EU Anti-Poverty Strategy: Commission delivers on short-term actions, but long-term ambition remains limited

article, socio-economic rights, lgbti, non-discrimination

On 6 May 2026, the European Commission published the first-ever EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, marking a long-awaited milestone in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. In its initial assessment, the Coalition on the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy acknowledges the positive developments and important commitments in the Strategy. However, it also raises serious concerns about the apparent lack of a long-term approach and adequate resources needed to achieve the Commission's objective of eradicating poverty by 2050.

In 2025, at least 92.7 million people in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, representing around 20.9% of the EU population. This is 600,000 fewer people than 2024. While these figures mark a slight improvement, the newly published Eurostat data once again show insufficient progress in fighting poverty and social exclusion.

Against this backdrop, the Coalition on the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy welcomes the efforts the Commission has undertaken in developing the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy launched on 6 May 2026, as it constitutes the first-ever EU-level strategy dedicated to the eradication of poverty, with the ambition to achieve this goal by 2050.

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Among the **promising elements** outlined in the Strategy, we note, in particular:

- The commitment to scale up cooperation of the Commission with **people experiencing poverty,**
- The acknowledgement of the impact of poverty **throughout the life cycle**, with particular attention to children, young people, and older persons, and how these stages are interwoven within the family unit,
- The connections **between the Anti-Poverty Strategy and the strengthened European Child Guarantee**, including the measures proposed in the latter text published on the same day, confirming that the fight against child poverty is a fundamental pillar of the EU social agenda,
- The announcement of a Commission Recommendation providing evidence-based policy guidance to **prevent and combat in-work poverty** across the EU, and the recognition throughout the text that quality jobs are key but can only help those who can work,
- Along the same lines, the acknowledgement that an **active inclusion approach** is central to addressing poverty, based on its three pillars: adequate income support, access to quality goods and services, and inclusive access to the labour market,
- The recognition of the need to **combat discrimination and stigma**, which contribute to deepening poverty, and exposing more to social exclusion groups such as women, racialised communities and ethnic minorities

including Roma, LGBTIQ+ people, people with disabilities, and children.
- The opening of new avenues to better address **homelessness and housing exclusion** through the proposed Council Recommendation on Housing Exclusion and the continuation of the EU Platform on Combating Homelessness,
- The publication of guidelines to EU member states to step up **local and national anti-poverty strategies**, and the appointment of **national Anti-Poverty Coordinators** at the highest political level,
- The willingness to open a conversation on the way poverty is measured, as current indicators fail to adequately capture the reality of many marginalised groups.

However, **several of our demands are left unanswered,** and lead to important concerns about the potential of the Strategy to deliver concrete impact:

- The Strategy **frames poverty as a barrier to competitiveness**, presenting poverty reduction primarily as a means to support economic growth. This approach risks overshadowing the imperative to eradicate poverty **as a matter of human rights and social justice.**
- It is unclear how the implementation of the Strategy will be **funded**, as it relies on the willingness of EU member states to better use existing EU funds, such as the European Social Fund (ESF), without creating new funding avenues. Moreover, the negotiations of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028-2034 are still ongoing, with strong uncertainties about the future budget to be allocated to social inclusion and poverty eradication.
- **Several marginalised groups are painfully absent from the Strategy**, such as sex workers and people with a migrant background, including undocumented people, despite their higher risk of poverty and the barriers they face to overcome it. Other marginalised groups' experiences are **insufficiently recognised.** For instance, LGBTQI+ people are referred to as a homogeneous group, without acknowledging the specific forms of marginalisation faced by trans and intersex people, disproportionately affected by poverty. Similarly, age-based discrimination affecting both older and younger people is not explicitly recognised. **Crucially, while discrimination overall is acknowledged as a key driver of poverty, there are no proposed measures to combat it,** not even a reaffirmation of existing efforts under the Union of Equality. These gaps further invisibilise certain groups and reinforcing harmful narratives that divide people experiencing poverty into those seen as "deserving" or "undeserving" of support.
- A large part of the Strategy focuses on integrating people experiencing poverty into the labour market, with **employment consistently presented as the primary pathway out of poverty.** The framing overlooks the complexity and multidimensional nature of poverty, which cannot be reduced to labour market participation alone. It also ignores the reality of those who cannot work for a variety of reasons, with the risk of reinforcing negative stereotypes against them.
- At the same time, the Strategy pays **limited attention to ensuring effective adequate and targeted access to essential services**, or to strengthening public and social service provision. Instead, the focus is on increasing income and purchasing these services on the market. The rolling back of social services in some Member States is not acknowledged by the Strategy, missing the mark as quality public and social services for all who need them are a fundamental precondition for eradicating poverty by 2050.
- As a result, the Strategy **lacks a structural and systemic approach**, as it focuses primarily on the individual experience of poverty. Key drivers such as taxation, wealth redistribution, labour market structures, and systemic discrimination are left unexplored. This limits the Strategy's ability to tackle the root causes of poverty in a comprehensive way and weakens its potential to deliver transformative change.
- The Strategy foresees the launch of a Coalition Against Poverty, bringing together "socially responsible business and philanthropic organisations", but stays mute on whether **civil society organisations** would be involved too, leading to concerns over their involvement across the implementation and overall accountability of the Strategy.
- Finally, we are concerned that the **proposed governance structure** of the Strategy risks limiting its effectiveness. In particular, the Strategy does not outline how it will contribute to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. In the same way, it does not foresee deliverables after early 2028. It also

lacks concrete targets and indicators to monitor progress towards the 2030 Porto Targets, and the overarching 2050 objective. In addition, it fails to set out a clear mechanism to ensure coordination across relevant European Commission Directorates-General, which is essential for a coherent and integrated implementation of the Strategy.

In conclusion, the launch of the EU APS marks an important step forward with several positive short-term measures. However, the Coalition fears that its limited focus on structural drivers of poverty, unclear funding commitments, and weak governance framework **significantly reduce its long-term ambition and effectiveness.**

As the implementation of the Strategy is starting now, the EU APS Coalition calls on the European Commission to establish meaningful and regular structured engagement with civil society organisations and people experiencing poverty as soon as possible, alongside clear monitoring mechanisms, activities post-2028, and strong coordination across institutions.

The Coalition stands ready to continue engaging constructively with EU and national decision-makers and all other relevant stakeholders to help ensure it delivers lasting progress towards the eradication of poverty by 2050.

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Signatories:

- EAPN (European Anti-Poverty Network)
- AGE Platform Europe
- ATD Fourth World
- COFACE Families Europe
- ENAR (European Network Against Racism)
- ERGO (European Roma Grassroots Organisations)
- ESWA (European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance)
- Eurochild
- Eurodiaconia
- FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless)
- IGLYO (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Intersex Youth and Student Organisation)
- ILGA-Europe (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association – Europe)
- PICUM (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants)
- Save the Children
- SMES Europa
- Social Platform
- TGEU (Trans Europe and Central Asia)

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