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Review of the 2021 European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan

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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

on the European Pillar of Social Rights

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Staff Working Document

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Introduction

Since its proclamation in November 2017 at the Gothenburg Social Summit, the **European Pillar of Social Rights** (hereinafter referred to as the 'Pillar') has become the comprehensive framework for improving working and living conditions of people in the EU and for fostering upward social convergence across Member States. The Pillar encompasses 20 principles, structured in three chapters: Equal opportunities and access to the labour market, Fair working conditions, and Social protection and inclusion.

Since the proclamation of the Pillar, the Union has seen measurable social progress and upward social convergence, remaining strong in the face of many crises and achieving record-high employment rates (76.1% for people aged 20 to 64 in 2025[1]), a historic low in unemployment (6.0% for people aged 20 to 64[2]) and significant reduction of in-work poverty (-1.2% since 2017). The gender pay gap has narrowed to 11.1%, women's labour market participation has reached an all-time high of 71.3%[3], and the gender gap in part-time employment also decreased and stands at 19.7pp, alongside a 7% drop in workplace accidents since 2017. At the same time, the EU's upward convergence and cohesion engine has continued purring, with some Member States seeing significant reductions in poverty and exclusion levels. Though challenges remain—particularly in disposable income growth and upskilling - these advances demonstrate the Pillar's relevance and tangible impact.

In March 2021, the Commission put forward the **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan** (hereinafter referred to as the '2021 Action Plan'). It set 75 actions at EU level that the Commission committed to take during the first von der Leyen Commission (see Annex I) and established three EU headline targets on employment, skills and poverty reduction to be met by 2030. To make its principles a reality the EU used its full toolkit: binding and non-binding measures, country-specific recommendations, and funding.

The implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights should not be seen as a process driven only by the EU institutions. The 2021 Action Plan also underlined that achieving upward social convergence depends on shared responsibility and ownership, with Member States, national, regional and local authorities, social partners, civil society and the private sector all playing a critical role under their different competences. In this sense, progress on making the Pillar a lived reality requires coordinated action and buy-in at every level, combining EU coordination and support with strong commitment by all the key players. The Porto Social Summit in May 2021 was a defining moment in solidifying this commitment.

While the principles of the Pillar remain fully relevant, the evolving economic, social and demographic context calls for increased attention to a number of issues that have gained prominence in recent years. In particular, ensuring quality jobs, strengthening productivity and sustainable income growth, and addressing growing challenges related to the cost of living, AI, and reducing persistent inequalities within the EU, will be important to further advance the objectives of the Pillar and promote upward social convergence across the Union.

[1] Eurostat (lfsi_emp_a).
[2] Eurostat (une_rt_a).
[3] Eurostat (lfsi_emp_a).

All actions announced in the 2021 Action Plan have been delivered, with the last deliverable being its own review. Throughout 2025, the Commission consulted broadly on its implementation and carried out an analysis. The outcomes of these activities are presented in this Staff Working Document.

Chapter 1: Overview of consultation activities

1.1 Scope of the consultation

The views of all relevant stakeholders and citizens were collected through different consultation activities: targeted meetings and events, surveys and online consultations. Moreover, the Commission conducted its own analyses on the implementation of the 2021 Action Plan.

1.2 Have your say webpage

The online consultation was conducted over a 12-week period, which started on 18 June and concluded on 10 September 2025. It featured a public consultation and a Call for Evidence open to all stakeholders (both individuals and organisations).

The public consultation questionnaire addressed key themes of the 2021 Action Plan, such as employment, social protection, equality, education and training. It was structured in a way that would allow feedback through both closed and open-ended questions. The public consultation attracted 153 respondents[4] from across Europe, representing a diverse mix of stakeholder groups and citizens.[5] Over one-third of the contributions (37%, 56 out of 153 respondents) came from non-governmental organisations, while the remaining responses were distributed among citizens (16%, 25 out of 153), public authorities (15%, 23 out of 153), trade unions (12%, 19 out of 153), companies (2) and business associations (16) (12%, 18 out of 153), academic/research institutions (1%, 1 out of 153), and other entities (7%, 11 out of 153).[6]

The Call for Evidence received 143 submissions. Non-governmental organisations accounted for nearly half of the contributions (48%, 44 out of 91), followed by those who self-categorised as 'other' (13%, 12 out of 91), citizens (12%, 11 out of 91), trade unions (10%, 9 out of 91), public authorities (8%, 7 out of 91), companies (4%, 4 out of 91), business associations (2%, 2 out of 91) and academic/research institutions (2%, 2 out of 91).

1.3 Dedicated meetings and events

[4] No coordinated campaigns were identified in the public consultation responses. One submission contained only respondent details and no accompanying file and was therefore excluded from the analysis. Another submission, provided via the Call for Evidence as a Word document, was manually added to the consultation, resulting in a total of 153 responses analysed.

[5] Throughout the report, when referring to 'stakeholders', this will also include citizens who have been respondents of the public consultation survey and the call for evidence.

[6] Respondents from other entities include associations of local and regional authorities, social security and health organisations, social economy and financial inclusion networks, development and financial institutions, and vocational training and employment services.

Member States expressed their views and provided evidence and analyses through questionnaires in 2025 in the Employment and Social Protection Committees (EMCO and SPC), which assessed the impact the 2021 Action Plan had made in the national context, and encouraged the inclusion of improvements to the social and employment situation. This collective input built on the 2024 EMCO-SPC Opinion on the future priorities.

The European Parliament (EP) adopted an Oral Question to the Commission on a new Action Plan. A debate took place in the EP Plenary on 22 January 2026 with Executive Vice-President Mînzatu. Moreover, the EMPL Committee sent a letter to EVP Mînzatu calling for specific initiatives the Committee wished to see included in the new Communication. The European Parliament also adopted an own initiative report on the European Semester for economic policy coordination: employment and social priorities – annual report 2026 which includes relevant policy recommendations in the context of the new Pillar Communication.

The Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) also held targeted consultations with key stakeholders throughout 2025. These included, amongst others, a hearing with EU social partners, a civil society dialogue meeting, several dedicated joint meetings with EU agencies, meetings with the European Economic and Social Committee, a Youth Check, including a dedicated Youth Policy Dialogue, a consultation with the European Network of Public Employment Services, and meetings with relevant Commission expert groups. Moreover, feedback on the implementation of the 2021 Action Plan was collected during events, such as the 2025 European Employment and Social Forum and the 2025 Porto Social Forum.

1.4 Commission internal assessment and methodological remarks

Annex I of the 2021 Action Plan entails 75 initiatives the Commission committed to take during the first von der Leyen Commission. The last initiative was the review of the 2021 Action Plan itself. More than half of the 75 initiatives (45) were led by Directorates-General other than DG EMPL, a testament to the efforts made in mainstreaming the Pillar across EU policymaking.

Of the 75 initiatives, 7 are directives, 8 regulations, 15 recommendations, 28 communications and 17 take other forms.[7] Assessment relies on evaluations or reviews of the individual initiatives. Moreover, given that most of the initiatives have been published recently, ex post evaluations may be conducted in the near future, but outside the scope of this SWD.

Chapter 2: Main findings from the 2021 Action Plan review process

2.1 Key achievements of the 2021 Action Plan

The 2021 Action Plan aimed to strengthen Europe's social fabric, turning the 20 Principles of the Pillar into concrete actions to benefit citizens. Moreover, among the EU funding tools for employment and social policies the entire ESF+ was programmed following the pillar

[7] Such as reports (5), staff working documents (3), reviews (1), evaluations (1), papers (1), groups (1), calls (1), Commission notices (1), guidelines (1), pacts (1) and packages (1).

principles. This section gives an overview of the main initiatives proposed by the Commission under the 2021 Action Plan and their impact or follow-up so far, based on feedback from the consultation and the Commission's own reporting and analysis of the information available to date.[8] The 2021 Action Plan also set three headline social targets to be met by 2030, which are discussed in Chapter 3.

Minimum wages

The **Directive on adequate minimum wages in the EU**, in force since 2022, established a common framework to ensure the adequacy of statutory minimum wages and promote collective bargaining on wage-setting. Feedback from the public consultation puts the Directive as one of the top three most impactful initiatives from the 2021 Action Plan. 22 Member States have already notified the Commission of full transposition. Since the adoption of the Directive, minimum wages have increased significantly across the EU. This has helped raise pay and living standards for many workers: in-work poverty rates have steadily fallen from a high of 9.8% in 2016 to 8.3% in 2025[9]. In all the countries with statutory minimum wages, they have risen in real terms, offsetting losses in purchasing power caused by the high inflation triggered by the 2022 energy crisis. Statutory minimum wages have grown fastest in **PL** (average annual growth rate of 19.7%), **HR** (16%) and **RO** (15.6%). They have also risen in most of the countries where minimum wages are only provided by collective agreements, such as **AT** (average annual growth rate of 7.8%). The Directive has also helped to narrow the gap between the highest and lowest minimum wages between Member States, from about six times in 2022 to five times today, contributing to greater wage convergence across Europe. More importantly, workers have benefited from these improvements, also thanks to the overall remarkable performance of the EU labour market over the past years, with very low unemployment and high employment rates in the years following the adoption of the Directive.

Country example: In **SK** the implementation of the **Minimum Wage Directive** is helping boost minimum wages and contributes to reduce in-work poverty (according to Eurostat, in-work at-risk-of-poverty rate dropped from 10.2% in 2024 to 6.5% in 2025) thanks to the introduction of new criteria to evaluate the adequacy of the statutory minimum wage, the raising of the automatic indexation mechanism to 60% of the average monthly wage of the previous year (in case of absence of an agreement between social partners on the minimum wage), and the creation a Minimum Wage Commission with the participation of the social partners.

Platform work

The co-legislators agreed on a new **Directive on improving working conditions in Platform Work** for people working through digital labour platforms, to ensure they have their employment status classified correctly and to correct bogus self-employment. The Directive increases transparency in the use of algorithms, ensures human monitoring of automated

[8] For example, work in the framework of the European Semester, the Joint Employment Report and implementation reports.

[9] Eurostat (online data code ilc_iw01).

decisions and grants the right to contest automated decisions and rectify them where needed. Member States have until 2 December 2026 to transpose the Directive into their national legislation. To support Member States, the Commission set up an expert group in which national experts, together with representatives of social partners, discussed the provisions of the Directive, including the main issues arising in relation to its transposition and implementation. These discussions are reflected in this report on the transposition of Directive (EU) 2024/2831 on improving working conditions in platform work.

Pay transparency

The co-legislators agreed on a **Directive to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms.** The Directive is an important step towards closing the gender pay gap in the EU. The Directive had to be transposed by Member States by June 2026. According to the Directive, employers have to provide information about the initial pay level or its range in the job vacancy notice or before the job interview. Moreover, workers have the right to request information from their employer on their individual pay level and on the average pay levels. Additionally, employers with at least 100 workers must publish information on the pay gap between female and male workers. Measures on Pay Transparency were highlighted by many during the consultation as positive and impactful. Some stakeholders emphasised the need for stronger enforcement while others highlighted the administrative burden linked to the implementation of the Directive. To facilitate this task and reduce administrative burden, the Commission, together with the European Institute for Gender Equality, developed a toolkit for gender neutral job evaluations. Member States are also required to support and guide employers in assessing the value of work. Moreover, the Directive grants flexibility in its implementation, notably by allowing Member States to alliviate employers' pay reporting obligations with tax and social security data already available to them.. The Commission will closely monitor the timely, complete and effective implementation of the Directive, helping to advance gender equality in the labour market.

Social economy

In December 2021, the Commission presented the **Social Economy Action Plan** 2021-2030. It included 63 actions to enable social economy entities to thrive and grow, including a **Council Recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions**. The Social Economy Action Plan was positively assessed by civil society organisations and business associations, particularly for mainstreaming the social economy across EU policies, fostering inclusive entrepreneurship and supporting the creation of quality jobs through not-for-profit and social enterprises. A Special Eurobarometer in October 2025 found that half of Europeans had engaged with social economy organisations in the past five years, and that 75% considered the social economy important for society. The cross-sectoral collaboration, legal recognition of social economy actors, and the alignment of social and green criteria in public procurement were also seen as successful aspects of the Action Plan (SSE, ENSIE, Social Platform, Euclid Network, CEPES; 2025). The 2026 mid-term review of the Action Plan revealed that 12

Member States have adopted or reformed social economy laws and 21 Member States have developed social economy strategies. Moreover, EUR1.6 billion has been mobilised in grants and financial instruments and another EUR11.7 billion is expected to be mobilised for social enterprises and microfinance under InvestEU. To improve legal certainty and knowledge on State aid options, the Commission published a study on the application of State aid measures to support social enterprises' access to finance and the recruitment of disadvantaged workers. The Youth Entrepreneurship Policy Academy, a joint initiative of the Commission and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), has brought together policymakers and networks of young entrepreneurs through a series of policy and capacity-building workshops, aiming to devise better policies for young entrepreneurs, including social entrepreneurs.

Country example: IE launched 'Trading for Impact', its National Social Enterprise Policy for 2024-2027. It was developed to help cultivate and sustain strong and impactful social enterprises. The 57 actions were developed together with social economy actors and after a public consultation.

Social dialogue

The Commission adopted a new social dialogue initiative in January 2023, consisting of a **Communication on strengthening social dialogue in the EU: harnessing its full potential for managing fair transitions** and proposal for a **Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue in the EU**. The Council Recommendation, adopted by Council on 12 June 2023, provides guidance to Member States on how to best promote social dialogue and strengthen collective bargaining.

Collective bargaining coverage rates vary widely across EU countries, with collective agreements covering all workers in some and less than a fifth in others. In 2023, BE and IT had collective bargaining coverage rates of 100% and seven additional Member States had rates above 80% in 2023 – FR (98%) AT (94.9%), ES (91.8%), FI (88.8%), SE (88%), PT (83.3%) and DK (81%). By contrast, rates below 20% were observed in EE (19.1%), BG (16.2%), HU (14.8%), EL (13.1%) and PL (11.6%). [10]

The Tripartite Declaration for a thriving European Social Dialogue signed at the Val Duchesse Summit in 2024 and the Pact for Social Dialogue signed by the Commission and cross-industry social partners in 2025 are part of a renewed commitment to strengthening European social dialogue in a time of global transformation. To further enhance the EU legal framework on social dialogue at company level, the Commission proposed to amend the 2009 recast Directive on European Works Councils in 2024. The aim was to further improve the effectiveness of the framework for the information and consultation of employees in large multinational undertakings. The amending Directive was adopted in 2025 and aims at improving legal certainty, for example, by clarifying the key concepts and conditions on the transmission of

[10] Source: Member State submissions. OECD/AIAS ICTWSS database.

information. The revised rules contain stronger requirements for gender-balanced European Works Councils. The consultation procedure has been strengthened to ensure that before taking a decision on a matter, the central management considers the opinion of the European Works Council and responds to it in writing.

Health and safety at work

The Commission adopted the **EU Strategic Framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027**, setting out an ambitious agenda of initiatives and actions at EU and national level, as well as for use by stakeholders. As a result, new EU rules have been adopted to reduce the exposure of workers to hazardous substances, including asbestos (which can cause cancer), lead (which can affect the reproductive system) and diisocyanates (which can cause respiratory diseases). The Strategic Framework has suggested Member States to update or adopt national strategies on health and safety at work, aligned with the objectives of the EU framework. The European Agency for Health and Safety at Work (EU-OSHA) has carried out research on a broad range of current, new and emerging risks regarding their impact on safety and health and their prevention, and has produced tools and resources to support policymaking as well as to help improve the prevention of occupational safety and health risks on the ground.

Skills

The **Pact for Skills**, launched in 2020, aims to get public and private organisations together and encourage them to make concrete commitments to upskilling and reskilling adults. More than 10 million people have benefited from upskilling initiatives under the Pact for Skills since its launch in 2020. The Pact has mobilised a network of 4 000 organisations, from companies to trade unions, education and training providers, regional and local authorities and employment services. Together, they have invested more than EUR 2 billion to strengthen skills across the EU. 85% of the businesses and workers surveyed appreciate the Pact's benefits and impacts, such as joint action, access to skills intelligence as well as networking opportunities. More than 412 100 organisations joined skills networks, strengthening cooperation between education, industry and public authorities through the Pact. They developed or updated nearly 142 000 training programmes, including short courses and longer programmes leading to qualifications. While the Pact for Skills primarily aims to support upskilling and reskilling efforts, it also contributes to addressing labour and skills shortages and complements broader EU initiatives on labour mobility and talent attraction, including Talent Partnerships with third countries.

The **2020 Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training** aimed to make VET in Europe more agile, resilient, and aligned with the green and digital transitions. To remain relevant and resilient, VET must expand and adapt so that both young people and adults acquire green, digital, and entrepreneurial skills aligned with evolving labour market needs. It established a modernised framework emphasising work-based learning, micro-credentials, and strengthened quality assurance across Member States. The Council Recommendation set a target of 60% of VET learners to benefit from work-based learning. This target has been exceeded and stood at 66% in 2025. The share of employed graduates from VET aged 20-34 reached 80.2% in 2025, very close to the target level of 82%.

Member States also agreed on two new Council Recommendations on **Individual Learning Accounts** and **Micro-credentials** to help people upskill and reskill in dynamic ways. Several **public authorities** reported notable achievements in the modernisation of adult learning systems with the introduction of the Individual Learning Accounts – notably in **CZ, FR, HR, LT, and PL** (EMCO-SPC, 2025). This action is usually implemented in tandem with other measures like electronic training vouchers and unified certification systems for non-formal and informal learning. Together these measures have increased access to upskilling, particularly in digital and green skills, contributing to the reduction of unemployment (**BG, FR, SK, RO**; EMCO-SPC, 2025). The integration of active labour market policies with education and training actions is also considered a success. Some employment agencies have implemented projects that combined activation, training, and employment support (**BG**, **RO;** EMCO-SPC, 2025) and business associations emphasised the positive impact of combining education and training with labour market policies. The use of micro-credentials, digital platforms and flexible learning models are seen as critical for creating an adaptable training ecosystem, especially for SMEs and social economy enterprises (SME United, 2025; Eurochambres, 2025; European Confederation of Woodworking Industries, 2025).

The European Year of Skills also helped raise awareness of the importance of skills development and lifelong learning across the Union. According to the evaluation, it contributed to increasing awareness of training needs among citizens, employers and other stakeholders.

Under the RRF, Member States have allocated around EUR70 billion to implement diverse reforms and investments to address country-specific challenges across education and training. For instance, around 35.5 million people have already benefitted from education and training measures, more than 19 million young people, aged 15-29, have already benefitted from support, and about 4.5 million people were assisted in either finding employment or engaging in job searching activities.

Country example: In **BG**, initiatives such as electronic training vouchers, digital skills courses targeting 260 000 people, and a new online learning platform will expand access to education for unemployed and employed adults. New measures also include validating skills gained through work or self-study, helping people gain recognised qualifications faster, combined literacy-vocational training, and support for disadvantaged groups to improve employability. Many of these initiatives have been implemented with support from EU funding programmes.

Supporting children

The Council Recommendation establishing a **European Child Guarantee** was adopted by the co-legislators in July 2021. Member States have begun to implement the European Child Guarantee**,** supporting children in need to set objectives, including free early childhood education and care, free education and free healthcare, as well as healthy nutrition and adequate housing. In the consultation, the European Child Guarantee, adopted together with the EU Strategy on the rights of the Child, emerged as the most positively assessed action of the 2021 Action Plan in both the call for evidence and position papers. It was consistently recognised by civil society organisations, public authorities, trade unions, business associations, and other actors as successful in establishing a framework and expanding access to key services, combating child disadvantages and promoting social inclusion (Eurochild; Save the Children; Social Platform; Österreichische Bundesarbeitskammer; ETUC; UIL; Panteia; SME United, 2025).

Member States identified the Child Guarantee as a success, materialised in the design of national action plans, entailing progress on the ground. The review of the progress in implementing the Child Guarantee shows that it has improved access to key goods and services for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Since its adoption in 2021, it has delivered important gains: early childhood education and care participation among children below three in poverty or social exclusion situation has risen; at least seven Member States have expanded school meal programmes; and 850 000 more children, 80% of them at risk of poverty, have gained access to school-based activities. These gains can be further consolidated by addressing remaining barriers to access across the areas covered by the European Child Guarantee. At the same time, recent developments, including growing threats to children's safety online and offline and persistently high levels of child poverty, highlight the importance of integrated approaches to child well-being and protection. In this context, the Commission Recommendation on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems in the best interests of the child promotes coordinated action across services and authorities to prevent and respond effectively to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, while ensuring that children receive timely and comprehensive support. In 2026, together with the Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Commission adopted the Communication on strengthening the Child Guarantee, which set out a renewed commitment, ensuring that every child can grow up in a safe, inclusive and nurturing environment, while reinforcing children's rights, wellbeing and opportunities. The 2026 Communication focuses on three pillars: (1) securing families' access to quality jobs and strong safety nets, (2) ensuring that all vulnerable children have access to the comprehensive and tailored support they need to reach their full potential, (3) boosting investment and bringing together partners to invest in children.

The **2022 Council Recommendation Pathways to School Success** aims to promote better educational outcomes for all learners, regardless of their socio-economic background, by seeking to raise basic skills levels, increase upper secondary completion rates and support inclusive education systems and wellbeing at school, with particular attention to disadvantaged groups. Its implementation has been supported through peer learning and exchange among Member States, the development of practical guidance and tools for policymakers and practitioners, and targeted funding under Erasmus+. Recent outputs include the Guidelines on wellbeing and mental health at school and the Roadmap for ensuring school success for all.

Country example: In **PL** the 'Active Toddler 2022-2029' (*'Aktywny Maluch'*) Programme leveraged both EU (RRF and ESF+) and national funds to create and maintain for 3 years over 100 000 new childcare places, with a view of facilitating parents’ labour market participation.

In **PT**, the 'Happy Nursery' (*'Creche Feliz'*) and in **FR** the 'Pact for the first steps' (*'Pacte pour les Premiers Pas'*) similarly extended free childcare and material support to young children, prioritising assistance for vulnerable families.

Care

The 2022 **European Care Strategy** and the accompanying **Council Recommendation on long-term care** set a framework for improving access to affordable, high-quality care services and supporting the care workforce, with a strong emphasis on community-based and person-centred care. EU level support includes a wide range of actions, from the setting up of the European social dialogue committee for social services, to the launch of a Large-scale skills partnership for LTC under the Pact for Skills). Implementation is advancing swiftly, building on close cooperation with the national Long-Term Care Coordinators, with national implementation plans having been submitted in 2024. The plans showcase ambitious policy measures and investments, with workforce and availability of services at the top of the policy agenda. Monitoring takes place in the European Semester, underpinned by an indicator-based framework developed with the Social Protection Committee and finalised in May 2025. A total of 22 Member States have programmed European Social Fund Plus resources to support health and long-term care sectors and services – reaching a total of EUR6.7 billion during the 2021-2027 programming period. This is complemented in the same period by EUR 7.2 billion (EUR 9.7 billion including national contributions) under the European Regional Development Fund (including its Interreg strand) programmed for health and long-term care infrastructure and equipment strengthening equal access to and the resilience of the sector. In addition, under the RRF, reforms and investments in long-term care across Member States amount to EUR 4.2 billion. The report on the implementation of the Council Recommendation in 2027 will take stock of progress and remaining gaps, feeding into broader reflections on the future of care in Europe.

As part of the Care Strategy, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Council Recommendation on the revision of the Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care to enhance women’s labour market participation. The Council Recommendation set new ambitious yet realistic targets so that by 2030 at least:

- 50% of children below the age of 3 are in early childhood education and care
- 96% of children between the age of 3 and the starting age for compulsory primary education are in early childhood education and care, as already agreed in the European Education Area framework

Participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) between the age of 3 and starting primary education continues to climb in the EU, with large variation among Member States both in terms of availability and quality (including differences between urban and rural areas). In 2023, 94.6% participated, just 1.4 pps below the 2030 EU-level target set at 96%. To date, eight Member States have reached this target, while most countries top 90%.

On top of the funds allocated by the Recovery and Resilience plans in the healthcare systems (EUR 42.7 billion), the EU4Health programme has supported several initiatives guiding Member States in improving their health coverage policies and addressing critical gaps in access to healthcare. They include tools and guidelines on affordability of healthcare, better distribution of health benefits, and guidelines on access to healthcare for persons with disabilities, and Roma communities, whose life expectancy remains around 7-8 years lower than the general population (FRA Roma Survey 2024). Several initiatives have also provided support to address health workforce shortages, especially tools for health workforce planning, policies to retain and attract nurses, actions focused on upskilling and reskilling. It is now for Member States to leverage the potential of these tools in designing and implementing policies ensuring better access to healthcare.

Combating homelessness

The Lisbon Declaration established the **European Platform on Combating Homelessness**. Signed in June 2021 by Member States, EU Institutions and Advisory bodies, social partners and relevant NGOs, it expresses the commitment to work towards ending homelessness by 2030. By mid-2026, the Platform has close to 50 members, with strong involvement of NGOs and local stakeholders. The establishment of national strategies to combat homelessness in an increasing number of Member States is a key achievement of the Platform. Progressively, more and more Member States refer to the Platform's objectives, guidelines and know-how in their national policy debates. It is among key priorities of the Commission to mainstream prevention and mitigation of homelessness across EU policies and initiatives. The European Affordable Housing Plan, adopted in December 2025, prioritises investments and promotion of housing solutions that protect and empower people in vulnerable situations, notably homelessness. The first ever adopted Anti-Poverty Strategy was also an opportunity to frame the work on combating homelessness as one component of the fight against poverty rather than a self-standing policy. Within the same social package, the Commission also adopted a proposal for a Council Recommendation on fighting housing exclusion, emphasising long-term solutions to prevent housing exclusion and homelessness, and shifting from emergency to early-prevention measures. Cohesion policy supports affordable and social housing, including for the most vulnerable. The Social Climate Fund will also be able to support renovation and construction of social housing. The Recovery and Resilience Facility includes EUR 18.1 billion in measures aiming at making housing more affordable and accessible. These include investments in expanding the stock and provision of social housing in Member States, as well as providing shelter and emergency housing.

Combating energy poverty

In 2023, the European Commission updated its Recommendations to Member States on energy poverty (Recommendation (EU) 2023/2407), accompanied by a Staff Working Document which provides concrete advice and evidence on the diagnosis, monitoring and tackling of energy poverty. The documents recommend prioritising structural measures addressing the root causes of energy poverty and providing tailor-made information and advice to energy poor households. In February 2025, the Affordable Energy Action Plan set out 8 concrete actions to make electricity bills more affordable, bring down the production and distribution costs of energy, and ensure a competitive, well-functioning and efficient energy market across the EU. The Citizens Energy Package, adopted in March 2026, originates from the Action Plan and dedicates a specific pillar to tackling energy poverty in the EU. Finally, the Commission supports implementation of measures on the ground through its initiative Energy Poverty Advisory Hub (EPAH).

Combating transport poverty

The recommendation on transport poverty, adopted by the European Commission on 22 May 2025, calls on Member States to combat transport poverty through affordable, accessible, and sustainable mobility solutions supporting social and climate justice. The recommendation outlines strategies to address transport poverty, including through the support from the Social Climate Fund expected to mobilise at least EUR 86.7 billion for vulnerable transport users and microenterprises. Key measures include improving public transport in low-income areas, developing on-demand transport solutions in rural areas, introducing social leasing schemes for zero-emission vehicles, and enhancing accessibility for vulnerable groups. The recommendation aims to promote social and climate justice by ensuring equitable access to mobility for all Europeans. In support of these efforts, the Joint Research Centre has launched the Transport Poverty Hub, an online platform providing high-resolution maps, that help visually identify areas with well-developed and underdeveloped transport networks, providing valuable insights to policymakers into regional and local connectivity.

Modernisation of social protection systems

The High-Level Group on the Future of Social Protection and of the Welfare State in the EU delivered its **report** in 2023, putting forward 21 recommendations aimed at strengthening social protection systems and welfare states in response to demographic change, labour-market transformations, and the digital and green transitions. The recommendations notably emphasise supporting job quality throughout the life course, ensuring adequate and sustainable financing of social protection systems, and embedding a social investment approach across employment and social policies. They advocate a preventive, life-course perspective that strengthens resilience, promotes inclusion, and equips societies to manage future social and economic risks. In parallel, the Commission continued to support Member States in implementing the 2019 **Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed** via monitoring, EU funding and mutual learning. Both the 2023 implementation report and the 2025 thematic social reporting by the Social Protection Committee highlight progress made in closing gaps by extending social protection and tackling barriers to effective access to adequate coverage – as well as remaining gaps and new challenges and risks. For instance, two thirds of the recovery and resilience plans (RRPs) adopted in 2021 and 2022 included reforms or investments aimed at improving access to social protection (mostly focusing on simplifying access through digital investments and enhancing the adequacy of unemployment and old-age benefits). In total, Member States' RRPs include social protection-related reforms and investments amounting to EUR 16.2 billion.

Moreover, based on measures reported in the Joint Employment Reports for 2023–2026, **around 15 Member States** adopted structural reforms that **extended formal social protection coverage** to previously excluded or insufficiently protected groups, notably the self-employed and workers in non-standard forms of employment. These reforms typically broadened access to unemployment, sickness, parental or occupational injury protection, or brought new categories of workers within the social insurance system. While some reforms applied broadly to the self-employed or workers in non-standard employment, others targeted specific occupational groups that had traditionally faced protection gaps, such as domestic workers, artists and cultural professionals, platform workers, agricultural workers or trainees.

Looking beyond formal coverage, an additional group of Member States introduced structural reforms aimed at **improving the effective coverage and/or adequacy** of existing schemes, notably by easing eligibility conditions, extending benefit duration or increasing benefit levels. Excluding reforms that primarily extended **formal coverage**, around **13 Member States** adopted structural reforms aimed at improving the **effective coverage and/or adequacy** of social protection schemes.

A pilot project on the **European Social Security Pass** (ESSPASS) was conducted between 2021 and 2025 to explore a digital solution for the issuance and cross-border verification of social security documents. The aim was to facilitate the proof and verification of social security rights across borders, while reducing administrative burdens on individuals, businesses and national authorities. During this period, multiple pilot activities were carried out to test digital solutions for procedures related to the Portable document A1 and the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), with the active participation of a substantial number of Member States. Given the demonstrated benefits of an ESSPASS digital solution and the success of the pilot projects, the Commission intends to include a legislative proposal on ESSPASS as part of the Fair Labour Mobility Package to be adopted in Q3 2026.

Minimum income

The 2023 **Council Recommendation on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion** set common key components for Member States' minimum income policies to jointly contribute to the reduction of poverty in the EU. They reiterated the merits of the active inclusion approach - combining income support, inclusive labour market policies and access to services. Moreover, to ensure a life in dignity at all stages of life, they set the joint ambition to achieve gradually an adequate level of income support[11] by 2030. The 2025 Minimum Income Report gives a first overview of the implementation of the Recommendation in the Member States. While a number of Member States have started to implement the Recommendation and

[11] Income support to be at least the equivalent of the poverty threshold, the monetary value of necessary goods and services or other comparable levels.

made progress, more efforts are needed to ensure that national minimum income schemes are fully in line with the provisions of the Recommendation.

Inclusion of persons with disabilities and other groups at risk of discrimination

The **Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030** aims to improve the lives of persons with disabilities in the EU across all areas, encompassing numerous Pillar principles and in particular principle 17. The key initiative in the area of employment is the Disability Employment Package, which provides guidance on inclusive and accessible employment measures. The Package covers all stages of employment, from recruitment, through retention to return to work. It will continue to be implemented up to 2030, covering specific topics such as AI and assistive technologies at the workplace, transition from education to employment and employment of women with disabilities. The Package will be complemented, under the Enhanced disability strategy up to 2030, by an assessment of the provision of reasonable accommodation at the workplace, in line with the Employment Equality Directive, and a cost-benefit analysis of boosting employment of persons with disabilities jointly with the OECD.

The The EU Roma Strategic Framework for equality, inclusion and participation 2020–2030 supports the objectives of the Pillar by promoting equal opportunities, social inclusion, and access to quality employment, education, healthcare, and housing for Roma communities. By tackling antigypsyism and discrimination and reducing socio-economic inequalities, the framework helps ensure that Roma people can fully participate in society and benefit from the Pillar's principles of equal treatment, inclusion, and fair access to social and labour market opportunities.

The EU Anti-Racism Strategy 2026–2030 supports the objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights by promoting equal opportunities, inclusion, and non-discrimination for all, regardless of racial or ethnic origin. By tackling barriers in employment, education, healthcare, and housing, the Strategy contributes to a fairer and more inclusive society, in line with the Pillar’s principles on equal treatment, social protection, and access to essential services.

The LGBTIQ+ equality strategy 2026–2030 supports the objectives of the Pillar by promoting equal opportunities, inclusion and non-discrimination for LGBTIQ+ people. Through measures to tackle barriers in employment, education, healthcare and access to services, the Strategy contributes to a fairer and more inclusive society, in line with the Pillar’s principles on equality, social protection and participation in the labour market.

Better protection of legally-admitted workers

The action announced in the 2021 Action Plan to review the Single Permit Directive has been delivered through Directive (EU) 2024/1233. The revised Directive combines labour-market objectives with stronger safeguards for third-country workers against labour exploitation. It simplifies and accelerates the single permit procedure, facilitates applications by third-country nationals already legally present in the EU, strengthens information on rights, introduces a right to change employer under conditions, provides for a limited period of residence during unemployment, and reinforces monitoring, inspections, sanctions and complaint and redress mechanisms.

Assessing distributional impacts of policies

Ex ante Distributional Impact Assessments (DIAs) can support the design of policies and ensure transparency on how their budgets and policies impact social outcomes and in particular poverty and income equality. The 2021 Action Plan announced the European Commission's intention to present in 2022 guidance to Member States on a more systematic use of ex-ante DIA in the planning and budgeting of reforms and did so in the form of a Commission Communication.

Subsequent initiatives have reinforced this commitment. By 2024, the Council's voluntary guiding principles for EU Member States for evaluating economic effects of reforms and investments in the labour market, skills and social policy domains had further embedded DIA as a tool for evaluating reforms to labour markets, skills development and social policy. The amended Council Directive on requirements for budgetary frameworks of the Member States (2011/85/EU) which refers to the New Economic Government Framework, now also includes references to DIA. The Commission supports Member States in this by providing capacity building and technical assistance through the Technical Support Instrument (TSI), as well as by organising mutual learning events. EUROMOD, managed by the Joint Research Centre since 2021, remains a key instrument for (comparative) DIAs based on tax-/benefit microsimulation. Progress at the national level has also accelerated in recent years, with several Member States making concrete methodological and institutional advancements in the use of DIA.

2.2 Implementation and enforcement

The 2021 Action Plan recognises that the effective delivery of social rights depends not only on the adoption of new legislation, but also on its timely and correct implementation. The Commission is committed to strengthening cooperation with Member States on EU labour and social law, focusing on transposition, implementation and enforcement, while facilitating exchanges of good practices and supporting national authorities in applying the EU social acquis. In line with this commitment, the Commission has combined legislative action with a broad range of implementation and enforcement support measures. These include structured dialogue with Member States, guidance and capacity-building activities, monitoring of national transposition measures, exchanges within expert groups and implementation networks, and, where necessary, the use of infringement procedures to ensure compliance with EU law.

The legislative initiatives adopted under the 2021 Action Plan are currently at different stages of implementation. For the most recently adopted measures, efforts have focused primarily on supporting national transposition and promoting a common understanding of the new rules. For older initiatives, enforcement activities increasingly concentrate on assessing the completeness and conformity of national measures and addressing potential shortcomings through bilateral exchanges and infringement action where appropriate.

A key example of ongoing implementation is the **Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages in the EU**. The Commission has consistently emphasised the importance of its swift and complete implementation, so that workers across the EU can reap the full benefit of its provisions. In its judgment of 11 November 2025 (case C-19/23, *Denmark vs. Parliament and Council*), the Court held that the Treaty (Article 153(5) TFEU) does not prevent the EU to regulate any question linked to pay, but only those that directly interfere with the determination of pay. The Court only annulled two specific provisions that were deemed to directly interfere (Article 5(2) and part of Article 5(3): listing the criteria that must be taken into account by Member States with statutory minimum wages, as well as the rule preventing a decrease of minimum wages when they are automatically indexed). It concluded that the rest of the Directive stands on firm legal ground. Following the judgment, implementation efforts have continued across the Union. Most Member States have adopted, or are in the process of adopting, the measures necessary to transpose the Directive (22 Member States have already notified full transposition). The Commission is closely monitoring progress and is pursuing follow-up action in those cases where transposition remains incomplete. The Commission is also carrying out a conformity assessment of the national transposition measures and will take appropriate action in case any issues are identified.

Implementation efforts are also ongoing regarding the **Pay Transparency Directive**. The transposition deadline into national law was 7 June 2026. The Commission has been supporting Member States through guidance and technical exchanges aimed at facilitating the incorporation of the Directive's transparency, reporting and enforcement requirements into national legal frameworks. Monitoring activities are focused on ensuring that the new obligations can be effectively enforced in practice and contribute to reducing the persistent gender pay gap.

The **Directive on Improving Working Conditions in Platform Work**, adopted in 2024, represents another important area of implementation activity. Given the novelty of many of its provisions, the Commission's current efforts are focused on supporting Member States in preparing transposition measures and promoting a common interpretation of the Directive. Particular attention is being paid to ensuring effective implementation of the new protections in rapidly evolving digital labour markets ahead of the December 2026 transposition deadline.

The effective implementation of the **occupational safety and health acquis** remains a longstanding enforcement priority. Accordingly, the Commission reviews every five years the practical implementation at national level of the directives on health and safety at work. The results of the review covering the period 2013 to 2017 were published in 2021 and concluded that the directives were overall delivering well on their objectives. During the period covered by the 2021 Action Plan, significant amendments of the occupational safety and health acquis were adopted to strengthen workers' protection, notably through revisions of the Asbestos at Work Directive, the Chemical Agents Directive, and the Carcinogens, Mutagens and Reprotoxic Substances Directive and the Recommendation on the European Schedule of Occupational Diseases. The Commission continues to support implementation at national level through established cooperation mechanisms, including labour inspectorate networks under the Senior Labour Inspectors Committee (SLIC) and the tripartite Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work (ACSH). In parallel, the Commission continues to monitor the transposition and application of the revised rules. The results of the latest review of the practical implementation of the health and safety at work directives at national level, covering 2018 to 2022, is due to be published in the second half of 2026.

Implementation work is also underway for other legislative initiatives included in the 2021 Action Plan, including the **European Disability Card and European Parking Card framework** and the **Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence**. As these measures are still within their transposition periods, current activities focus on supporting Member States in the preparation of national implementing measures and facilitating exchanges on practical implementation challenges. The Commission will closely monitor compliance once the relevant transposition deadlines have expired. Gender based violence at work can push them to quit the labour market and can exacerbate gender segregation at work, which is a factor of the gender pay gap. The results of a EU survey on gender-based violence against women and other forms of inter-personal violence (EU-GBV) disseminated in 2024 demonstrated that 30.7%[12] of women experience gender based violence during adulthood and 30.8%[13] sexual harassment at work.

From a territorial perspective, the Commission is also reinforcing the implementation of the Pillar in the recent EU level territorial strategies[14], in view of addressing specific territorial challenges and needs, including in relation to access to essential services. Forthcoming initiatives such as the Strategy for Outermost Regions and the Strategy on the Right to Stay will be also in line with this approach.

Overall, implementation and enforcement activities under the 2021 Action Plan demonstrate the importance given by the Commission to complementing legislative action with sustained support, monitoring and enforcement efforts, while also focusing on better quality legislation. As more of the recently adopted measures reach their transposition deadlines, ensuring their effective and uniform application across the Union will remain a key priority for the Commission. For this, access to timely, reliable and comparable data will be key. The European Labour Authority (ELA) has supported the implementation of the Pillar by promoting fair labour mobility, facilitating cooperation between national authorities and strengthening the enforcement of EU rules on labour mobility and social security coordination across the Union.

2.3 Implementation challenges of the 2021 Action Plan

While many aspects of the 2021 Action Plan have been tackled by the Member States, regions and local authorities, implementation gaps remain across the entire spectrum of the Pillar

[12] Eurostat (online data code gbv_any_type), source EU-GBV survey wave 2021, data collected by Eurostat, FRA, EIGE.
[13] Eurostat (online data code gbv_shw_occ), source EU-GBV survey wave 2021, data collected by Eurostat, FRA, EIGE.
[14] These include the EU Agenda for Cities, the Communication on the EU's eastern regions bordering Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, and the EU Strategy for Islands.

principles. Key social and employment challenges persist, for example in the areas of skills and labour shortages, supporting (re)entry of people furthest away from the labour market, wage inequality, working conditions, income support, housing and access to services (including healthcare).

Respondents believed the EU could add the most value in creating quality jobs, as chosen by 67% (91 out of 136) of respondents, followed by improving access to affordable housing, with 63% (86 out of 137) of respondents, and with promoting equality, diversity and combatting discrimination and improving access to and quality of healthcare and social services both chosen by 57% of respondents (79 out of 139 and 77 out of 136 respectively).

The public consultation revealed several perceived gaps in terms of principles that were considered insufficiently addressed. Principle 19: housing and assistance for the homeless was the top concern, cited by 20% (31 out of 153) of respondents. Principle 20: access to essential services followed at 19% (29 out of 153), and principle 3: equal opportunities at 16% (25 out of 153). Additionally, 14% (22 out of 153) identified principle 16: healthcare as insufficiently covered. These identified gaps are examined in the remainder of the chapter through three thematic sections, corresponding to the three chapters of the Pillar.

Equal opportunities and access to the labour market (Principles 1-4)

In 2025, nearly one fifth of the EU working-age population — more than 50 million people — remained outside the labour market, with sharp regional and territorial divergences, underlining the scale of untapped potential across the Union Labour market non-participation continues to be particularly pronounced among certain groups, including women, who account for around 32 million of those outside the labour market, older people representing close to 20 million, as well as migrants, of whom over 7 million are affected, and people with disabilities, among which only 56% participate in the labour market, compared to 84% of those without disabilities, underscoring the extent of the barriers they face.[15]. These categories often overlap, compounding barriers to participation. Young people also continue to face significant difficulties in entering the labour market, with almost 8 million people aged 15–29 neither in employment, education nor training. Although, as a whole, the share of young people neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET) has fallen slightly in the EU since 2020, significant variation is evident across Member-States. Notably, some Member States recorded the highest NEET rates in 2024, indicating that youth unemployment has risen slightly and still requires targeted interventions. Young Roma face particularly acute barriers, with a NEET rate of 47% in 2024 (FRA Roma Survey 2024), more than four times the EU average.

More broadly, employment gaps persist for other groups in situations of vulnerability: according to the 2025 Employment and Social Developments in Europe report, the employment gap for persons with disabilities widened to 24%[16], with particularly severe impacts on those with more serious disabilities. The FRA Roma Survey 2024 shows that only 54% of Roma were in paid work, a gap of 21 percentage points compared to the EU average, reflecting persistent barriers to labour market participation. According to the III LGBTIQ+ survey from

[15] 2025 Employment and social development report.
[16] Eurostat (online data code hlth_dlm200).

the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, LGBTIQ people also continue to face barriers in accessing the labour market, with 43% of trans women, 30% of trans men, and 23% of intersex people having felt discriminated while looking for work.

Long-term unemployment also remains a structural challenge. In 2025, the long-term unemployment rate stood at 1.9%, accounting for almost one third of total unemployment, and was slightly higher among women (2.0%) than among men (1.8%). Very long-term unemployment, defined as unemployment lasting more than two years, remained stable at 1.4% and represented 16.3% of total unemployment. While overall rates remain comparatively low, long-term unemployment continues to place a heavy burden on regions facing industrial decline, weak job creation or demographic pressures, where pathways back into employment are often more limited.

The **gender pay gap** still stands at 11% in the EU. The lack of pay transparency makes an effective implementation of the fundamental right to equal pay between women and men for equal work or work of equal value a major challenge in the EU.

Unequal career progression is also visible in the (average) **gender pension gap** (standing at 23.9% in the EU in 2025)[17] and higher risk of poverty or social exclusion for older women (standing at 21.2% in the EU for women aged 65 or over in 2025).[18] Principle 15 of the Pillar ensures pension adequacy and calls for the reduction of the gender pension gap. Both the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy and the Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030 highlight that inequalities in employment, pay, and unpaid care work accumulate over the life course and lead to significant gender gaps in pensions and income security in old age. Closing the gender pension gap requires addressing its root causes—such as career breaks, part-time work, and low retirement savings—and adapting pension system design accordingly.

Fair working conditions (Principles 5-10)

The impacts of technological developments, such as the proliferation of **platform work** and the increasing use of **artificial intelligence (AI)** in the workplace continue to raise questions, as explored in a 2026 Eurofound research paper. New data for the EU suggests that occupational exposure to AI is rising in the GenAI era across all categories of workers. The most immediate challenge concerns the impact of AI on labour demand and the organisation of work. AI is expected to accelerate employment growth in some occupations and sectors while transforming many existing jobs and changing the skills required across the economy, notably digital skills. While new opportunities will emerge, some workers may face job losses or occupational transitions as companies adopt new technologies.

There are other potential emerging risks stemming from new technologies. For instance, the widespread use of AI in the labour market also raises the risk of algorithmic bias, potentially reinforcing inequalities and discrimination affecting women and other underrepresented groups. These risks are covered at the EU level through legal instruments in particular the AI Act.

[17] Eurostat (online data code ilc_pnp13).
[18] Eurostat (online data code ilc_peps01n).

AI-powered profiling and job-matching tools can improve, if used in a manner that is safe, respects fundamental rights and applicable legislation, labour market activation and help public employment services provide more targeted support. If not properly designed and compliant with applicable rules, such systems may reinforce existing biases and discrimination, potentially affecting access to employment and career progression. AI systems used to detect fraud and simplify application processes and access to social benefits will frequently be considered as high-risk AI systems under Annex III, points 4 and 5 of the AI Act. Providers of high-risk AI systems will be subject to stringent obligations designed to ensure that their AI systems do not, among others, pose a risk to fundamental rights, are accurate and unbiased, and can be adequately overseen. Deployers of high-risk AI systems are also subject to relevant obligations that concern, for instance, human oversight, monitoring the operation and keeping the logs of AI systems.

It is important to note that, in addition to the high-risk rules, the AI Act also imposes, inter alia, targeted prohibitions, including in what regards to AI systems inferring emotions in the workplace (Article 5(1)(f)) and biometric categorisation AI systems that categorise individually natural persons based on certain characteristics such as trade union membership (Article 5(1)(g)).

The situation of **low-wage earners** has improved relative to other workers over the past years**.** This is reflected in the decline in both in-work poverty (to 8.3% in 2025 from a peak of 9.8% in 2016 and 8.9% in 2021) and the share of low-wage earners (to 14.7% in 2022 from 15.2% in 2018). This improvement is largely due to support measures during the pandemic and energy crisis as well as significant minimum wage increases in many Member States. **Minimum wage** increases also benefited persons earning wages slightly above the minimum. While the gap between low-wage earners and middle-wage earners has decreased, wage gap between middle wage earners and top earners has increased. Inadequate wages, including minimum wages, were cited as an ongoing issue to improve working conditions by citizens, civil society organisations and trade unions during the consultation.

Atypical (temporary) work contracts affect one in nine workers. Although this figure has been decreasing since 2022, more robust measures are needed to ensure fair wage distribution and to reduce precarity in employment arrangements. There is a need for closer monitoring of risks associated with **differing working arrangements** in several Member States. Additionally, Member States must ensure that labour inspectorates are adequately resourced and that effective sanctions are in place to enforce compliance with employment regulations.

The **involvement of social partners** in policymaking, collective bargaining and the capacities of social partners need to be further strengthened, particularly in countries where collective bargaining coverage is low. Enhancing social dialogue is essential to ensure that workplace policies can adapt to evolving economic, technological and social realities and help keep European companies competitive.

More **balanced working arrangements** are required, along with extensions to paid parental leave and the provision of affordable childcare to better support work-life balance. Risks related to evolving working arrangements must be monitored, particularly in the countries where disparities in work-life balance persist.

Improving working conditions in sectors facing labour shortages requires enhanced cross-border cooperation among labour inspectorates to combat undeclared and illegal work, as well as to address precarious or insecure employment arrangements. It also requires greater attention to job quality and sector attractiveness. This is particularly relevant in farming, where demanding working conditions, low incomes, limited work-life balance and difficulties for young farmers to access land, finance and knowledge, continue to affect the attractiveness of the sector. This is reflected in the fact that only 12% of EU farmers are under 40 years old and just 2.5% are young women.

Social protection and inclusion (Principles 11-20)

Improving the coverage and **adequacy of national social protection systems** is crucial to addressing challenges posed by labour market transformations. Access to adequate social protection **across contract types and employment statuses** remains a challenge, especially for non-standard workers and self-employed working in critical sectors, including farming and care, for whom some gaps in formal coverage remain in two third of the Member States. Moreover, when access is only voluntary (opt-in schemes) one observes very uneven take-up across countries. Effective access and adequacy are also issues, and monetary poverty remain significantly more prevalent among temporary (13.4%) and part-time workers (13.8%), and the self-employed (20.9%), compared to permanent employees (6.3%). There is significant variation among Member States in both the coverage of **unemployment benefits** and the length of the qualifying period required to access them. While short-term coverage has remained stable at the EU level, disparities in national schemes must be addressed to ensure equitable support for the unemployed across the EU.

For the working-age population, employment remains the most effective and sustainable route out of poverty, but people in vulnerable situations face complex barriers to the labour market. **Integrated support** from employment, income and social services is necessary to make inclusive labour markets a reality, in line with the 2016 Council Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market.

Despite some progress, the employment rate for **persons with disabilities** remains 24.2 percentage points lower than for those without disabilities in 2025[19]. Out of 51 million persons with disabilities aged 16-64 in the EU, only about half was employed in 2023. Lack of inclusive and accessible education and training options, of working environments adapted to their needs, and of recruitment and employment measures are among the barriers to quality employment for persons with disabilities. Roma jobseekers also face significant discrimination, with 36% reporting having felt discriminated against when looking for work (FRA Roma Survey 2024). For those who cannot work, **minimum income schemes** act as a social safety net of last resort. Despite improvements in recent years, in almost all Member States minimum income support is generally not sufficient to lift people out of poverty. The adequacy of the net income of a minimum income recipient (unemployed single person household), when expressed as a percentage of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold (smoothed over three years), was 57.3% at

[19] Eurostat online database (hlth_dlm200).

EU level in the income year 2024, and strongly differed across Member States. It reached (almost) the poverty threshold only in the Netherlands. Moreover, due to the way eligibility requirements are framed, schemes do not necessarily cover all those who would benefit from them. In 2025, only 83,6% of those at risk of poverty among those living in (quasi-)jobless households received some kind of income support. Non-take-up rates remain high, varying from 20 to 50% across Member States and depending on estimations.

Healthcare expenditure varies widely across the EU, ranging from 10–11% of GDP on average, with significant urban-rural disparities in access to services. In 2025, 2.4% (up from 2% in 2021) of EU citizens reported unmet medical needs[20], highlighting the necessity for more equitable healthcare provision and resource allocation. Demographic and societal changes are increasing the need for LTC and exacerbating the current structural challenges of affordability, availability and quality of LTC, against the increased pressure on resources. The sector suffers from a low attractiveness due to difficult working conditions and low wages, as well as insufficient career pathways and training opportunities. As a result, there is a high variability in the availability of **long-term care** workers across Member States~~.~~ Improving the access, adequacy, and sustainability of national long-term care systems remains a priority, with challenges related to limited affordability, territorial disparities in access to services, under-development of homecare and community-based care, or weak quality assurance and lack of person-centred integrated approaches. Informal carers also require better recognition and support, including adequate social protection and work-life balance measures. **Energy poverty** continues to affect millions of people in the EU and the inability to keep the home adequately cool during summer is expected to increase due to the higher frequency and intensity of heatwaves.

Housing affordability has been identified as a key future challenge, particularly for young people. One in ten Europeans spends 40% or more of their disposable income on housing, while for households below 60% of medium income the share of households experiencing housing cost overburden is more than 30% (EU average). **Combating homelessness** requires integrated strategy frameworks and sustained initiatives at the EU level. Further investments in digitalisation are needed to simplify and improve **access to essential services** throughout the EU. Addressing territorial inequalities in service provision remains critical, especially Member States where disparities between urban and rural areas persist.

As reported in the 2026 implementation review, all Member States have demonstrated some progress in the implementation of **the European Child Guarantee**. The European Child Guarantee also requires qualitative reporting by the Member States. Across all 27 reports, the aspect that appears to be best covered is the provision and access to early childhood education and care. On the other hand, the aspect least covered across the progress reports in the 2024 round seems to be comprehensive data collection and systematic progress monitoring. The absence of clearly defined quantitative and qualitative targets in numerous action plans (and consequently also in progress reports) is notable, restricting the ability to gauge success and guide future actions.

[20] Eurostat (online data code hlth_silc_08).

In 2025, almost one in five (18.8%) people aged 65 or above were at risk of poverty or social exclusion[21]. **Pension systems** require improvement to tackle old-age poverty , ensure adequate income replacement and tackle persistent gender gaps, while striking a balance between adequacy and sustainability. Since pension adequacy is largely determined by national policies, coordinated efforts are needed to ensure that pension schemes remain adequate, socially fair and financially viable in the long term, as well as to avoid long delays by social security institutions in granting and paying old-age, invalidity and survivors' benefits in cross-border situations or with communicating periods of insurance necessary to calculate these benefits in another Member State.

As part of the public consultation, respondents were asked to identify what they perceived were the **main obstacles in advancing social rights and employment policies in the EU** in the past four years. Respondents most frequently identified lack of political support with 28% (39 out of 137 respondents) ranking it as the most relevant impediment, with considerable shares placing it in second and third place. Lack of funding also featured prominently, ranked as the most relevant obstacle by 22% (30 out of 137) of respondents, and third by 23% (32 out of 137). Challenges related to coordination between EU institutions and Member States clustered in the middle of the rankings; 18% of respondents identified this obstacle in third and fourth place equally (25 and 24 out of 137 respondents, respectively). Concerns about insufficient involvement or limited powers at regional, local, and community levels were similarly placed in the mid-range of the ranking. By contrast, issues such as limited involvement of social partners and civil society were less often identified as top obstacles, concentrating in the lower ranks. Notably, policy/legislative complexity in the social and employment fields, as well as external challenges (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, etc) were predominantly perceived as the least relevant obstacles: external challenges were ranked in eighth place by 12% (16 out of 137) of respondents and in ninth place by 28% (38 out of 137) of them; meanwhile, policy/legislative complexity was ranked in eight place by 28% (38 out of 137) of respondents and in last place by 31% (43 out of 137).

2.4 Stakeholders’ proposals for further action

Stakeholder contributions gathered through the public consultation, call for evidence, bilateral meetings and broader consultations point to a general expectation that the next phase of the Pillar should focus less on defining new broad objectives and more on **ensuring effective delivery, implementation and measurable progress**. Across the different inputs, a common message emerges: social policies need to be better equipped to respond to structural transformations, including demographic change, digitalisation, the green transition and evolving labour market patterns.

At the same time, stakeholders differ in the type of EU action they consider most appropriate. Trade unions, NGOs and several institutional actors call for stronger rights-based approaches, including binding measures and enforceable rights, while business organisations place greater

[21] Eurostat (online data code ilc_peps01n).

emphasis on better implementation of existing frameworks, proportionality, simplification and respect for national labour market models. Greater digitalisation and clearer, simpler EU legislation also emerge as key enablers to balance strong social and labour protection with reduced administrative burden.

A first category of recommendations concerns **equal opportunities and access to the labour market**. Stakeholders underline that persistent barriers continue to affect women, young people, persons with disabilities, people with a migrant background and other underrepresented groups. Proposals therefore focus on strengthening equality strategies, improving monitoring of Member States' actions and addressing discrimination in access to employment and at the workplace. In this context, a stronger focus is placed on a **skills-based approach to labour market integration**, including the recognition of skills acquired outside formal qualifications and better alignment with European classification frameworks such as the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), as a means to improve matching efficiency and support labour mobility and transitions. Qualification recognition more broadly is also identified as a key lever to facilitate integration into the labour market, supporting the full use of skills and qualifications, including those acquired outside the EU.

Several contributions also stress the importance of **increasing female labour participation**, notably through the adoption of a series of measures such as recognising care responsibilities and unpaid care work, and better work-life balance policies. Expanding flexible working arrangements, extending paid parental leave and ensuring access to affordable childcare are recurrent demands. At the same time, many stakeholders point to the need for stronger enforcement of equal pay and pay transparency rules. In line with the Commission's broader agenda on inclusive growth, these recommendations frame equal access to the labour market not only as a matter of fairness, but also as a condition for increasing labour supply, addressing labour shortages and supporting competitiveness. The role of the social economy, including work integration social enterprises, is also increasingly recognised as a strategic component of inclusive employment pathways.

A second major area relates to **education and training**. Stakeholders broadly agree that skills policies should become more strategic, better governed and more closely aligned with labour market needs, also taking into account their different regional and territorial needs and challenges. Many contributions call for stronger skills intelligence across sectors and regions, improved recognition of qualifications and skills acquired outside formal education, and better coordination between existing EU initiatives. Trade unions and civil society organisations emphasise the need for individual rights to training, including training during working time and free of cost for workers, while business organisations highlight flexible learning models, micro-credentials and stronger public-private partnerships. In addition, stakeholders point to the importance of strengthening the education and training dimension, including initiatives on digital well-being, increasing the participation of women in STEM, and enhanced cooperation with the educational technology sector, including using artificial intelligence. These proposals are often linked to the need to **modernise vocational education and training** (VET) systems, ensure inclusion, and integrate new technologies into learning pathways. A recurring message from stakeholders is the need to make lifelong learning, VET and adult learning more accessible, particularly in less developed and peripheral regions, while strengthening investment and quality assurance. Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of developing skills for the green and digital transitions, adapting to the impact of AI, and ensuring the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, notably NEETs.

A third category concerns **fair working conditions and job quality**. Contributions show strong support for further action on occupational safety and health (OSH), in particular regarding mental health and psychosocial risks at work. Proposals for EU-level rules in this area feature prominently (i.e. the suggestion to deliver a European action plan for mental health, in line with initiatives proposed by the Commission in this area), alongside calls for new rights such as the right to disconnect. Stakeholders also emphasise that OSH considerations should be integrated as a core quality criterion within VET and apprenticeship programmes, fostering a culture of prevention from the earliest stages of labour market entry. There is also a strong emphasis on the need to ensure robust implementation of existing legislation, including the Platform Work Directive and the AI Act. Artificial intelligence and algorithmic management are increasingly highlighted, with trade unions and several stakeholders calling for greater transparency, safeguards and workers' involvement in decision-making. Overall, fair working conditions are framed as a key pillar of sustainable growth, contributing to productivity, resilience and social cohesion. Moreover, **collective bargaining, social dialogue and worker participation** are consistently presented as essential mechanisms to secure fair pay and decent working conditions.

A fourth area concerns **employment resilience and labour market transitions**. Several stakeholders propose the development of stronger EU-level instruments to support Member States in the event of severe shocks, including a permanent SURE-type mechanism. Other proposals include the development of EU guidance on job retention schemes, and measures to improve the working conditions of workers in specific sectors, notably **long-term care**. More broadly, stakeholders underline the importance of supporting **reintegration into the labour market, particularly for the unemployed,** and of promoting the creation of quality jobs. These proposals reflect the need to strengthen the Union's capacity to manage transitions and respond to future crises in a coordinated and effective manner.

A fifth category concerns **social protection and inclusion**. Stakeholders give prominence to **poverty reduction**, access to essential services and the modernisation of social protection systems. A central message is that, in order to support the EU's poverty reduction targets, social protection systems need to be adapted to ensure **adequate coverage for non-standard, cross-border and precarious workers,** including people with disabilities, while safeguarding pension adequacy. Many contributions call for stronger EU frameworks on minimum income, unemployment protection, long-term care and access to healthcare, housing, childcare, education and social services. **Housing affordability and homelessness** emerge as particularly urgent concerns, with calls for strengthened EU action and improved monitoring. Stakeholders also emphasise the importance of integrated approaches that link employment, education, health and social services, with a view to reducing territorial inequalities and tailoring responses to local contexts. Strengthening participatory governance, including the involvement of civil society organisations, social partners and local authorities, is seen as essential to ensure both the legitimacy and effectiveness of policies.

Finally, a cross-cutting category concerns **governance, funding and implementation**. Stakeholders emphasise that future action should be supported by stronger monitoring, better data and more coordinated multi-level and multistakeholder governance frameworks. Several contributions call for EU funding to be more clearly linked to measurable social outcomes, particularly in relation to poverty reduction and inclusion. The development of stronger data infrastructures, is seen as key to supporting evidence-based policymaking. Overall, the feedback suggests that the next steps should combine ambition with implementation capacity, ensuring that social rights are effectively translated into tangible outcomes for citizens while supporting the Union's competitiveness, resilience and long-term sustainability.

Chapter 3: The EU and national targets

The 2021 Action Plan proposed three ambitious EU targets to be reached by 2030 in the fields of employment, training and poverty reduction:

- at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment by 2030
- at least 60% of all adults should be participating in training every year by 2030
- a reduction of at least 15 million in the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including at least 5 million children, compared to 2019

To reach these targets, EU employment and social affairs ministers presented their national targets on 16 June 2022.

3.1 Progress on the EU and national targets for 2030

Employment target

Employment growth has been consistent since the COVID-19 pandemic, and the EU is currently still on track to meet its headline employment target by 2030. Overall, the EU employment rate has risen 3 percentage points (pps) from 73.1% in 2021 to 76.1% in 2025[22]. There is now a gap of only 1.9 pps to the 78% target, with five years remaining. Based on Eurostat's latest demographic projections, an average annual employment growth rate of around 0.6% between 2025 and 2030 would be sufficient to meet the target. By comparison, employment grew by 1.1% per year on average during the pre-pandemic period (2013-2019)[23]. Having grown a moderate 0.4% p.p. in 2025, employment growth is nonetheless projected to slow in 2026 and 2027, according to the Commission Spring 2026 Forecast. The ongoing reconfiguration of geopolitical and trade relationships is expected to limit employment growth to 0.3% in 2026 and 0.4% in 2027. Despite this potential slowdown, the EU is currently progressing well towards its 2030 employment target thanks to robust growth in the first part of the decade.

At Member State-level progress towards **national employment targets** has been broad-based. National 2030 targets have been achieved or are close to be reached for the majority of Member

[22] Eurostat (lfsi_emp_a).
[23] Joint employment report 2026.

States. In seven countries – CY, CZ, EE, IE, NL, PL and SK – employment rates in 2025 were already higher than the respective 2030 targets. Among the 20 countries still facing gaps, six are less than 1 pp from their targets and a further four are less than 2 pps from their targets. The largest remaining gaps are in BE (7.2 pps), RO (5.7 pps) and IT (5.4 pps). They, along with the remaining seven Member States which are within 4 pps of their national targets, will require significant efforts to achieve their 2030 targets in the remaining part of the decade (see Table 1 for details).

Significant progress is still required to achieve the **sub-targets** of halving the gender employment gap by 2030. It has only narrowed slightly since 2021, from 10.0 percentage to 9.6 percentage points. The complementary goal on NEETs (young people neither in employment nor education), by contrast, is closer. The NEET rate for people aged 15 to 29 fell from 12.5% in 2019 to 11.0% in 2025[24], 2 percentage points from the target of 9%. Enrolment in early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children aged 3 up to the start of primary school has continued to rise across the EU, though significant disparities persist among Member States. In 2024, participation reached 95%, just 1 percentage points short of the EU's 2030 target of 96%.[25]

Training target

Adult learning participation has increased only marginally, leaving substantial efforts needed to meet the EU headline target by 2030. According to the Adult Education Survey (AES), the EU participation rate (excluding guided on-the-job training) rose from 37.4% in 2016 to 39.5% in 2022. Data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) points to a small overall increase in adult learning participation between 2022 and 2024. However, this trend of very moderate growth is insufficient to achieve the EU headline target of 60% of adults participating in learning every year by 2030. Accelerated progress is crucial to equip the workforce for changing skills needs, mitigate labour and skills shortages and strengthen competitiveness and inclusiveness.

Most Member States remain behind on their **national adult learning targets**, despite notable progress in a few cases. By 2022, SE, HU and RO had surpassed their targets, with SK approaching its target. RO recorded the strongest increase from a relatively low base, although a break in series complicates comparisons. Among the 24 countries still below their targets, only a minority of countries recorded meaningful gains by 2022. The next significant data release to measure progress, the 2028 AES, is to be published in 2029. LFS data for 2026 will provide an intermediate update on potential progress when it is published in 2027.

Progress on the **sub-target** of at least 80% of adults (16-74) having basic digital skills by 2030 is currently not fast enough. In 2025, 60.40% of adults had at least basic digital skills, a steady increase from 2021 (53.9%). In 2023, only 55.6% of adults had at least basic digital skills, a small increase from 2021 (53.9%). The proportion of early school leavers in the EU—defined as young people aged 18–24 who leave education and training prematurely—stood at 9.1% in

[24] Eurostat (edat_lfse_36).
[25] Eurostat (educ_uoe_enra21).

2025, narrowly missing the 2030 target of 9.0%. Over the past decade, this figure has steadily declined from 11.0% in 2015, reflecting significant progress toward the EU's goal of reducing early school leaving rates to below 9.0% by the end of the decade.

Poverty reduction target

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and increases in energy prices in the first half of the decade, some progress has been made towards the 2030 **poverty target**. In total, compared to the baseline in 2019, 3.5 million fewer people in the EU are now at risk of poverty or social exclusion[26]. However, progress remains insufficient to meet the EU headline target of an at least 15 million reduction by 2030 and a gap of 11.5 million remains. This implies that an average annual reduction of more than 2 million would be required to reach the target by 2030. Achieving the target will thus demand a significant acceleration of efforts during the remainder of the decade.

Progress towards the **national poverty reduction targets** remains uneven across Member Stateswith persistent regional disparities and pockets of poverty, particularly in rural, peripheral areas and outermost regions . By 2025, only 12 Member States had made progress towards their 2030 targets since 2019. Six of these (RO, HU, LV, IT, PL and BG) are broadly on track to meet their national targets. The largest relative gaps remain in AT, SE, DE, LU, SK, SL, FI and FR. The only Member State that already met its 2030 poverty reduction target by 2025 is BE.

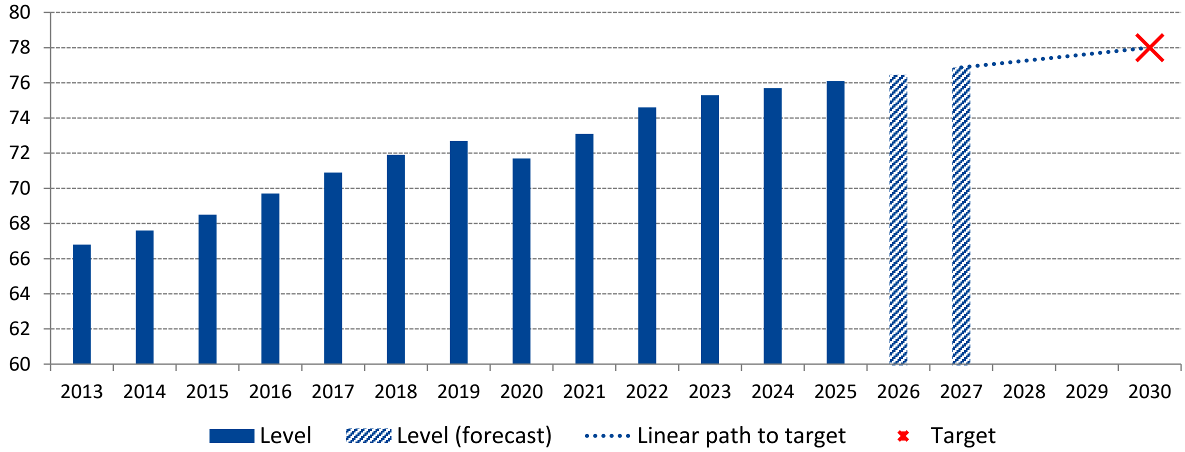
On child poverty, the **sub-target** is one of at least 5 million reduction in children (0-17) being at risk of poverty or social exclusion. However, 19.3 million children were experiencing poverty or social exclusion risks in 2025, 0.2 million above the aggregated child poverty reduction target [27]. More efforts are needed, in particular, to reduce poverty risks faced by children by the end of 2030. Among the 21 countries that set complementary targets on child poverty reduction, 11 have made progress since 2019, while CY has already reached its target. On the other hand, CZ, DE, ET, ES, FR, LU, AT, SL, SK and FI have yet to make any progress since 2019.

For all three 2030 headline targets, progress at subnational level remains uneven, with persistent regional disparities and pockets of poverty, particularly in rural, peripheral areas and outermost regions.

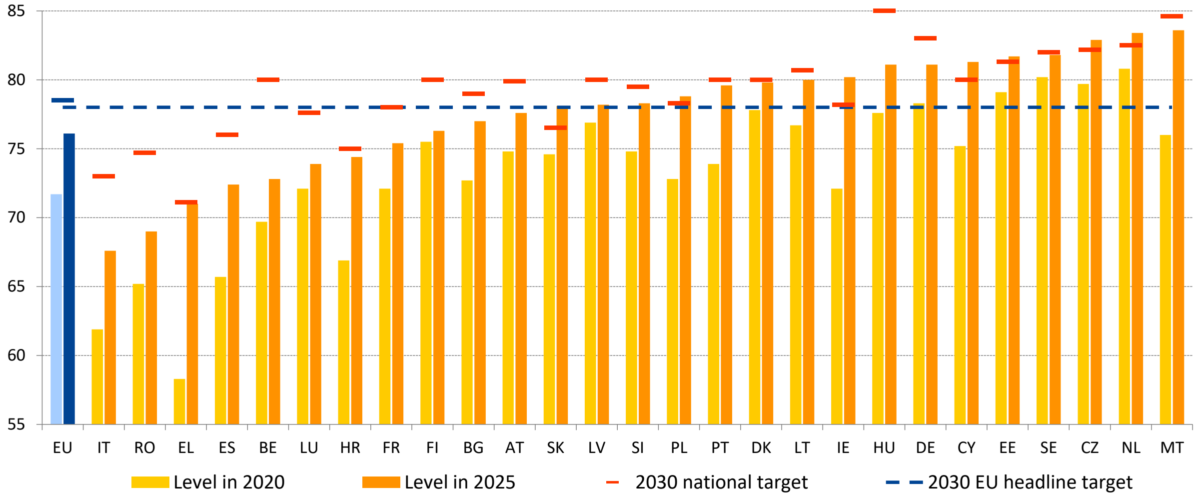
Progress must accelerate to ensure the EU meets the three social targets by 2030. The targets set out in the 2021 Action Plan will continue to provide the strategic framework for our work and will remain fully relevant.

[26] Eurostat (online data code ilc_pecs01).
[27] Eurostat (online data code ilc_pecs01)

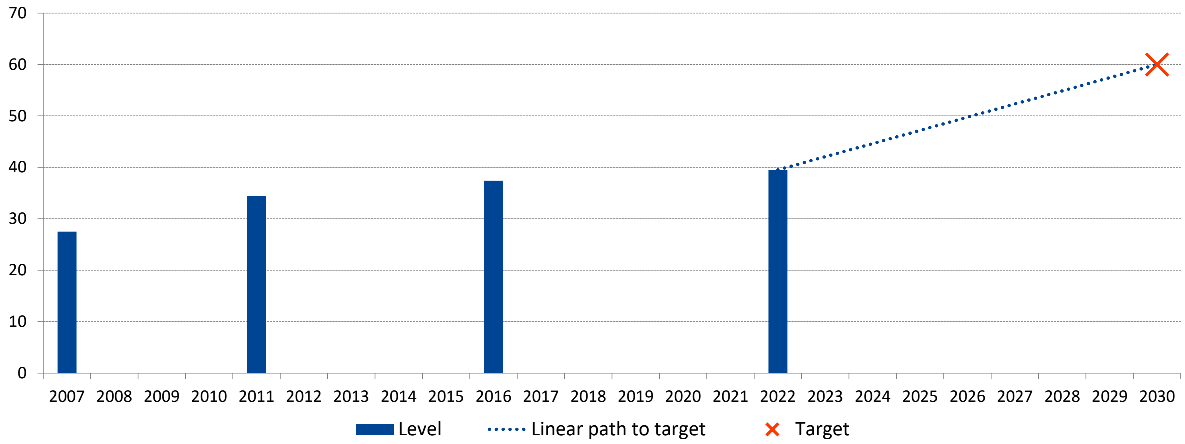
Employment rate in the EU-27 and the related 2030 EU headline target (20-64, % of population)



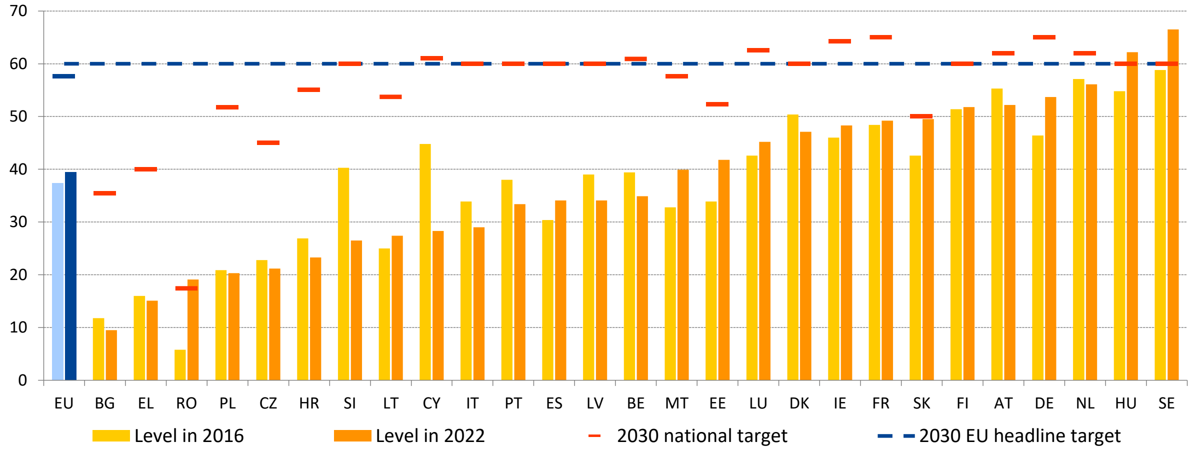
Employment rate (2020 and 2025, 20-64, % of population); national and EU 2030 targets



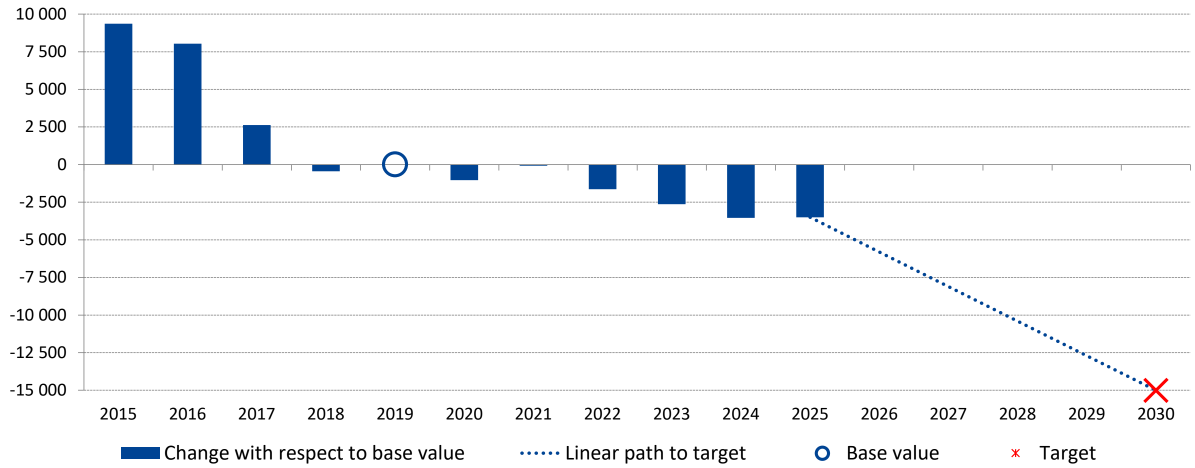
Adult participation rate in learning (excluding guided-on-the-job training) during the past 12 months in the EU-27 and the 2030 EU headline target (25-64, %)



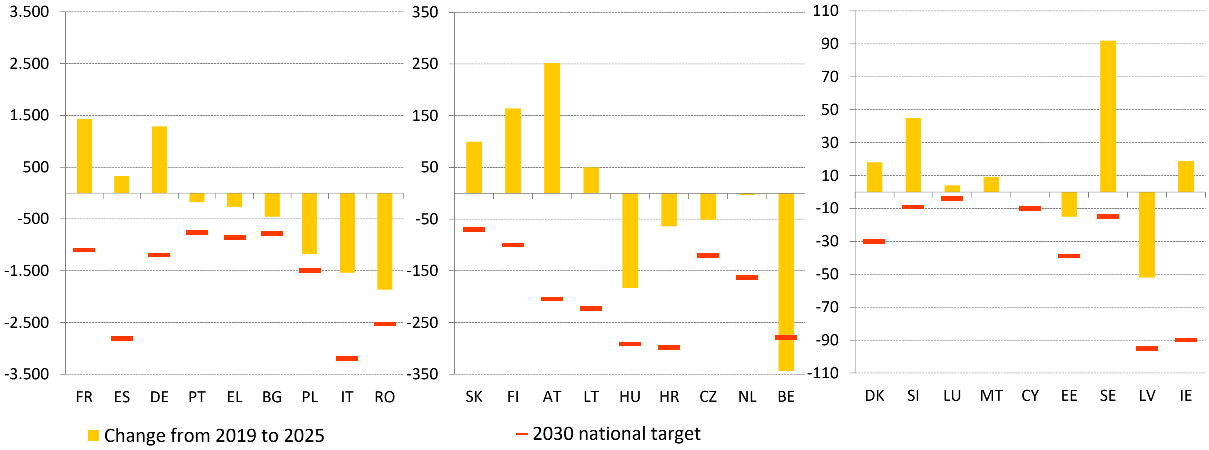
Adult participation rate in learning during the past 12 months in the EU-27 and national 2030 targets for Member States (25-64, %)



Change in EU-27 AROPE level with regard to the 2019 base year and related 2030 EU headline target (total population, thousand persons)



Changes in AROPE levels over 2019-24 and national 2030 targets (total population, thousand persons)



3.2 Potential scope for complementary goals and further monitoring

While progress on the employment target has been noteworthy, concerns persist on the uneven developments on the overall quality of jobs (in particular when it comes to essential workers), as evidenced in the Country Reports and the second-stage analysis of the Social Convergence Framework released as part of the 2026 European Semester cycle.[28] The updated EMCO monitoring framework on job quality agreed on a number of well-established Eurostat indicators. Some of them could be used as additional complementary goals such as:

- the in-work-at-risk-of-poverty rate (IWPR)
- the share of employees in involuntary temporary contracts
- the share of involuntary part-time work

[28] Forthcoming European Employment and Social Outlook 2026 report.

- fatal accidents at work

In-work at-risk-of poverty rate (IWPR)

Fair wages and working conditions contribute to attracting people to the labour market and provide incentives for improving skills and qualifications, thus supporting progress on the two 2030 headline targets on the employment rate and adult participation in learning. Earning adequate income from labour also impacts directly on the 2030 headline target on the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate through the share of people experiencing poverty risks while in employment.

The risk of in-work poverty is considerably higher among certain population groups. These include women, the young, people born outside the EU, as well as workers on temporary contracts, part-time work and households with low work intensity.

In-work at-risk-of poverty rate increased by 0.1 pp to 8.3% in 2025. Except for 2021, the share of people at risk of poverty has been trending downwards since 2016. While there has been a general convergence of the indicator among member states, significant differences still exist, with highest rates of in-work poverty for BG, ES, RO, EE, IT and EL, and lowest in FI, CZ and BE.

Involuntary temporary employment (ITES)

The reduction of involuntary temporary employment has a direct impact on the overall headline employment rate target, as well as on income security, thus also on the headline poverty reduction target. It can also provide stronger motivation to engage in training and skills development, thus additionally impacting on the headline skills target.

Involuntary temporary employment is more widespread for certain groups. This is the case for instance among women, generating gender inequalities in the labour market. The extensive use of temporary contracts in some EU countries has also led to unequal conditions for newcomers to the labour market compared to the incumbents.

The share of involuntary temporary work has been declining since 2021 and stabilised at 6.4% in 2025. This downward path has been accompanied by convergence among Member States, with a notable decline in the share of involuntary temporary jobs in ES, and still highest incidence of involuntary temporary employment in CY, ES, IT and PT, while the countries with the lowest rate are LT, RO and BG.

Involuntary part-time employment (IPT)

The involuntary part-time employment, similarly to the involuntary temporary employment, impacts poverty risks for employees (thus on the poverty reduction headline target) and can also provide disincentives to up- and re-skilling (thus impacting on the headline skills target). Involuntary part-time work is expected to increase during economic crises, as firms may decide to keep the existing personnel while reducing the total hours of work.

Involuntary part-time employment is considerably higher among certain groups. These include women and the young. The concentration of higher incidence of involuntary part-time employment in these groups calls for targeted actions, such as improved access to childcare from early stage, facilitated integration in the labour market and career advice.

The share of involuntary part-time employees in total employees has been trending downwards since 2016 and the differences among member states have been declining.[29] Notably, in IT and ES, the countries with the highest share of involuntary part-time employment, the reductions were sizable. Nevertheless, the indicator still remained above the EU average in both Member States, together with BE, FI, SE and FR, while for the rest the share of involuntary part-time work did not exceed 2.5% in 2025.

Poverty and social exclusion gender gap

As acknowledged in the Anti-Poverty Strategy, poverty affects some people more than others, with women being particularly affected. Enhanced monitoring, disaggregated by age, together with the policy action carried out under the Anti-Poverty Strategy, will contribute to achieving the target. Roma women face a particularly pronounced employment gap of 31 percentage points (38% vs 69% for Roma men in 2024), more than three times the EU-wide gender gap of 9.6 pps (FRA Roma Survey 2024). The EU Roma Strategic Framework calls for halving this gap by 2030.

Gender based violence at work

Gender based violence at work can push them to quit the labour market and can exacerbate gender segregation at work, which is a factor of the gender pay gap. In 2024, a survey conducted by EUFRA and EIGE demonstrated that 30.7% of women experience gender based violence at work and 30.8% sexual harassment at work.

Fatal accidents at work

The indicator refers to the number of fatal accidents per 100,000 persons in employment that occur during the course of work and lead to the death of the victim within one year of the accident. The indicator has been on a downward trend since 2016, with the exception of 2020 and 2021.8 Between 2015 and 2023, fatal accidents fell from 2.06 to 1.63 per 100,000 persons in employment. Naturally, the target number should be zero as soon as possible[30]. The highest incidence of fatal accidents at work in 2023, exceeding 3 per 100,000 was recorded in FR, BG, CY and LV.

Chapter 4: Monitoring and EU Funding

4.1 The European Semester

The European Semester is the EU's economic and employment policy coordination framework and one of the key instruments to monitor the implementation of the Pillar and to issue related

[29] Break in the series for EU27 and all MSs in 2021.

[30] To be noticed that the data for France follows a broader definition of the indicator (including all deaths at work, irrespective of the cause), rendering it not comparable with the EU average.

recommendations for policy action to Member States. The Pillar has been fully integrated in the European Semester since the 2018 cycle, acting as a compass for policy analysis and guidance in the labour market, skills and social domains through a range of yearly deliverables.

The 2026 European Semester cycle marked the second year of implementation of the new EU economic governance framework, in which the Pillar is also firmly embedded. The new framework enabled deeper integration of economic, employment, skills and social policies within the Semester process. This stronger policy integration reflects the role of social reforms and investment as drivers of inclusive economic growth, productivity, resilience and competitiveness. As part of the European Semester Autumn Package, key labour market, skills and social policy priorities for the EU are identified by the Commission, at the start of each Semester cycle, in line with the Pillar principles as well as the priority areas and horizontal enablers identified in the Competitiveness Compass. Moreover, common priorities for national employment policies are set on a yearly basis in the Employment Guidelines, which are monitored in the yearly Joint Employment Report (JER). Since its 2022 edition, thematic Pillar boxes have been added to the report that cover key challenges in the areas of equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion, against the background of the socio-economic context and most recent policy initiatives. Moreover, the Social Scoreboard is fully integrated into the JER analysis.

As part of the 2026 Semester Autumn Package, the first-ever Human Capital Recommendation was proposed by the Commission, as announced in the Union of Skills. The recommendation calls on all 27 Member States to address skills shortages in strategic EU sectors by strengthening basic skills, vocational education and training, higher education and STEM fields. The initiative supports the objectives of the Pillar by promoting equal access to quality education, lifelong learning and skills development to improve employability and support labour market transitions. It also highlights the importance of digital, financial and AI literacy, better use of skills intelligence, reduced barriers to professions and faster recognition of qualifications. The recommendation was adopted by the EPSCO Council in March 2026 and was meant to complement and inform the Country-Specific Recommendations of the Semester Spring Package.

As part of the Semester Spring Package, the yearly Country Reports, which outline the nature and extent of policy challenges faced in Member States , include an assessment of progress made in relation to the Pillar implementation. They provide the analytical basis for the Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) to Member States, with concrete guidance on how to tackle key employment, skills and social challenges, among others.

The Country Reports and CSRs are informed by the findings of the Social Convergence Framework.[31] Introduced in 2024, the framework aims to identify risks and challenges to upward social convergence and is now fully integrated into the Semester process, further supporting the implementation of the Pillar. It entails a two-stage country analysis. In the first

[31] The design and features of the Social Convergence Framework were discussed within a dedicated EMCO-SPC Working Group over 2022-2023, as described in the Key Messages on the introduction of a Social Convergence Framework in the European Semester and the related underlying report produced by the Working Group. Both documents were presented to the EPSCO Ministers in June 2023.

stage, all 27 Member States are reviewed to identify potential risks to upward social convergence. This stage relies on Social Scoreboard indicators and feeds into the annual JER. In the second stage, countries flagged in the first stage undergo a more detailed analysis. This includes a wider range of quantitative and qualitative evidence, as well as an assessment of existing and planned policy responses by Member States to address the identified challenges. The framework also contributed to the thorough coverage of employment, skills and social challenges in the Country Reports, as well as in the related CSRs, where relevant.

Building on the EMCO Opinion adopted in 2025 and the related update of the EMCO monitoring framework,[32] job quality was systematically integrated into the 2026 Semester cycle, with dedicated analysis in the 2026 JER and the Country Reports. This supported, where relevant, the formulation of CSRs providing explicit policy guidance across the different dimensions of job quality. Evidence and comparative research conducted by Eurofound on these matters also informed EU and national policymaking.

4.2 EU funding

Cohesion Policy funds

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Just Transition Fund (JTF) all play a decisive role in delivering on the principles enshrined in the Pillar and in reaching the EU headline targets. With a total EU budget of more than EUR 367 billion and a planned total financing including Member States' contributions of EUR 512.5 billion[33], the Cohesion Policy funds support investments and reforms in Member States and contribute to a Europe that is fair, inclusive and full of opportunities for the current and future generations. Just over 161 billion euros of cohesion policy funds are dedicated to policy objective 4: "a more social and inclusive Europe implementing the Pillar."[34]With an EU budget of 94 billion (EUR 139 billion when national cofinancing is included), ESF+ is the main financial instrument used by the EU to support the implementation of the Pillar. By the end of 2025, the ESF+ had reached 16 million participants. In addition, measures addressing material deprivation of the most deprived have reached 35 million end-recipients.

The ERDF, Cohesion Fund and JTF also contribute to implementing the Pillar through social infrastructure investment. Under Policy Objective 4 (PO4) "a more social Europe", the ERDF, including its Interreg strand, allocates around EUR 22.1 billion (EUR 29.6 billion including

[32] An updated monitoring framework will be included in the 2026 Employment Performance Monitor to be transmitted to the Council ahead of the EPSCO meeting in October.

[33] These figures include the Cohesion Fund. In the further calculations this Fund is not considered since it is not included under Policy Objective 4.

[34] While Policy Objective 4 has been the main driver of support for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, Member States and regions have also allocated resources from ERDF, CF and JTF under other policy objectives that further contribute to these efforts. These include investments in energy efficient, affordable and sustainable housing (including social housing), job creation and entrepreneurship, fair green transition measures including to address energy poverty, digitalisation of public services to enhance their outreach, skills development, sustainable transport and connectivity, and social investments as part of wider integrated territorial development strategies.

Member States' contributions) to support infrastructure, equipment and cooperation across borders.

The JTF (EUR 19.6 billion, EUR 25.9 billion including Member States' contributions) further supports Pillar objectives in regions most affected by the climate transition, mainly through reskilling, upskilling, job search assistance and education for workers and communities facing structural change, thus also contributing to the Pillar.

Under the ERDF, the Cohesion Fund, ESF+, and the JTF, about EUR 15.6 billion (including EU and national co-financing) has been allocated to housing construction and renovation. These investments span across Policy Objectives 2, 4, and 5, alongside the JTF Specific Objective, funding energy efficiency measures, affordable and social housing for vulnerable groups. Notably, the figure incorporates an additional EUR 3.3 billion mobilised for affordable and social housing following the mid-term review of Cohesion Policy programmes. Member States and regions are encouraged to continue reprogramming funds towards housing - alongside with other EU strategic priorities - until the end of programming period, in line with their needs.

Figure 3 below shows the distribution of funding across the main thematic areas. In general, ESF+ funds are the largest contributors. An exception to this is the healthcare domain. Here physical infrastructures have a higher relative weight and, hence, the presence of ERDF is more significant than in other areas. The presence of JTF is limited to those specific areas (or regions) selected in each Member State.

Figure 3. Overview of the total amounts (EU + national contributions) by fund, for each thematic area – 2021-27[35]

ESF+, ERDF and JTF investments under the different intervention fields are key tools to ensure the delivery of different principles and headline targets of the Pillar. An illustration of this is the ESF+ and ERDF investment in early childhood education and care (ECEC). The provision of ECEC is associated with positive social and economic outcomes, both in the short and long term, not only for the child concerned but also in terms of gender equality and female labour participation. This way it contributes to the delivery of the Pillar in a multifaceted way, mainly through the Principles of 'Education, Training and Life-long Learning'; 'Active support for Employment' or Childcare' and, thus, affecting the whole household and also breaking the cycle of potential intergenerational disadvantage. Concrete examples and stories of how the ESF supports the Pillar implementation can be found on the DG EMPL website and in the Kohesio platform.

The ESF+ mid-term evaluation shows that all the Pillar principles (except principle (6) Wages) are addressed by the ESF+ specific objectives. An approximate mapping indicates that the largest ESF+ shared management allocations correspond to the following Pillar principles: (3) Equal opportunities (EUR 71 bn), (4) Active support to employment (EUR 50 bn), (1)

[35] The global figures allocated by category come from the individuation of all intervention fields (IFs) listed under Policy Objective 4 in the Annex to the CPR. There is not an exact match between the four figures and the ESF+ total planned amount due to the facts that several IFs can simultaneously contribute to two or more of the areas.

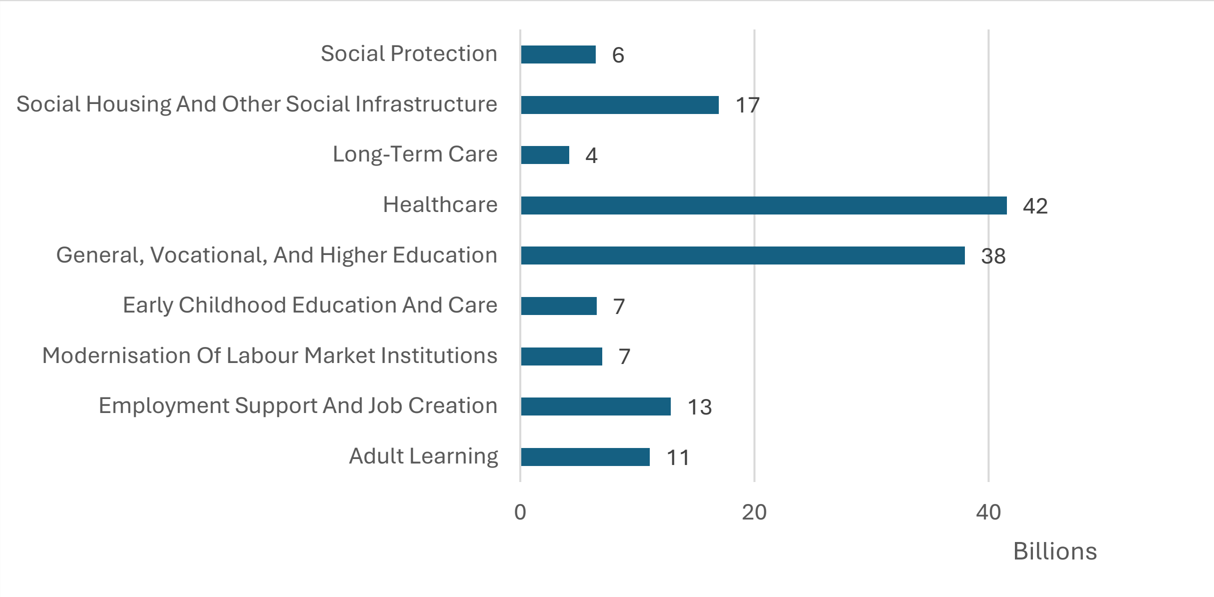
Education, training and lifelong learning (EUR 44 bn) and (11) Childcare and support to children (EUR 31 bn). The results of the survey of the ESF+ managing authorities show that nearly 90% (81 out of 91) considered that ESF+ supported their country to deliver on the Pillar principles. The good alignment between the Pillar and the ESF+ was also confirmed in focus groups and interviews with different stakeholders (ESF+ coordinating bodies, beneficiaries, social partners, etc.) at national and EU level. This alignment was also confirmed for the previous programming period of ESF and the YEI 2014-2020. The evaluation found coherence between the operations programmed and the Pillar principles and 2021 Action Plan. 87% of respondents to a Managing Authorities survey (114 respondents) performed for the ESF/YEI ex-post evaluation expressed that the ESF and Y\EI had contributed to a "large" or "moderate" extent to the Pillar principle on equal opportunities and access to the labour market, 46% expressed so for Pillar principle (2): fair working conditions, and 59% for Pillar principle (3): social protection and inclusion. The mid-term evaluation of the ERDF, CF and JTF 2021-2027 finds that ERDF PO4 investments show the strongest alignment with European Semester investment needs of any ERDF policy objective, covering around 94% of the needs identified in the 2019 country reports. ERDF investments are creating favourable conditions for socio-economic and territorial development, equality and addressing basic human needs through its investments in mainstream non-segregated healthcare, education and training, social inclusion and housing. In some Member States and regions, ERDF under PO4 is also contributing to addressing demographic challenges, including improvements in accessibility and quality of services and measures to attract and retain population in depopulated areas. The evaluation also found that the six thematic enabling conditions linked to PO4 are also contributing to improving the social investments environments even beyond ERDF, CF and JTF support through improvements in long-term national and regional strategic frameworks and reforms in the areas relevant to the implementation of the Pillar.

Recovery and Resilience Facility

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Semester was adjusted to factor in the establishment of the RRF, which was created to support the economic recovery and build a greener, more digital and more resilient future. In preparing their national recovery and resilience plans, Member States were required to effectively address all or a significant subset of challenges identified in the relevant country-specific recommendations, identified in the European Semester, notably in the 2019-20 CSRs. This went along with a parsimonious approach to new recommendations that should reflect remaining and newly emerging challenges only, compared to the content of the recovery and resilience plan. The green and digital transitions, growth potential and job creation, economic and social resilience and social and territorial cohesion received particular attention, in line with the remit of the Facility. The national plans include reforms and investments that strengthen the effectiveness of active labour market policies, improve access to inclusive quality education and training, and enhance social protection and care systems. The RRF will also contribute to boosting green skills and reducing energy poverty.

The RRF has been instrumental in improving social cohesion and mitigating the social impact of the crisis. Member States have included many reforms and investments with social objectives in their recovery and resilience plans. On average, Member States have dedicated **around 25% of their RRF funds (around EUR 144 billion) to supporting social objectives**. A breakdown of the policy areas is presented below highlighting significant support for healthcare and education but also for skills.

Figure 4. Allocated RRF funds per social policy categories[36]



Technical Support Instrument

Beyond EU funding instruments, technical support has also contributed to Member States' capacity to design and implement reforms linked to the European Pillar of Social Rights. During the 2021–2026 period, the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) has provided demand-driven expertise to national authorities across the reform cycle, including through strategic and legal advice, analytical work, capacity-building, training, peer learning and expert support. This support has complemented EU funding instruments by helping Member States prepare, operationalise and implement reforms in areas relevant to the Pillar, including labour-market policies, skills governance and adult learning, social protection, healthcare and long-term care.

TSI support has been particularly relevant where implementation of Pillar-related reforms required strengthened administrative capacity, improved coordination across institutions, better use of evidence, or the development of new tools and methodologies. It has also supported Member States in addressing emerging reform needs linked to the digital and green transitions, including the upskilling and reskilling of workers and the responsible use of digital tools in

[36] Category names are shortened so that they can fit the table. For a full description of categories see Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard (europa.eu).

employment and social-policy areas. In the remaining phase of the current programming period, targeted technical support can continue to help Member States advance selected reforms relevant to the Pillar and draw lessons for future implementation.

Social Climate Fund

The Social Climate Fund (SCF) was set up to accompany the set up of the emissions trading system for buildings, road transport and other small industry (ETS2) with emphasis on building and transport sectors. Its objective is to support measures and investments dedicated specifically to vulnerable households, vulnerable transport users and vulnerable microenterprises to help them cope with the potential negative social impacts of higher fossil fuels prices.

The Social Climate Fund will support measures and investments to promote greener homes and sustainable transport. This includes funding for building renovations (such as improved insulation and energy efficiency), cleaner heating, cooling, and cooking systems, and the installation of renewable energy sources like solar panels and encouraging energy communities. It will enhance access to sustainable transport, including public transport and shared mobility solutions, and support to acquiring electric vehicles.

The Social Climate Fund is financed with a maximum of EUR 65 billion generated from the sale of ETS allowances, and an additional 25% national contributions. The Member States and the European Commission are currently negotiating the social climate plans which will underpin the measures and investments to be financed by the SCF.

InvestEU

The InvestEU Programme, notably its Social Investment and Skills Window, makes an important contribution in supporting the Pillar. With a budgetary guarantee of EUR 2.8 billion, which is currently being increased by further allocations under the 'Omnibus' package to simplify EU investment programmes, it finances projects that support micro and social enterprises, promote skills and education, strengthen social infrastructure, and foster social innovation and impact investment. This support directly contributes to the achievement of the headline targets under the 2021 Action Plan. To date, it benefitted some 117 000 recipients of microfinance and some 4,000 social enterprises, thereby not only moving people out of poverty but also supporting the creation or maintenance of jobs. In addition, this support allowed some 42 500 individuals to acquire new skills or have their skills validated and certified.

SURE

Financial assistance to Member States in the framework of the **SURE instrument secured job retention during the crises** (also for self-employed and other workers normally not covered under such schemes), contributed to avoiding a severe deterioration of the labour market and social situation and set the basis for a robust and quick recovery. In 2020, SURE **supported about 31.5 million employees and self-employed people and over 2.5 million**

businesses. An evaluation of SURE has been carried out, providing an ex-post assessment of how it delivered on its objectives to protect employment and reduce the loss of income.

4.3 Data and monitoring

Administrative data held by public authorities are a unique source of evidence for policy making and monitoring. Especially at times marked by uncertainty and substantial labour market transformations linked to AI, intensified global competition and decarbonisation, accurate and timely data is indispensable to understand what is actually happening in our labour markets and societies. The granularity and accuracy of administrative data on labour market, social security or taxation matters provide important intelligence needed to design and put in place effective policy and crisis response. Precisely, these data can be used for policy monitoring and design as well as ex-ante assessment and ex-post evaluation of Pillar actions.

The use of administrative data can be more efficient and less costly than existing alternatives. These data are in fact routinely collected by Member States for administrative purposes. Unlike surveys, they do not require complex and costly procedures for data generation. Administrative data could be also used to populate official statistics usually collected through surveys, hence reducing costs and administrative burden.[37] Compared to survey data, these data are also more timely and can be collected at higher frequences. They are more accurate as they cover the entire population and can cover longer periods and provide longitudinal information.

However, re-use of these data for policy evidence remains difficult in many Member States. This is due to a range of obstacles, including legal constraints, privacy concerns, limited technical infrastructure, institutional rigidities, insufficient administrative capacity and other barriers[38]. Improving access to administrative data is therefore important for supporting evidence-based policies on employment and social developments and for helping to unlock the full potential of the European Pillar of Social Rights. In addition, in times of limited fiscal capacity more granular insights and evidence on the functioning of policies contributes to more efficient use of public funds.

The June 2024 Council Conclusions reiterate the importance of access to administrative data to strengthen evidence-based policymaking. In particular, they invite the Commission to reflect on how to support Member States to enhance access to administrative data for policy evaluation and impact assessment purposes, while ensuring the protection of personal data. In response to this, the Commission has established in November 2025 an Informal Working Group on “Enhancing access to administrative data” with representatives from Member States.

[37] This is currently done already in DK, FI, SE, NL for the EU Labour Force Survey and for DE, DK, FI, FR, LU, SE, NL, SI, AT, BE, EE, LT, LV, PL, CZ, SK, HU for some components of the EU Survey of Living Conditions.

[38] In this regard, a forthcoming book by JRC researchers with support by 70 national experts will contribute to a better understanding of current administrative data access arrangements in the EU and showcase the benefits of using administrative data in several key policy areas (Berton, F. and Paruolo, P., *Data-Driven Learning in the EU: from administrative data to public value*, Springer eds., Available at: https://link.springer.com/book/9783031990311).

Mostly through the exchange of best practices, the group will aim to produce guidance on how to enhance access to administrative data for policy evidence.

The Commission is already promoting the use of administrative data for the analysis of social policies through several projects. A project launched in 2024 uses administrative data to analyse monetary poverty across life stages and events, such as labour market entry, parenthood, and retirement. A further joint project[39] between the Commission and the OECD leverages linked employer-employee data to analyse job-to-job transitions in the context of the green transition. Another Commission-OECD joint project supports evidence-informed policymaking in four countries in the field of labour market and social policies and improves the effectiveness of ALMPs based on counterfactual impact evaluations. Moreover, the Commission will launch a new Horizon Europe partnership on Social Transformation and Resilience (2027-2034), to develop tools and services facilitating researchers' access to administrative data as well as peer learning and exchange in data governance. Administrative data are also widely used in the context of modeling and simulations of impacts of tax benefit policies. The long-established **EUROMOD network** of researchers, supported by the Commission and based in national research institutes, ministries or academics- makes regular use of these data for these purposes. Furthermore, the Commission via its Joint Research Centre continuously provides methodological support to Member States to carry out counterfactual impact evaluations of ESF+ interventions, based on administrative data[40].

EU legislation can facilitate access to administrative data for research, evaluation and monitoring purposes. The Data Governance Act is one of the key pieces of legislation implementing the European strategy for data[41]. Adopted in May 2022, it creates the legal and organisational framework that allows administrative data to be shared safely when sharing is allowed under national or EU legislation. In this context, a reference point is the Health Data Space Regulation[42], entered into force in March 2025. It represents the first EU-wide legal framework for health data sharing, including the re-use of administrative health data for purposes such as scientific research, public health studies and monitoring.

The Commission proposal for the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework aims to improve access to administrative data for the evaluation of EU-funded programmes. The proposed **Performance Regulation**[43] under the next Multiannual Financial Framework includes a legal basis, in particular Article 19, to ensure easier access to administrative registers for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating the National and Regional Partnership Plans.

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[39] LinkEED 2.0 | OECD.
[40] https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/projects-activities/centre-research-impact-evaluation-crie_en/evaluation-ready-%E2%80%93-policy-evaluations_en.
[41] A European strategy for data | Shaping Europe's digital future
[42] https://health.ec.europa.eu/ehealth-digital-health-and-care/european-health-data-space-regulation-ehds_en
[43] EUR-Lex - 52025PC0545 - EN - EUR-Lex

Chapter 5: The European Pillar of Social Rights on a global stage

The European Pillar of Social Rights continues to shape the Commission's action to advance high labour and social standards also beyond EU's borders. Building on the 2021 Action Plan, the Commission is strengthening multilateral engagement – through forums like the World Social Summit – and driving initiatives to advance decent work and responsible business conduct in global value chains. The Pillar also reinforces the EU's commitment to international human rights instruments, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, by aligning its external action with principles on working conditions, employment, social protection and adequate living standards.

The Commission has worked towards implementing the 2021 Action Plan also in its international dimension by promoting labour and social rights outside the EU's borders. The Commission adopted a **Communication on decent work worldwide** in February 2022, providing a blueprint for the EU's role as a responsible global leader, where competitive advantages are not to the detriment of the most vulnerable. This was reinforced by two other instruments adopted in 2024: the EU Forced Labour Regulation, which introduces a market ban on all products to be placed in the EU internal market and will become applicable as of 14 December 2027; Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CS3D), *which will **require** – as of 26 July 2029 - large EU and non-EU companies **generating a significant turnover in the EU** to identify **and address** adverse human rights (and environmental) impacts **in their own operations and value chains***.

To foster compliance with CS3D, the Commission has launched global initiatives on Business and Human Rights to support **civil society organisations,** as well as the '**EU Due Diligence Navigator for Partner Countries'***[1]*. Accompanying measures supporting businesses, governments and civil society organisations in partner countries aim to raise their awareness and build their capacity on human rights and environmental due diligence. Grounded in international standards for responsible business conduct, the CS3D reflects the **value-based approach of the Global Gateway strategy** to ensure the delivery of high-quality, sustainable infrastructure in key partnership areas.

The Commission also worked towards setting examples and enhancing **decent work and social inclusion in third countries via its bilateral and multilateral relations**. In line with its 2022 Communication on The power of trade partnerships: together for green and just economic growth, the Commission has included provisions to respect of fundamental international labour standards in all the Free Trade Agreements for which negotiations were concluded in the last years (under the Trade and Sustainable Development Chapters).

Moreover, the Commission engaged strongly with the **International Labour Organization** (ILO), with several of its initiatives acting as benchmarks for creating new international standards. For example, in 2022, the International Labour Conference decided to add "a safe and healthy working environment" to the ILO's Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. In 2025, the ILO adopted new standards addressing bio-hazards in the working environment, responding to lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and wider workplace exposure risks in sectors such as healthcare, waste management, laboratories, and agriculture. The EU's substantial legal framework on worker protection from biological agents, notably under the Biological Agents Directive (Directive 2000/54/EC), provided inspiration, alongside broader occupational safety and health legislation. And in 2026, the ILO advanced discussions on international standards for the platform economy, addressing issues such as employment status, algorithmic management, transparency, working conditions, and social protection for people performing platform work. The Commission's work on developing the Platform Work Directive provided the ILO with a roadmap for how to balance innovation, labour rights, and legal certainty.

The Commission has also systematically advocated for clear references and commitments to high social and labour standards as well as for promoting social policies aimed at eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities, advancing social integration and inclusion and ensuring full employment and decent work for all in other UN fora, like in the UN Commission for Social Development and relevant General Assembly resolutions. The Commission was engaged in intensive works on the Political Declaration adopted at the 2025 World Social Summit which included building a more just, inclusive, equitable and sustainable world by addressing social challenges such as poverty, inequalities, lack of decent jobs, and exclusion. Also and within the G7 and G20, the Commission was actively engaged in promoting quality jobs and strengthening decent work. The Commission also tracks how its external action contributes to inequality reduction, disability inclusion, and gender equality and women's empowerment through the use of markers—namely the OECD Gender Equality Marker, the OECD Disability Marker and the European Commission's Inequality Marker—to help ensure that funding allocations advance these priorities.

Furthermore, the Pillar has served as a guiding tool for relations with the enlargement and Neighbourhood countries, defining the high level of social standards for which the EU stands. This is done among others via the following channels:

- To enhance the alignment of enlargement partners with EU labour and social policies and procedures, they are increasingly included, as appropriate, in relevant **actions, platforms, working groups** and **meetings**.
- To address the high NEETs rates in the Western Balkans, a **flagship initiative on youth guarantee schemes** is being rolled out. Ukraine and Moldova are also preparing to implement the Youth Guarantee.
- To reduce child poverty in enlargement partners, a flagship initiative on the **Child Guarantee scheme** has been promoted and is being rolled out in the region.
- Through the Employment and Social Affairs Platform (ESAP), the alignment of Western Balkan countries with the Pillar is promoted.
- The Pact for the Mediterranean put an emphasis on promoting quality jobs, skills development and social inclusion, including for women and youth NEETs and promoting the Youth Guarantee model. Moreover, through the Union for the

Mediterranean regional policy dialogue on employment and labour, the EU also works to advance these shared objectives together with the Mediterranean partners.

In this context, the European Training Foundation (ETF) has supported the external dimension of the Pillar by promoting reforms in skills, employment and social inclusion policies in partner countries, in line with EU principles and priorities.

Moreover, the **Western Balkans and Moldova** have issued their own **declarations** on improving social policy, highlighting their **commitment to the Pillar** and their willingness to be guided by its principles.

Conclusion

This Staff Working Document has taken stock of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights through its 2021 Action Plan, bringing together the views and feedback of a broad range of stakeholders alongside the Commission's own assessment.

It confirms that the continued and determined implementation of the 2021 Action Plan remains essential, not least to support the attainment of the EU's 2030 social headline targets. As Europe's social compass and shield, the Pillar remains central to promoting fair, inclusive and resilient societies. Sustained commitment at all levels will therefore be crucial to build on the progress made so far and to ensure that the principles of the Pillar continue to translate into tangible improvements in people's lives across the Union.

2021 European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan- EU-level action implementation tracker of the 75 initiatives

	Initiative	Reference	Adoption date
1	European Gender Equality Strategy	COM(2020) 152 final	5 March 2020
2	A New Industrial Strategy for Europe	COM(2020) 102 final	10 March 2020
3	A new Circular Economy Action Plan For a cleaner and more competitive Europe	COM(2020) 98 final	11 March 2020
4	An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe	COM(2020) 103 final	10 March 2020
5	European instrument for temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency (SURE) following the COVID-19 outbreak	Regulation (EU) 2020/672	19 May 2020
6	Revised Multi-Annual Financial Framework 2021-2027	Regulation (EU) 2020/2093	17 December 2020
7	Recovery and Resilience Facility	Regulation (EU) 2021/241	18 February 2021
8	REACT-EU	Regulation (EU) 2020/2221	23 December 2020
9	European Skills Agenda for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience	COM(2020) 274 final	1 July 2020
10	Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience	2020/C 417/01	24 November 2020
11	Youth Employment Support	COM(2020) 276 final	1 July 2020
12	Reinforced Youth Guarantee	2020/C 372/01	30 October 2020
13	European Education Area by 2025	COM(2020) 625 final	30 September 2020
14	Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 Resetting education and training for the digital age	COM(2020) 624 final	30 September 2020
15	Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025	COM(2020) 565 final	18 September 2020
16	EU Roma Strategic Framework on Equality, Inclusion and Participation	COM(2020) 620 final	7 October 2020
17	Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation	2021/C 93/01	12 March 2021
18	A Renovation Wave for Europe - greening our buildings, crhouseating jobs, improving lives	COM(2020) 662 final	14 October 2020
19	Commission Recommendation on Energy Poverty	C/2020/9600	14 October 2020
20	Pact for Skills	COM(2020) 274 final	1 July 2020
21	Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027	COM(2020) 758 final	24 November 2020
22	LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025	COM(2020) 698 final	12 November 2020
23	Adequate Minimum Wages	Directive (EU) 2022/2041	25 October 2022
24	Pharmaceuticals Strategy for Europe	COM(2020) 761 final	25 November 2020
25	Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy – putting European transport on track for the future	COM(2020) 789 final	9 December 2020
26	Green Paper on Ageing	COM(2021) 50 final	27 January 2021
27	Europe's Beating Cancer Plan	COM(2021) 44 final	3 February 2021
28	European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan	COM(2021) 102 final	4 March 2021
29	Revised Social Scoreboard	COM/2021/102	4 March 2021

30	Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030	COM(2021) 101 final	3 March 2021
31	Binding pay transparency measures	Directive (EU) 2023/970	10 May 2023
32	Effective Active Support to Employment (EASE)	COM (2021) 1372 final	4 March 2021
33	2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade	COM(2021) 118 final	9 March 2021
34	Strategy on Rights of the Child	COM(2021) 142 final	24 March 2021
35	European Child Guarantee	Regulation (EU) 2021/1004	14 June 2021
36	Joint Report on the application of the Employment Equality Directive and Race Equality Directive	COM(2021) 139 final	19 March 2021
37	Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937	Directive (EU) 2024/1760	13 June 2024
38	Revision of the Non-Financial Reporting Directive /Sustainable governance package - Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive	Directive (EU) 2022/2464	14 December 2022
39	Follow-up to the European approach to AI	COM(2021) 205 and 206 final	21 April 2021
40	Framework for European Digital Identity	Regulation (EU) 2024/1183	11 April 2024
41	Updating the 2020 Industrial Strategy: Building a stronger Single Market for Europe's recovery	COM(2021) 350 final	5 May 2021
42	New Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at work 2021-2027	COM(2021) 323 final	28 June 2021
43	European Platform on Combatting Homelessness	N/A	21 June 2021
44	Communication on Decent Work Worldwide	COM(2022) 66 final	23 February 2022
45	Affordable Housing Initiative	COM (2025) 1025	16 December 2025
46	Guidance notices on public procurement of innovation and on socially responsible public procurement	C(2021) 3573 final	26 May 2021
47	Strategy for Financing the Transition to a Sustainable Economy	COM(2021) 390 final	6 July 2021
48	Action Plan for the Social Economy	COM(2021) 778 final	9 December 2021
49	Legislation to combat gender-based violence against women and domestic violence	Directive (EU) 2024/1385	24 May 2024
50	Individual Learning Accounts	Council Recommendation on individual learning accounts	16 June 2022
51	European Approach to Micro-Credentials	Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability	16 June 2022
52	Building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation	Council Recommendation on	5 April 2022

		building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation	
53	Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability	Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development	16 June 2022
54	Skills and Talent package	COM (2022) 655, COM (2022) 657, COM (2022) 650	27 April 2022
55	Expanded and deepened Joint Employment Report	COM(2021) 743 final	24 November 2021
56	Legislative initiative on platform work	Directive (EU) 2024/2831	23 October 2024
57	Guidelines on the application of Union competition law to collective agreements regarding the working conditions of solo self-employed persons	C(2022) 6846 final	30 September 2022
58	European Health Data Space	Regulation (EU) 2025/327	11 February 2025
59	Methodology for social expenditure under the RRF	C(2021) 8801 final	28 September 2021
60	Report on EU Taxonomy Regulation	N/A	February 2022
61	Implementation Report on Working Time Directive	COM(2023) 72 final	15 March 2023
62	Initiative on Pathways to School Success	Council Recommendation 2022/C 469/01	28 November 2022
63	Council Recommendation on early childhood education and care: Revision on the Barcelona Targets	Council Recommendation 2022/C 484/01	8 December 2022
64	Review of 2014 Quality Framework for Traineeships	SWD(2023) 9 final	10 January 2023
65	Council recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care	Council Recommendation (EU) 2022/2412 on access to affordable high-quality long-term care	8 December 2022
66	Report of High-Level Group on the Future of Social Protection and of the Welfare State in the EU	N/A	7 February 2023
67	New tools and indicators on access to healthcare (2022)	N/A	Reports published in 2025
68	Directive on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to asbestos at work	Directive (EU) 2023/2668	30 November 2023
69	Council Recommendation on minimum income	Council Recommendation (EU) 2023/397 on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion	30 January 2023

70	Initiative on Social Dialogue	Council Recommendation C/2023/1389	12 June 2023
71	Communication on Better assessing the distributional impact of Member States' policies	COM(2022) 494	28 September 2022
72	First EU report on access to essential services	N/A	28 June 2023
73	European Social Security Pass	COM(2023) 501 - Communication on digitalisation in social security coordination: facilitating free movement in the Single Market through the European Social Security Pass	6 September 2023
74	First evaluation of the European Labour Authority	COM(2025) 256 final and SWD(2025) 128 final	26 May 2025
75	Review of the Pillar Action Plan	COM(2026) 650 final and SWD(2026) 650 final	22 July 2026

Annex 2 Table 1: EU headline and national Targets and State of Play by 2025

MS	Employment Rate (%)		Skills (%)		Poverty Reduction (000s)	
	Level 2025	**Target**	**Level 2022**	**Target**	**Change by 2025**[44]	**Target**
EU 27	76.1	78.0	39.5	60.0	-3503(1)	-15000
BE	72.8	80.0	34.9	60.9	-344	-279
BG	77.0	79.0	9.5	35.4	-455	-787
CZ	82.9	82.2	21.2	45.0	-51	-120
DK	79.8	80.0	47.1	60.0	18(2)	-30
DE	81.1	83.0	53.7	65.0	1286(2,3)	-1200
EE	81.7	81.3	41.8	52.3	-15	-39
IE	80.2	78.2	48.3	64.2	19	-90
EL	71.0	71.1	15.1	40.0	-262	-860
ES	72.4	76.0	34.1	60.0	331	-2815
FR	75.4	78.0	49.2	65.0	1427(4)	-1100
HR	74.4	75.0	23.3	55.0	-64	-298
IT	67.6	73.0	29.0	60.0	-1538	-3200
CY	81.3	80.0	28.3	61.0	0	-10
LV	78.2	80.0	34.1	60.0	-52	-95
LT	80.0	80.7	27.4	53.7	50	-223
LU	73.9	77.6	45.2	62.5	4	-4
HU	81.1	85.0	62.2	60.0	-183(5)	-292
MT	83.6	84.6	39.9	57.6	-1.3 pps(6)	-3.1 pps
NL	83.4	82.5	56.1	62.0	-3	-163
AT	77.6	79.9	52.2	62.0	252	-204
PL	78.8	78.3	20.3	51.7	-1179	-1500
PT	79.6	80.0	33.4	60.0	-178	-765

[44] Eurostat (online data code ilc_pecs01).

RO	69.0	74.7	19.1	17.4	-1863	-2532
SI	78.3	79.5	26.5	60.0	45	-9
SK	78.1	76.5	49.5	50.0	100	-70
FI	76.3	80.0	51.8	60.0	164	-100
SE	81.8	82.0	66.5	60.0	92	-15

Notes on the poverty targets

1 The EU aggregate uses figures for ‘Metropolitan France’ rather than ‘France’ to be in line with the 2019 figure for France.

2 DK and DE express their national poverty reduction targets as a reduction in the number of people living in (quasi-)jobless households (i.e. households with very low work intensity), which is expected translate into a reduction in the share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

3 For DE, the reference year for its national target is 2020.

4 FR set its national target in reference to metropolitan France and monitoring aligns to this geographical scope.

5 HU expresses its national poverty reduction target as a reduction in the material and social deprivation rate for families with children, which is expected to translate into a reduction in AROPE under current circumstances.

6 Employment rate 2025 source: Eurostat (lfsi_emp_a)

7 MT expresses its national poverty reduction target as a reduction of the AROPE rate, in terms of percentage points (i.e. -3.1 pps).