



# Keep what works: 8 success factors for a future ESF+

## JOINT STATEMENT



Europe is **transforming**: economically, digitally, in terms of sustainability. These changes necessitate a social transformation to make the most of the evolving landscape, whilst **leaving no one behind**. To achieve this, Europe must reduce inequalities, promote social progress and achieve high quality employment levels, thereby strengthening the Single Market and improving Europe's economy. These are also foundational elements to facilitate restoring trust in our political systems and our social market economy.

The European Union's **Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2027 onwards** will be a critical instrument to create a Europe that is fit-for-purpose, competitive and capable of achieving the 3 targets set-out in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan: on employment, training and lifting at least 15 million people, of which 5 million children, out of poverty by 2030. Like the European Parliament and others, we see the European Social Fund + and Cohesion policy more generally as essential tools to achieve this.

The **next MFF will of course need to improve**, be adapted to the evolving context and new priorities. Improving a framework is also to recognise what has worked well with its predecessors. Since its establishment in 1957 with the Treaty of Rome, the **European Social Fund (ESF)** has been a cornerstone of EU investment, effectively addressing territorial disparities, targeting local needs, and supporting innovation and reforms in partnership with local stakeholders, social partners, civil society and the social economy.

The ESF has driven advancements in employment, training, and social support services, creating opportunities for millions of Europe's most excluded individuals. As highlighted in the Joint Statement "Time for Ambition", **we urge the EU Commission to build on those advancements and strengthen, rather than weaken or merge, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).**

**As the EU's primary instrument to invest in people, the European Social Fund must remain central to the next EU budget. We highlight 8 of its Success Factors that are essential to its continued effectiveness.**

**Success  
Factor 1**

**Guaranteed funding** for delivering on Europe's quality jobs, skills, and social targets and policies, as highlighted in the European Pillar of Social Rights. This support is needed more than ever given the increasing social and economic challenges Europe faces today and should be strengthened to fully achieve its objectives.

**Success  
Factor 2**

**Multi-level governance** and shared management, through its bottom-up approach, linking local needs to EU strategic priorities to maximise impact, accountability, and sustainability of funds.

**Success  
Factor 3**

Horizontal **earmarking** for social inclusion has ensured investment to the most excluded, which is crucial for social cohesion, in particular to ensure that new emerging priorities do not undermine social goals.

**Success  
Factor 4**

Ongoing efforts to **simplify and increase flexibility for end-beneficiaries**. This approach makes the ESF+ more accessible and attractive, particularly for smaller initiatives from the Proximity and Social Economy ecosystem, enabling a broader range of organisations to benefit from EU funding programmes and enhancing the fund's overall impact.

**Success  
Factor 5**

**Enabling Conditions** (both horizontal and thematic) have been instrumental in the effectiveness of ESF+ and other funds, as they are designed to ensure that investments are grounded in EU's strategic priorities and legal frameworks and respect for fundamental rights.

**Success  
Factor 6**

The **Partnership Principle**, brings together public authorities, social partners, civil society and the social economy and thus ensures transparency, improved targeting of investment needs, and enhanced ownership, coordination, and monitoring.

**Success  
Factor 7**

ESF+ provides dedicated **funding opportunities for local initiatives**, including those led by the Proximity and Social Economy sectors and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. This is made possible through measures such as capacity building, the use of intermediary bodies, administrative simplification, and the creation of a more enabling environment for smaller organisations to access and manage funding.

**Success  
Factor 8**

ESF+ means investment into **long-term priorities, systemic reforms and capacity development**. This has helped reforming welfare systems in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights and enhancing the availability, accessibility, affordability, and resilience of quality social, health, education, training, housing, and other services of general interest.

We stand ready to support the EU institutions in securing a strong European Social Fund +, by building on its 8 Success Factors.

### Co-Signed by

European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)  
European Network of Social Integrations Enterprises (ENSIE)  
Social Services Europe (SSE)  
Social Economy Europe (SEE)  
Social Platform  
European Public Service Union (EPSU)  
Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL)  
Association de Recherche et de Formation sur l'Insertion en Europe / Association for Research and Training on Integration in Europe (ARFIE)  
Autism Europe  
CEC - Acting for Social inclusion  
European Confederation of Industrial and Service Cooperatives (CECOP)  
COFACE Families Europe  
Confederation of European Firms, Employment Initiatives and Cooperatives (CEFEC)  
Diesis Network  
European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)  
Eurocarers  
Eurochild  
Eurodiaconia  
European Ageing Network (EAN)  
European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)  
European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB)  
European Council for Non Profit Organisations (CEDAG)  
European Disability Forum (EDF)  
European Federation for Family Employment and Home Care (EFFE)  
European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)  
European Microfinance Network (EMN)  
European Network Against Racism (ENAR)  
European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy (REVES aisbl)  
European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR)  
ERGO Network  
European Students' Union  
European Youth Forum  
European Federation of Ethical and Alternative Banks and Financiers (FEBEA)  
Housing Europe

Inclusion Europe

International Step by Step Alliance (ISSA)

Lumos

Make Mothers Matter (MMM)

Mental Health Europe

Microfinance Centre (MFC)

Philea - Philanthropy Europe Association

Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)

RREUSE - Reuse and Recycling European Union Social Enterprises

Samaritan International

Save the Children

SOLIDAR