European Social Fund: fighting poverty and unemployment

The European Social Fund plays a major role in fighting poverty and unemployment in Europe. MEPs want 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 and health.
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
- The EU Health Programme

This would allow 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, health 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 create better measures to implement the European Child Guarantee in order to contribute to children's equal opportunities and 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.

The ESF+ programme would support the digital transformation of health and care services as well as investment in early diagnosis and screening, enhance cooperation between EU countries, for instance on rare and complex diseases.
Next steps

Parliament will now have to negotiate the regulation with the Council during the next parliamentary term.

**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+?