

What's next for Social Europe?

A recap of key takeaways

25-03-2025

Social Rights in Focus

The event gathered high level stakeholders, including Members of the **European Parliament**, representatives from the **European Commission**, and members of Social Platform to discuss the future of the European Social agenda, and their priorities on working conditions, social protection, and accessible services within the framework of the new **Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights**.



30 Years of Advocacy: More Work Ahead

Hugh Frazer, Professor in Applied Social Studies at Maynooth University, moderated the discussion and Laura de Bonfils, Secretary General of Social Platform welcomed attendees with a call to action, highlighting "2025 marks 30 years of Social Platform, but there's still much to do to keep social rights high on the agenda."

Laura called for an ambitious EPSR action plan containing proposals for binding legislation, warning that "welfare states are eroding, leading to poverty, exclusion, and people are answering voting for far right political groups."



The urgency of **Social Europe**

The event focused on maintaining European social policies as a priority amid rising geopolitical tensions and economic competitiveness.

The upcoming new European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) Action Plan is a key opportunity to advance social policies in the European Union.



"The warfare vs. welfare discussion is very dangerous for the EU, we should not go in that direction."

– Maria Ohisalo MEP, EMPL Committee Coordinator for the Green / EFA group

Key Priorities for the Next Action Plan

- **Fair working conditions & quality jobs:** Beyond skills—ensuring stable, quality employment for all.
- **Social protection & inclusion:** Adequate income and anti-poverty strategies to combat growing inequalities.
- **Access to essential services:** Ensuring affordable, high-quality public services for all, including housing and care.



"If we fail to deliver for people, there is a significant risk that they will feel unheard on issues like social protection and quality jobs, allowing far-right parties to exploit these insecurities."

– Estelle Ceulemans, MEP, EMPL Committee Coordinator for the S&D

Challenges and policy gaps

- **Growing social inequalities:** Welfare states are eroding, leading to increased poverty and political extremism.
- **Lack of binding legislation:** Many social targets remain principles rather than enforceable laws.
- **Budget Priorities:** While billions are allocated for defence, investment in social policies is still insufficient.



“Investing in people is not negotiable for us. If we want a competitive Europe we must invest people and not just jobs, but quality jobs.”

– Miron Podgorean, member of cabinet of European Commission Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu

What Needs to **Happen Next?**

- **Push for stronger social legislation:** Minimum income directive, AI regulations at work, add social conditionalities in the review of the public procurement directive.
- **Secure adequate funding:** Protect social investment funds like ESF+ and the Child Guarantee.
- **Ensure CSO involvement:** Civil society must be consulted to actively shape and monitor the next EPSR Action Plan



"At times of crisis we must think about the core values of the EU. Our social model is what makes the EU more powerful, it must be strengthened."

– Leïla Chaïbi MEP, EMPL Committee
Coordinator for The Left

2025: A Pivotal Year for **Social Change**

- **2025 is a crucial year:** The 30th anniversary of Social Platform, a moment to reinforce the social agenda.
- **Social policies and the social agenda are key to the EU's legitimacy:** Without them, citizens feel left behind, leading to democratic challenges.
- **Action is needed now:** The next EPSR Action Plan must be ambitious, well-funded, and legally binding.



"The fight against poverty must be a strong priority."

– Jana Toom MEP, EMPL Committee Coordinator for Renew Europe

Spotlight on: Working Conditions and Quality Jobs

Diana Dovgan, member of Social Platform Management Committee and Secretary General of CECOP, emphasised hidden labour market challenges, including youth unemployment being three times higher and job precarity due to digitalisation. She called for sector-specific policies and inclusive employment, stressing **"Barriers to quality employment for disadvantaged groups must be addressed."**

Estelle Ceulemans MEP added: "The cost of gender inequality amounts to €319 billion for the economy, surely is the same for people with disabilities." The discussions highlighted priorities for fair working conditions and inclusive labour strategies.



Spotlight on: Working Conditions and Quality Jobs

Maria Nyman, Secretary General of Caritas Europa, highlighted the need for stronger national minimum income systems, stating: "This is the moment to invest in services; investing in social ensures stability, peace, and cohesion."

Her remarks prompted dialogue on mainstreaming anti-poverty strategies, with Maria Ohisalo emphasising the importance of including the "housing first principle" in affordable housing plans and broader anti-poverty efforts.



Spotlight on: Quality, Affordable Services

Thomas Bignal, Secretary General of EASPD, highlighted the need for stronger financial support for social economy and services, emphasising, **"We must put money on the table for these sectors to benefit as well."** He also stressed the importance of reviewing public procurement's impact on social issues and maintaining conditionalities in EU funds to ensure effective use.

MEP Jana Toom added that: **"We don't need action plans; we need legislation to create real change."**



Closing reflections



Professor Hugh Frazer emphasised the need for a holistic, inclusive approach to social policies, calling investment in social systems. He remarked that **"It is indispensable to protect our social model and build a sustainable, inclusive future."**

He highlighted risks tied to underfunding and stressed practical anti-poverty measures. **Mikael Leyi**, Vice-President of Social Platform, and Secretary General of SOLIDAR, noted the pivotal nature of current times, urging stronger cooperation, and echoed Leïla Chaïbi's sentiment that **"pushing is a kind of support."** Both underscored the importance of collective action and CSO involvement.



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