that plural policy approaches complement each other, and empowering local, regional and national levels of government and civil society to work hand in hand. We believe that this strategy must not only address immediate needs but also foster long-term solutions to break intergenerational cycles of poverty and social exclusion.

Therefore, our input is grounded in three core pillars:

- 1) empowering people for a sustainable transition,
- 2) building resilience through strengthening social and healthcare services as well as communities,
- 3) ensuring inclusion through opportunities and security for all.

1) EMPOWERING PEOPLE FOR A SUSTAINABLE TRANSITION

Promote inclusive employment opportunities

High quality and decent employment opportunities are crucial in lifting people above the poverty level. Today, many marginalised groups and people in vulnerable situations are excluded from the labour market, find themselves in involuntary part-time positions, or are trapped in low-paid jobs. To unlock that potential and create a genuinely accessible labour market, the European Anti-Poverty Strategy should focus on the following:

Targeted job training, upskilling and reskilling

Targeted programmes towards people in long-term unemployment, NEETs, or people with a migrant background are essential to improve the access to the labour market. In times of severe labour shortages and changing labour market needs following the twin transition and demographic change, Member States can no longer ignore the potential of these groups.

- Support member states and organisations to provide targeted training, skill development programmes, and innovative projects that are necessary to ensure an accessible and inclusive labour market. Specific programmes to support marginalised groups, NEETs, and other groups should be fostered and strengthened through adequate funding and mutual learning.
- Changing labour market needs, especially considering the green and digital transition, as well as social and care needs, must be a crucial aspect of the development of training programmes.
- Support member states in improving access to quality and inclusive education, vocational training, and lifelong learning to improve employability, with particular attention to upskilling adults and young people who are unemployed or at risk of poverty. Ensure upskilling includes cutting-edge digitalisation technologies. This can be done by allocating specific funds (such as ESF+ and Erasmus+) for programmes targeting marginalised groups. Moreover, the mutual recognition of formal, non-formal and informal skills should be recognised across member states.
- The European Commission should issue recommendations on inclusive employment policies to ensure that vulnerable groups are supported in accessing and maintaining quality jobs.
- The European Commission should support person-centred approaches and programmes to pave the path towards labour market inclusion. Programmes that specifically put the person at the heart of all approaches, offering individually shaped opportunities are the most successful in the long-term. These approaches, even if more expensive in the beginning, payoff for the person itself as well as for the society and economy.

- Recognise the role of social enterprises as crucial partners in job creation specifically in employing and empowering persons furthest from the labour market. Social enterprises facilitate grassroots participation and must therefore be supported by a favourable ecosystem that allows their well-functioning.
- Work towards dismantling structural inequalities across the labour market, education systems, and society generally by promoting and legislating measures that remove barriers to entry related to identity, gender, life circumstances, race, socio-economic status, age, and ethnicity.

Better working conditions in the health and long-term care sector

Amidst an ageing population and increasing demand for long-term care services, the sector continues to face significant labour shortages due to poor working conditions, particularly highly skilled professionals.

- An effective anti-poverty strategy should focus on improving employment conditions in the sector to attract and retain workers, thereby reducing poverty and exclusion risks for both care workers and care recipients.
- To enable the full implementation of the European Care Strategy, adequate funding should be allocated beyond the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Prevention of in-work poverty

In-work poverty remains a wide-spread challenge across the EU. Many solutions to tackle in-work poverty stop at the call for better minimum wages. But minimum wages often target single workers: while a minimum wage should be enough to lift an individual worker above the poverty line, it is usually not enough to lift a whole family out of poverty. Therefore, further measures are needed to prevent in-work poverty¹.

- The European Commission should intensify conversations with Member States on measures to prevent in-work poverty beyond minimum wages. This could include mutual learning, enforced coordination, and better implementation of current legislation (e.g. Platform Work Directive, Directive on Minimum Wages).
- The European Commission should work with all member states to identify complementary support for families and households who will still experience poverty even if minimum wages are available to those in employment in the household. This could include tax benefits, additional financial support, preferential tariffs for essential services and improved access to social services.

1 To learn more about in-work poverty, you can read our [latest paper](#).

Promote a green and just transition for everyone

An ambitious green transition is essential to fight climate change and mitigate its impact. Since climate change disproportionately affects low-income groups and communities in vulnerable situations, green policies must be accompanied by social mechanisms to ensure public support, prevent growing inequalities and foster a just transition. Furthermore, not-for-profit social service providers are often struggling to 'green' their services, lacking funding opportunities for renewable energy, building renovation or staff training.

- The European Commission should strengthen the Social Climate Fund by removing the €65 billion cap and allocating all ETS2 earnings to the fund.
- The European Commission and member states could allocate a dedicated budget and project funding to enable not for profit organisations to access green technologies and infrastructure, and to finance support measures and social inclusion programs towards the most vulnerable.

2) BUILDING RESILIENCE: STRENGTHEN SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE SERVICES AND COMMUNITIES

Support social and health care services

Social service providers and health care services are the backbone to combat poverty. They are working on the ground, supporting people experiencing poverty, families in social exclusion, or communities in distress every day. However, they are facing challenges themselves. Therefore, the Anti-Poverty Strategy must ensure that those organisations on the ground can operate in an enabling environment, allowing them to continue delivering high-quality services. Concretely, this includes:

Prioritise investments in social and health care services

Investments in social and health care services, such as long-term care, mental health services, palliative care, education, or early childhood education and care, are crucial to ensure that these services remain available, accessible and affordable, especially in the challenging context of green transition and consequent increase of costs.

- The current European economic governance framework prioritises fiscal consolidation over long-term social investment. This approach can prevent social services being seen as an investment towards resilient societies. It must be ensured that economic governance frameworks do not hinder national governments from investing in essential social and health care services. Instead, the economic governance framework must allow fiscal flexibility for permanent social investment.

Ensure coherence between the European Semester and the Anti-Poverty Strategy

The European Semester is a key element in the current European economic governance framework. It must therefore be included in the efforts to effectively combat poverty.

- Instead of viewing public spending on social services and social benefits as a negative cost, the European Semester's emphasis should include long-term benefits of investing in people and communities, particularly in terms of reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion. This approach not only contributes to a fairer society but also supports sustainable economic growth.
- The EU should foster a policy environment that prioritises social investment over fiscal consolidation, emphasizing the long-term economic and social benefits of poverty reduction.
- Wellbeing indicators should be incorporated into fiscal policies to measure their societal impact beyond GDP.
- Fiscal consolidation measures must be regularly reviewed for unintended effects on poverty and adjust as needed, integrating the 'do no harm' approach.

Adapt state aid rules and public procurement mechanisms

The European Commission has an influence on the funding framework and working environment of non-for-profit social service providers. Currently some EU rules discourage a socially responsible and quick implementation of adequate and high-quality services. Therefore, state aid rules and public procurement must be adjusted:

- To promote high quality social services, state aid rules need to be revised and simplified and the SGEI de minimis ceiling must be increased substantially, taking into consideration the inflation and rising cost of living³. In order to ensure the effective, transparent and unbureaucratic provision of social services on the one hand and compliance with EU State aid rules on the other, we underline the need for all actors not only to lawfully apply the EU State Aid Rules, but also to simplify their application in practice to work in the ground and to support an effective delivery of social services of general interest. These adaptations concern both the general de minimis Regulation (1407/2013) and the SGEI de minimis Regulation (360/2012).
- The European Commission should continue with awareness raising activities and training for those responsible for commissioning and contracting social services via Public Procurement at all levels on socially responsible public procurement. It should further encourage and incentivise national and regional governments to develop strategies on socially responsible public procurement.

3 Find out more about the change needed on the SGEI de minimis regulation [here](#).

- We appreciate the possibility of reserved contracts with Article 20, however, the Commission needs to encourage and provide clarity on implementation of these contracts uniformly across Member States. In the planned revision, an annex should be included with clear guidelines for national authorities to ensure reserved contracts are used effectively to promote social inclusion.
- The cumulative bureaucratic burden of the implementation of both State Aid and Public Procurement rules places an often-insurmountable challenge to the provision of social services where and when they are needed. Addressing such burdens through dialogue with service providers and commissioning authorities, including training as referred to previously, would be a way to try and mitigate this situation and enable the provision of services in a proactive and partnership based manner.

Empower affected communities and NGOs

People affected by poverty and social exclusion have first-hand testimonies of the challenges in accessing services, reasons for non-take up of services and benefits, and recommendations for change. Civil society organisations delivering services on the ground also bring valuable insights to the discussions. These voices need to be heard and included in the drafting, implementation, and evaluation of the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

- The European Commission can give guidance to member states on how to strengthen partnerships with local communities, NGOs, and grassroots organizations, leveraging their knowledge and networks to deliver tailored support efficiently, especially in high-debt contexts and in support for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups to access services, enter the labour market and combat non-take up.
- The European Commission can lead by example by ensuring the systematic and meaningful participation of people experiencing poverty in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Crisis response, civilian defence and preparedness

Individuals, families, and communities in vulnerable situations are usually hit the hardest by a crisis – whether it be because of natural disaster, war or conflicts. Despite their vulnerability, they are often excluded from preparedness strategies, crisis plans, and disaster relief. Diaconal organisations are deeply rooted in local communities and therefore play a decisive role in ensuring that crisis response and preparedness are inclusive and adapted to people's need⁴.

4 Read more about the role of diaconal actors in crisis preparedness and response in our [latest briefing](#).

- The deep-rooted presence of diaconal actors in communities makes them indispensable for maintaining social cohesion and resilience. Public authorities must recognise diaconal organisations, churches and other essential health and social service providers as key stakeholders and engage them accordingly, providing the resources necessary to strengthen overall crisis preparedness and response systems.

3) ENSURING INCLUSION: SECURITY AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

Child and family poverty

Child poverty rates across the EU have grown in recent years, leading to unacceptable high numbers of children growing up at risk of poverty and social exclusion. To effectively combat poverty, breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty is essential. Furthermore, ending child poverty is not only a moral imperative, but also an economic necessity. Child poverty has severe consequences on both the wellbeing of the person, as well as on the economic situation, leading to lower wages, reduced employment, and higher rates of illness. The European Commission therefore must:

- Strengthen the European Child Guarantee and ensure that all children, especially those in vulnerable situations and from disadvantaged backgrounds, have access to services as described in the ECG to break the vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty. This includes adequate funding, mutual learning across the EU, and removing barriers such as hidden costs to ensure low-threshold access to services.⁵
- Encourage member states to implement universal child benefits, which have proven their effect in reducing child poverty.

Improve access to essential services

Whereas most people across the EU have access to essential services, communities in vulnerable situations and marginalised groups, such as Roma, are still too often left behind without access to water, sanitation or electricity. Additionally, rural areas often lack access to public transport, financial services, or digital infrastructure. To improve the situation, the Anti-Poverty Strategy should encourage better access to essential services:

- Installing drinking water, sanitation and electricity in Roma settlements must be a priority and should follow a participatory approach. It needs to be ensured that access to water, which is a human right, is enforced and a reality for everyone in Europe.

⁵ Additional recommendations on strengthening the ECG can be found in the Alliance for Investing in Children [latest paper](#).

- In light of the rural-urban divide, a focus on availability is needed since many people living in rural areas face the unavailability of essential services such as transport or digital communication every day. As elaborated in the Draghi report, targeted investments in the development of rural areas are therefore essential to foster cohesion between regions and tackle the urban-rural divide.

Accessibility and adequacy of social protection

Social protection is key to foster social cohesion, prevent people from falling under the poverty line, and ensure a life in dignity. However, social protection schemes are under pressure all across the EU, faced with budget constraints, rising demand, and bureaucratic obstacles. Whereas the competencies of the European Commission are limited, some further steps can be taken on European level:

Adequate minimum income schemes

Adequate minimum income schemes play a key role in reducing persisting inequalities and poverty and can act as an automatic stabiliser. For those in need and with insufficient income, minimum income schemes might be the only way to guarantee a decent standard of living. Minimum income schemes should be the basis of well-designed social safety nets, aiming to guarantee that everybody has a sufficient level of resources to ensure a life in dignity and are able to participate in the economic and social life, including the labour market.

- The implementation of the minimum income recommendation should be fostered through best practice sharing between Member States as well as monitoring and evaluation through the European Commission. The Commission should also support Member States in reducing the administrative and bureaucratic barriers to tackle non-take up by offering technical support.
- Minimum income schemes must be tailored to the costs of living and strengthened through indexation to ensure life in dignity for everyone.
- Whereas the Council recommendation on adequate minimum income was a crucial step, it is important to further work towards a minimum income directive, that ensures access to adequate minimum income all across the EU.

Adequate social protection

Social protection schemes are a crucial pillar of resilience, participation, and trust across Europe. They ensure that people are supported during difficult or challenging times of their lives, provide stability and prevent more people from falling under the poverty threshold. They are also important to build trust between citizens and governments, putting people at the centre of strong European welfare states. However, social protection schemes are often under strain, faced with a lack of innovation and reliant on bureaucratic mechanism. Additionally, such schemes are often implemented from a punitive

approach, emphasising the 'burden narrative'. An incentivising approach should be adopted that would support people in accessing the services and support they need to escape poverty. The Anti-Poverty Strategy should therefore foster strengthened social protection systems:

- The European Commission can contribute to stronger social protection by fostering policy alignment among Member States, setting ambitious yet achievable targets to reduce poverty, and especially by providing financial and technical support for reforms that modernise and expand social protection systems.
- Investments in areas such as unemployment benefits, minimum income schemes, universal child benefits, and access to affordable housing and health care are key aspects to combat poverty and social exclusion. The European Commission should set incentives for Member States to fund these pillars of social protection.
- The strategy should promote innovative solutions, including better use of digital tools and integrated service delivery, to ensure that social protection systems are accessible and effective in reaching marginalised groups, by keeping in mind that services still need to be accessible for people without digital skills or devices. These steps are also crucial to tackle non-take up of services.

Homelessness and affordable housing

Europe is facing a housing crisis. Housing cost overburden, the inability to keep the house warm, and rising numbers of homelessness are challenges all across the EU. Housing has become one of the central social questions of today, with rising housing costs and shortages of social housing leaving more and more individuals and families without access to an adequate home. Therefore, the Anti-Poverty Strategy must include a strong commitment to improving the affordability of quality housing and combatting homelessness.

Ensure access to adequate, social and affordable housing

The current housing shortage does not only affect low-income groups, but also more and more middle-income families and households. Social housing can be an effective mechanism to increase the share of affordable housing on the market, but investments and political commitment have been scarce in the past decades. Therefore, the Anti-Poverty Strategy must have a strong focus on ensuring access to more social housing across the Union:

- The Commission should encourage public-private partnerships to develop social and affordable housing, adjusted to the local and regional social needs.
- The European Commission should steer available funding towards social and cooperative housing, ensuring that public money serves the social needs and interest, instead of market demands.

- Non-for-profit social service providers and civil society actors must be supported in their efforts to provide social and affordable housing. This includes better access to funding for smaller scale projects, 0% interest loans for not-for-profit social housing provision, and lower bureaucratic barriers.

Combatting homelessness

Homelessness is the most severe form of poverty in Europe. Next to supporting people experiencing homelessness and providing long-term solutions beyond emergency relief, it is fundamental to prevent homelessness in the first place.

- Encourage Member States to provide targeted funding for homelessness prevention, emergency shelter, and long-term support services, including Housing First programmes, with a focus on transitioning people into permanent housing and stable living conditions. Strengthened collaboration between social services, local governments, and NGOs to address root causes and provide tailored support also play a crucial role in preventing and combatting homelessness.
- Establish concrete, achievable milestones to support the overarching goal of eradicating homelessness by 2030. The EU should work with Member States to break down this target into quantifiable and time-bound objectives. These milestones should be accompanied by clear indicators, such as the number of individuals rehoused, reductions in the length of time spent homeless, and an increase in the number of affordable housing units available. To achieve this, the EU should provide guidance and resources for Member States to develop, strengthen and implement national and regional strategies.

Inclusive policies for marginalised groups

Discrimination and marginalisation further exacerbate inequalities, reinforce non-take-up, and impose obstacles on social inclusion. Since poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon, the policies to address poverty must include diverse and targeted measures.

- Adopt an integrative approach to ensure coherence and alignment with existing and future EU frameworks to advance on anti-discrimination and social inclusion (such as the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation, the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 or the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 or the future revised EU Anti-Racism Action Plan).
- Implement a comprehensive approach to address the complex dimensions of poverty and systemic barriers, acknowledging how multiple and overlapping forms of disadvantage, such as those linked to gender, ethnicity, disability, and other factors, can exacerbate economic inequalities.
- Provide targeted support for those at substantial risk of extreme deprivation such as undocumented migrants and people experiencing homelessness by supporting outreach services designed to correctly identify the persons and their needs, as well as provide services such as food banks, shelter and sanitation on the basis of non-discrimination.

- Integrate the Anti-Poverty Strategy with policies on migration that enable quicker processing of claims for asylum and access to services that support integration into the labour market, inclusion activities and education and training.
- Promote access to affordable health care, mental health services and addiction services to recognise and address the intersection between health, social care and support inclusion as well as employability.

Data collection

Reliable data is the foundation of policy development. However, currently many figures miss European-wide standards and measurements, e.g. on homelessness, which leads to incoherent and scattered numbers.

- Standardised and comparable disaggregated data collection methodologies should be developed and implemented across the EU to ensure evidence-based policy making, enable a reliable monitoring progress for the reduction of poverty and promotion of social inclusion, and address social inequalities accordingly.
- Support the collection of longitudinal data and evidence that supports not only short-term results of anti-poverty strategies but also the mid and long-term impact. This should then be used to promote the benefits of social investments across the life cycle.

CONCLUSION

The first ever European Anti-Poverty Strategy can be an important instrument to combat poverty and social exclusion across the continent. If designed well, its implementation will have a crucial impact on families and households currently experiencing poverty and preventing more people from falling into poverty. To do so, a comprehensive, multidimensional strategy is needed. From our perspective, this strategy needs to build on various aspects of social and economic policies, but it must particularly include the following cornerstones to have a sustainable effect on the ground:

Combat child poverty by strengthening the European Child Guarantee

Numbers of child poverty have been on the rise in the EU, a phenomenon that is unacceptable. Therefore, the Anti-Poverty Strategy must urgently accelerate the combat against child poverty. The European Child Guarantee is a crucial instrument to do so; more and targeted funding for services included in the ECG is therefore necessary.

Strengthen social service providers by creating an enabling environment for social investment

Adapt the public procurement and state aid rules to ensure high-quality social services. High quality services that are available, accessible and offer low-threshold support are key in the combat against poverty. Without social service providers, the Europeans efforts to combat poverty will remain targets on paper instead of leading to implementation on the ground. Additionally, social service providers often play a preventive role due to their knowledge of local contexts and communities. Their access to funding and resources must be supported and enabled by the current and future EU budget and State Aid and Public Procurement rules.

Improved access to the labour market through a person-centred approach

Support access to the labour market by a combination of integration services, including education and training, as well as incentivising social protection schemes, adequate wages and access to needed social services.