20/11/2026

# Open letter: For a Strong European Social Fund in the Next Long-Term EU Budget

**Ambitious and dedicated social spending in the next long-term EU budget is key to the wellbeing of people, competitiveness and security across Europe**. We, Chairs of Networks of the Party of European Socialists and S&D Members in the European Parliament leading the work on social, economic and budgetary affairs, strongly support a **well-resourced and standalone European Social Fund (ESF)** in the next European Budget for the years 2028-2034 that is currently under negotiation.

**The ESF is the EU's main instrument in financially supporting the European Pillar of Social Rights and has proven successful in improving citizens' lives.** The figures given by the Commission are telling. By the end of 2025, the ESF+ had helped some 1.7 million people find a job, and 2.2 million people gain qualification. 31 million people received food assistance, and almost 8,000 job placements were created. In total 23 million people benefited from it.[1] This instrument is anchored in the partnership with trade unions, employers, and civil society, and this must be preserved.

In a world of **uncertainty**, Europe is facing profound economic, social and security challenges. Yet these challenges must never be a pretext for putting social progress on hold. With millions of people struggling to pay their daily essentials in the current affordability crisis and citizens taking to the streets to protest for affordable lives and quality public services, **we hear people's discontent. We call for putting people at the core of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**, as the European Budget is known.

**With negotiations entering a crucial phase, the next MFF is central in determining whether Europe lives up to its expectations and responsibilities in addressing citizens' concerns**. **We reiterate that the EU must demonstrate that investments in our security, sovereignty and competitiveness go hand in hand with social rights and social spending**. Europe will not be more competitive if workers cannot access the labour market, face precarious working conditions or feel deprived of career prospects. It will not tackle challenges if its youth and schools are abandoned. It will not be secure if inequalities increase

[1] European Commission, *Cohesion Open Data Platform*, available here; European Commission, *European Social Fund+ - Performance*, available here.


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and people are left behind. **Social Europe is not optional, but a key requirement for a competitive and secure Europe**.

**The next MFF must reflect this reality**. We firmly reject any deregulation attempts that undermine social rights and hold the Commission President accountable to her commitment to the European Pillar of Social Rights in her recent 2026 State of the Union. **We call for the European budget to have *more* targeted social funding, not less.**

Given the current cost-of-living crisis and the importance of the ESF in addressing it, **we call for a well-resourced and standalone European Social Fund:**

- **Well-resourced**: Social Europe can only be strong if supported by an appropriate ring-fenced financial envelope. At a time when Europe is expected to do more for people, funding must ensure an appropriate level of spending in line with growing social demands. It is clear that the proposed minimum target of 14% for social objectives under the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs) is insufficient. We reiterate our support to the European Parliament's call for €124 billion for the ESF. Adequate dedicated resources should be allocated to fighting poverty, homelessness and material deprivation; financing food aid and social inclusion; creating quality jobs; promoting gender equality and equal access to the labour market; and providing training. They should also support the just transition, social innovation, local employment and job guarantee schemes. The ESF should ensure that everyone, including children in line with the European Child Guarantee, has access to essential services of good quality and affordable care services. Moreover, it will help address territorial disparities and local needs, enhance resilience and territorial cohesion across the Union, including by supporting the social economy.

- **Standalone**: the Commission proposal of National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs) is meant to enhance simplification, flexibility and better value for money. It brings several EU funding programmes together under a single plan for each Member State or region. However, as it stands the proposal raises serious concerns and risks diluting and reducing social funding. This does not deliver on simplification. Instead, it impedes a well-functioning allocation of funds for social and economic progress. This is why we call for a standalone ESF to avoid these risks of diluting social funding, weakening visibility, and forcing social priorities to compete with other EU priorities.

The well-being of Europeans and Europe's future prosperity and autonomy depend on a strong social pillar. Delivering this requires adequate resources. A strong, well-resourced and standalone ESF in the next European budget is critical to ensure that no one is left behind.

***Signatories***

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***Korinna Schumann**, Chair of the PES EPSCO Ministers Network and Federal Minister for Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection in Austria*

***Fernando Sampedro Marcos**, Chair of the PES GAC Ministers Network and Secretary of State for the EU in Spain*

***Gaby Bischoff**, Chair of the PES Social Europe Network*

***Aurore Lalucq**, Chair of the PES Financial and Economic Network and Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs*

***Mohammed Chahim**, S&D Vice-President for the Green Deal for Industry, Energy and Climate and Financing the Just Transition*

***Estelle Ceulemans**, S&D Coordinator in the European Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs Committee*

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***Carla Tavares**, European Parliament Co-Rapporteur (S&D) on the next Multiannual Financial Framework*

***Marit Maij**, European Parliament Co-Rapporteur (S&D) on the European Social Fund*