

**BRIEFING
PAPER
#113**

THE EU'S ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY: CAN THE WORDS BE TRANSLATED INTO ACTION?

The European Commission's long-awaited Anti-Poverty Strategy outlines the plan to help eradicate poverty in the EU by 2050. Positioned as the first-ever EU anti-poverty strategy, it integrates three priorities: quality jobs for all; effective access to quality services and adequate income support; and coordinated action against poverty.

Despite its promises, critical questions remain: is soft law enough to eradicate poverty? How will Member States be held accountable to deliver on the Strategy? How will the Strategy be funded?

This SOLIDAR briefing paper provides an overview of the Commission's Strategy and critically examines its potential to help eradicate poverty in the EU. Furthermore, it proposes a set of policy recommendations aimed at ensuring that the Strategy truly benefits people of all ages and backgrounds.



DECONSTRUCTING THE ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

The [European Union \(EU\) Anti-Poverty Strategy](#), published by the European Commission on 6 May 2026, sets out the EU's approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion. The Strategy is built on three main rationales: the protection of living in dignity as a fundamental right, the need to strengthen social cohesion and trust in institutions, and the economic benefits of reducing poverty through enriched human capital and a larger labour force.

The Strategy comes at a time when [93 million Europeans](#) (one in five people) are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including 19.3 million children. Rising living costs, precarious work, housing pressures, and unequal access to essential services are highlighted as the main factors that deepen social inequalities across Member States.

Building on the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#), the Strategy aims to meet the EU poverty reduction target set in 2021 to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU by at least 15 million by 2030, including at least 5 million children, while contributing to the broader objective of eradicating poverty by 2050. Given that progress remains [significantly behind](#) what is required to meet the Action Plan's target, the Strategy provides an important framework for accelerating efforts to tackle poverty.

The Strategy proposes EU-level measures to address poverty across different age groups, recognising the impact that poverty can have throughout the course of a person's life. The goal is to ensure everyone can live in dignity, by finding work and [affordable](#) places to live.

Alongside the Strategy, there is a proposal for a Council Recommendation on [fighting housing exclusion](#) and two communications; one on [breaking the cycle of child poverty](#) and one on [reinforcing the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities up to 2030](#). We [welcome](#) the Council Recommendation's recognition of housing exclusion as a key challenge, while stressing that greater ambition and stronger implementation measures are needed to ensure access to adequate and affordable housing.

1. Measures to tackle poverty along the life cycle

Children and young people

To tackle child poverty, the Strategy focuses on [improving families' access to adequate financial resources through quality employment and income support](#). Recognising the importance but limited effectiveness of existing child and family benefits, the Commission will adopt a Commission Recommendation in 2027 to improve the efficiency and integration of child-related benefit systems. In light of "[constrained resources](#)", the Commission has suggested reallocating public expenditure across age groups to promote intergenerational fairness, rather than allocating additional funds. This approach risks creating competition between age groups for limited resources, rather than promoting intergenerational fairness through adequate investment for all. The Communication "[Breaking the Cycle of Child Poverty – Strengthening the European Child Guarantee](#)" complements the Strategy by setting out measures to strengthen access to essential services for the livelihood of children.



For young people, the Strategy acknowledges persistently high risks of poverty and social exclusion driven by unemployment, early school leaving, and precarious labour market transitions. The response centres around strengthening the [Youth Guarantee](#), including improving its coordination with the [Child Guarantee](#) through a 2027 toolkit, improving outreach, and expanding local support services.

Working-aged people

For working-aged people, **quality jobs** are presented as the main route out of poverty, alongside activation measures combining income support, personalised services, and training. It is noted that certain groups face additional barriers, including women, carers, persons with disabilities, third-country nationals, and the long-term unemployed. In the second half of 2026, there will be the first-stage consultation with European social partners to explore EU action on the activation of persons excluded from the labour market and gender equality. Regrettably, there is no specific mention of civil society organisation being involved in the consultation process. Alongside this, there will be **continued support for the social economy** and micro-financing through a review of the Social Economy Action Plan and a revision of the European Code of Good Conduct for Microcredit Provision so it meets the needs of under-represented groups in entrepreneurship.

The Strategy recognises that **employment alone is insufficient to prevent poverty**. In-work poverty remains significant, driven by low wages, precarious contracts, and inadequate social protection. The planned 2027 Recommendation and **increase enforcement of transposition of the Directive on adequate minimum wages** are presented as key responses. Moreover, the Commission will reinforce monitoring and mutual learning within the

[Employment Committee](#) and the [Social Protection Committee](#).

For those unable to work, the Strategy stresses **adequate income support and minimum income schemes**, while acknowledging persistent problems of limited coverage and low take-up. The upcoming 2027 Compendium of Best Practices aims to address these gaps and strengthen the cooperation on the topic in the Social Protection Committee and its working group on [Minimum Income \(MINET\)](#).

Old age

Poverty in old age remains a major concern, with almost **one in five people aged 65 and over at risk of poverty or social exclusion**. The risk is particularly high among women, reflecting cumulative inequalities over the life course. The Strategy also acknowledges additional vulnerabilities associated with disability, long-term care needs, social isolation, and digital exclusion. In 2027, the Commission and the Social Protection Committee will publish a Joint Report on Adequate Social Protection in Old Age, alongside an Expert Report examining national approaches to preventing poverty among older people. They will be followed by a high-level exchange on integrated approaches to ensuring a dignified old age, involving social partners as well as other stakeholders and experts, although civil society organisations are not mentioned.

2. Horizontal challenges and dimensions that can aggravate poverty

The Strategy highlights how **prejudice and stigma** contribute to structural disadvantage and increase exposure to poverty and social exclusion. Women are particularly affected due to unequal access



to employment, pay gaps, career interruptions, and unpaid care work. Significant inequalities due to stigma are also observed for **persons with disabilities, people born outside the EU, persons from minority racial or ethnic backgrounds and LGBTQI+ persons.**

The Commission states it will address these challenges through the **Union of Equality framework**, including strategies on gender equality, disability rights, anti-racism, Roma inclusion, and LGBTQI+ equality. It also recognises **socio-economic status as a potential ground of discrimination**, with further analysis to be carried out by the **Fundamental Rights Agency**.

Rising cost-of-living pressures are increasing poverty and financial insecurity across the EU, with growing reliance on food assistance and concerns over the affordability of basic goods. Energy and transport poverty are identified as key drivers of exclusion, particularly for households in vulnerable situations. To combat this, the Commission will put forward measures to address energy price shocks, as announced in the **AccelerateEU Communication**, and update the 2023 Commission Recommendation on energy poverty.

Housing affordability is identified as a major challenge, with 31.1% of low-income households overburdened by housing costs and around 1 million people experiencing homelessness. The Commission has put forward a proposal for **Council Recommendation on housing exclusion** to support integrated, housing-led approaches to prevention and response.

Social services are recognised as essential for preventing and addressing poverty, although access

remains uneven due to administrative, territorial and digital barriers. The Commission will propose a 2027 Council Recommendation on integrated access to services, including single entry points, and rapid needs assessments. It will also support practices of peer-support among persons experiencing poverty.

The Strategy points to **education and training** as key tools to reduce poverty risks, although socio-economic background remains the strongest driver of educational inequality. A 2026 Education Package, which will include a Basic Skills Support Scheme, will support basic skills development. The objective is to ensure that 80% of European citizens have at least a basic level of digital skills by 2030.

Climate-related shocks are recognised as increasing risks for vulnerable groups by disrupting essential services and infrastructure. The forthcoming **EU framework on climate resilience** will address these challenges and strengthen preparedness, although the Strategy does not specify in what capacity.

3. Opportunities to improve governance, funding and monitoring at all levels

Addressing poverty is framed as requiring **collective responsibility of public authorities, private actors, social partners and civil society organisations**. Member States are called on to ensure anti-poverty policy frameworks are in place at **national, regional or local levels**. A **guidance document** has been put forward by the Commission to help authorities achieve this.

The Strategy also places a strong emphasis on governance and coordination. The Commission calls on Member States to appoint **Anti-Poverty**



Coordinators at the highest political level to oversee the development, implementation and monitoring of anti-poverty frameworks, supported by exchanges of best practices and mutual learning. It also highlights the role of the European Semester in monitoring poverty-related challenges and guiding reforms, while committing to stronger engagement with regional and local authorities, civil society organisations, social partners and people experiencing poverty through dedicated consultation mechanisms.

The Commission announced plans to strengthen monitoring by developing **new indicators on affordability, material deprivation, and territorial disparities**, and to improve the comprehensiveness of poverty measurement. It also signals the possible future revision of the social scoreboard within the Social Convergence Framework, as part of the European Semester, to better capture these dimensions.

Funding

The Commission's proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034) foresees at least 14% of National and Regional Partnership Plans to

be earmarked for social objectives. Member States will be asked to concentrate the resources on “social inclusion; food or basic material assistance; addressing child poverty and implementing the European Child Guarantee; combating youth unemployment and implementing the Youth Guarantee”.

The Strategy calls for **both long-term investments to improve service delivery and short-term measures to prevent and reduce poverty spells**, without proposing dedicated new funding for their implementation. It stresses improved use and coordination of existing EU funding instruments, such as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and Cohesion Policy Funds, as well as the Social Climate Fund, InvestEU and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. The Strategy also foresees greater involvement of the private sector through social investment frameworks and a Coalition Against Poverty, bringing together socially responsible business and philanthropic organisations. There is no mention of civil society organisations, whose inclusion is crucial for a successful coalition.

“**Housing affordability is identified as a major challenge, with 31.1% of low-income households overburdened by housing costs and around 1 million people experiencing homelessness.**”



SOLIDAR'S ASSESSMENT OF THE STRATEGY

The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy is a welcome initiative that provides a comprehensive overview of poverty and social exclusion across the European Union. It establishes an important framework that, if implemented to its full potential, can contribute significantly to achieving the poverty reduction targets set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, which are not currently on track to be fully met.

A key strength of the Strategy is its **life cycle approach**, recognising that poverty affects people differently throughout their lives and requires tailored responses at different stages. The Strategy pays particular attention to children, young people, working-aged people and older persons, while also recognising the links between these stages in shaping poverty risks. This approach reflects the reality that poverty is often cumulative and can be transmitted across generations.

We also welcome the Strategy's emphasis on **access to services as both a means of preventing and combating poverty**. The recognition that quality social services, healthcare, housing, education, care services and other essential services are fundamental to social inclusion is particularly important. Given the **link between homelessness and poverty**, the proposed Council Recommendation on Fighting Housing Exclusion and the continuation of the **EU Platform on Combating Homelessness** are promising developments. However, to have a strong impact there must be political commitment and dedicated resources.

The Strategy further recognises the **importance of education and training** as crucial building blocks of social inclusion and poverty prevention. Its emphasis on tackling educational inequalities, supporting basic skills acquisition and promoting training reflects the crucial role that education plays in breaking cycles of disadvantage and creating opportunities throughout the life course. Despite a clear labour market-oriented focus, we welcome the reference to basic skills and the role of education to promote social inclusion more broadly. A call for transversal competences would have made this connection more robust.

A strategy without accountability

The Strategy contributes to the implementation of the Pillar, but the link between the two frameworks should be stronger. While the poverty reduction target is frequently referenced, the Pillar is not consistently used as the overarching framework guiding the Strategy's actions. Several initiatives are presented as stand-alone measures rather than as concrete steps towards implementing the Pillar's principles.

This reflects a broader weakness in the document, which is the absence of a strong rights-based approach. Poverty is largely framed as a social and economic challenge requiring better coordination and more effective policy design and governance, rather than as a violation of rights. Without a stronger connection to the Pillar, both implementation and accountability are weakened, particularly given the absence of binding measures within the Strategy.



There remains a significant gap between the ambition of the Strategy and the measures proposed to achieve it. While the Commission **acknowledges** that “acting to prevent and combat poverty is more urgent than ever” and that “determined, bold and concerted action is needed”, the Strategy relies solely on soft law instruments, including Council Recommendations and other sources like guidance documents, exchanges of good practices and consultations. The Strategy contains **no binding measures, targets or enforcement mechanisms** capable of reducing poverty across Member States. This concern has also been highlighted by other **civil society organisations**, which note the absence of clear pathways and **binding commitments** towards poverty eradication.

Throughout the Strategy, Member States are encouraged to take action, including by establishing anti-poverty policy frameworks at national, regional and local level. This is a welcome recognition of the need for coordinated responses to poverty. However, these calls are not accompanied by concrete obligations, accountability mechanisms or incentives to ensure implementation. Similarly, the Strategy makes several important claims, such as the assertion that **combating poverty should be a central element of the accession process for candidate countries**, yet provides little indication of how these objectives will be operationalised, monitored or enforced. As a result, many of the Strategy’s ambitions risk remaining aspirational rather than translating into tangible improvements for people experiencing poverty.

The Strategy also appears **short-sighted in its implementation timeline**. While its aim is to contribute to eradicating poverty by 2050, almost

all announced initiatives are concentrated between 2026 and 2028. Beyond this period, there is little indication of how implementation, monitoring and investment will be sustained. Given the scale and persistence of poverty across Europe, a longer-term roadmap with intermediate milestones is needed to strengthen the credibility of the Strategy and provide greater certainty for stakeholders.

One of the biggest weaknesses is the **lack of dedicated resources**. While the Commission repeatedly **stresses the importance of EU funding to reduce poverty**, it does not propose new funding mechanisms to support implementation. Instead, the emphasis is placed on better coordination, more efficient use of existing resources and mobilising existing funding streams. This is particularly evident in the approach to child poverty, where intergenerational fairness is framed primarily through the redistribution and reprioritisation of existing expenditure. Moreover, the proposed 14% earmarking for social objectives under the next Multiannual Financial Framework falls short of providing clear guarantees that adequate resources will be directed towards **poverty reduction**, as several objectives are classified as social.

A strategy for all, or just for some?

While social partners are explicitly identified as key actors in several of the initiatives, the role of civil society organisations and people experiencing poverty remains less clearly defined. The Strategy acknowledges their importance and proposes the establishment of a dedicated forum for consulting people experiencing poverty, but their participation remains largely consultative and lacks integration in the decision-making processes.



People experiencing poverty and the organisations representing them should be actively involved in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of anti-poverty policies. Their lived experience provides essential insight into the barriers people face when accessing services, social protection and employment. Similarly, civil society organisations play a crucial role in service delivery, advocacy and outreach to vulnerable groups.

The Strategy rightly acknowledges that tackling poverty requires a combination of adequate income support, access to quality services and labour market participation. However, in practice, the proposed measures place considerably greater emphasis on activation and labour market integration than on strengthening income support systems or expanding access to quality services.

Quality jobs are an essential component of a stronger Social Europe, and it is positive that the Strategy recognises their role in preventing and reducing poverty. However, the strong emphasis on labour market activation risks overlooking the structural drivers of poverty. Poverty is not solely the result of exclusion from the labour market. **Many people experience poverty despite being employed**, while others face barriers that cannot be overcome through activation measures alone. As a result, these people would fall through the cracks of the proposed initiatives.

Despite recognising the importance of adequate income support for those unable to work, the Strategy does not propose any new initiatives to strengthen minimum income schemes beyond promoting take-up and exchanging best practices. Given the role of **adequate minimum income** in preventing poverty, this represents a missed

opportunity to advance upward convergence in social protection across the EU.

Women, persons with disabilities, Roma, LGBTQI+ people and people born outside the EU are all identified as facing higher risks of poverty and social exclusion. However, the Strategy largely treats these groups separately and does not sufficiently examine how different forms of discrimination and stigma interact and reinforce one another. This is particularly evident regarding people with migrant backgrounds.

According to **Eurostat**, in 2024, 43.8% of non-EU citizens residing in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared with 26.9% of EU citizens living in another Member State and 18.5% of nationals living in their own country. Despite this, the Strategy focuses primarily on labour market integration and pays limited attention to the broader structural barriers that contribute to migrant poverty, including discrimination, unequal access to housing and services, language barriers and insecure residence status.

While discrimination is identified as a driver of poverty and exclusion, the Strategy lacks concrete measures to tackle it as part of anti-poverty measures.

“According to Eurostat, in 2024, 43.8% of non-EU citizens residing in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared with 26.9% of EU citizens living in another Member State and 18.5% of nationals living in their own country.”



CONCLUSION

SOLIDAR welcomes the Anti-Poverty Strategy as an important **first step** towards a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion across the EU. Its life cycle approach, recognition of the importance of quality services and social protection, and emphasis on a collaborative approach provide a valuable foundation for future action.

However, for the EU to achieve its poverty reduction targets and the objective of eradicating poverty by 2050, **the Strategy must be accompanied by stronger legislative action, adequate and dedicated funding, and robust accountability mechanisms for implementation.** Greater involvement of civil society organisations and people experiencing poverty will also be essential to ensure that policies respond to lived realities and reach those most in need.

While the Strategy acknowledges that poverty is multidimensional and shaped by intersecting forms of disadvantage, its proposed actions remain fragmented. A stronger rights-based and intersectional approach, firmly rooted in the European Pillar of Social Rights, with hard measures is needed to address the structural causes of poverty and ensure that no one is left behind.



Read our policy recommendations below



SOLIDAR'S POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN ACTIONABLE STRATEGY

SOLIDAR calls for a cohesive Anti-Poverty Strategy that is actionable and sustainable, ensuring the root causes of poverty are addressed. As EU policymakers develop the Council Recommendations, guidelines, and other instruments announced in the Strategy, we urge them to:

1. Ensure that the European Pillar of Social Rights serves as the guiding framework for the implementation of the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

The implementation of the Strategy should be explicitly aligned with the principles of the Pillar, in particular Principle 14 on minimum income, Principle 11 on childcare and support to children, Principle 19 on housing and assistance for the homeless, and the commitment to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Anti-poverty measures should be assessed against their contribution to social rights and social inclusion.

2. Complement soft governance tools with stronger commitments, accountability and monitoring mechanisms.

Member States should be required to develop comprehensive anti-poverty strategies at national, regional and local level, with clear targets, timelines, implementation plans and monitoring frameworks. This should include establishing a

long-term roadmap with clear milestones beyond 2028 to support the objective of eradicating poverty by 2050. Progress in reducing poverty and social exclusion should be systematically monitored through the European Semester, with country-specific recommendations followed by structured follow-up and assessment.

3. Ensure adequate and dedicated funding for poverty reduction and social inclusion.

The success of the Strategy depends on sufficient investment. The proposed earmarking under the next Multiannual Financial Framework should be strengthened and accompanied by safeguards ensuring that funding is effectively directed towards poverty reduction, quality social services, affordable housing, child poverty prevention and social inclusion. EU funding should support local and regional initiatives, civil society organisations and social economy actors working directly with people experiencing poverty.

4. Put civil society organisations and people experiencing poverty at the centre.

The proposed forum for people experiencing poverty is a welcome step, but participation must go beyond consultation. Civil society organisations and people experiencing poverty should be systematically involved in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of anti-poverty policies and initiatives through civil



dialogue. Their expertise and lived experience are essential to ensuring that policies respond to real needs, improve access to services and social protection, and reach those most at risk of exclusion.

5. Strengthen the Strategy's intersectional approach and address the structural drivers of poverty and exclusion.

The implementation should move beyond a predominantly labour-market-centred approach and address the multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage that contribute to poverty.

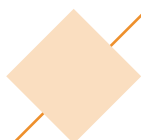
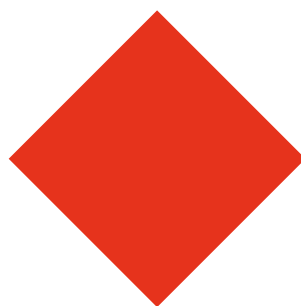
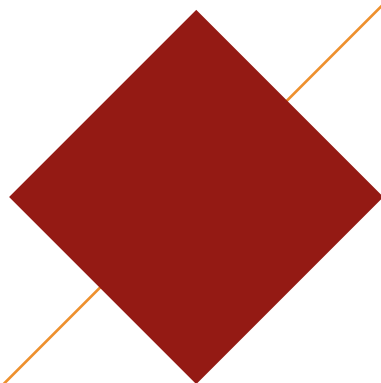
Particular attention should be given to groups facing disproportionately high poverty risks, including women, persons with disabilities, Roma communities, LGBTQI+ people, racialised groups and migrants. Dedicated measures should be developed to tackle barriers to access to housing, social protection, education, healthcare and essential services, alongside measures addressing discrimination and stigma. Poverty reduction policies must recognise that quality employment is important, and should be improved, but not sufficient on its own to eradicate poverty and social exclusion.

“ SOLIDAR calls for a cohesive Anti-Poverty Strategy that is actionable and sustainable, ensuring the root causes of poverty are addressed. ”

solidar

50 Avenue Des Arts
Box 5, 2nd floor
B1000 - Brussels
Belgium

LinkedIn: **SOLIDAR & SOLIDAR+**
Bluesky: **@solidar-eu.bsky.social**
Instagram: **@solidar_eu**
Facebook: **SOLIDAR**
www.solidar.org
solidar@solidar.org



Responsible editor: Mikael Leyi

Author: Julia Johnson

Reviewer: Martina Corti

Designer: Dagmar Bleyová

SOLIDAR is a European and worldwide network of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working to advance social justice through a just transition in Europe and worldwide. Our over 50 member organisations are based in 27 countries (19 of which are EU countries) and include national CSOs in Europe, as non-EU, EU-wide and organisations active at the international level.



**Funded by
the European Union**

This document was funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.