European Social Fund: fighting poverty and unemployment

The European Social Fund plays a major role in fighting poverty and unemployment in Europe. MEPs wants to upgrade its role so that more people can be helped. Find out how.

The European Parliament is backing updated rules to tackle unemployment and high rates of poverty in the EU.

The report, adopted in plenary on 4 April, proposes to increase funding for the European Social Fund in the EU’s budget for 2021-2027 with a primary focus on youth employment and children.

Many people are concerned about social and employment issues. Parliament wants the EU to do more on social issues by supporting a renewed and simplified European Social Fund, known as the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).

The new version of the fund could then help to create full employment, boost the quality of work, increase productivity, make it easier for people to find work in a different part of the EU, improve education and training as well as promote social inclusion.
What is the European Social Fund?

• It is the EU's oldest financial instrument to invest in people, improve job opportunities for workers and raise their standard of living

• Funding is distributed to EU countries and regions to finance operational programmes and employment-related projects, from helping to create work to addressing educational gaps, poverty and social inclusion

• Beneficiaries are usually people, but funding can also be used to help companies and organisations

More flexibility, simplicity and efficiency

The updated European Social Fund Plus would merge a number of existing funds and programmes, pooling their resources:

• The European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative
• The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived
• The EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation

This would allow for more integrated and targeted support. For instance, people affected by poverty would benefit from a better mix of material assistance and comprehensive social support.

Because of these more flexible and simpler rules, it should be easier for people and organisations to benefit from the fund's funding.

Young people and children key priority

ESF+ will invest in three main areas: education, training and lifelong learning; effectiveness of labour markets and equal access to quality employment; social inclusion and combatting poverty.

MEPs want to ensure that ESF+ continues to support youth employment with a particular focus on inactive young people and the long-term unemployed, as well as address children in poverty, promoting children's equal opportunities and facilitating access to free education.

Support to health and social innovation

The ESF+ funds would also support initiatives enabling people to find better employment or work in a different region or country of the EU, including supporting new skills for new types of jobs required by the green and digital transitions.

Next steps

Parliament will now have to negotiate the regulation with the Council as part of the agreement on the EU's next long-term budget for 2021-2027.
Read more about social policies
Youth employment: the EU measures to make it work
Getting back to work after a long sickness or injury (video)
European Solidarity Corps: opportunities for young people
Press release: MEPs want the EU to invest more in young people (16 January 2019)

Find out more
Procedure file
Briefing
Fact sheet: what is ESF+?