



EUROPEAN COMMISSION RELEASES A NEW COMMUNICATION ON THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS *WHAT'S IN IT FOR EUROPE'S ROMA¹?*

On 22 July 2026, the European Commission published a [communication on the European Pillar of Social Rights](#), **renewing its commitment to Social Europe** ahead of the Social Pillar's 10th anniversary in 2027. The document **reviews progress** in strengthening social rights across the EU and sets out **clear priorities for further action** where more needs to be done. It stresses that the Social Pillar remains the EU's **social shield and compass for fairness**, for a Europe that protects and empowers citizens. ERGO Network has closely engaged with the European Pillar of Social Rights over the past decade, most recently issuing a [comprehensive analysis of the 20 policy principles of the Social Pillar](#), highlighting how **their implementation must meaningfully include Roma rights, realities, and recommendations**, and align with the EU Roma Framework. We have reviewed the Commission communication on the European Pillar of Social Rights in light of these findings, and the results of this exercise are reprised below in this response paper.

¹ The umbrella term "Roma" encompasses diverse groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.), in accordance with terminology used by the [European Commission](#).

ERGO Network **warmly welcomes that the Roma are explicitly mentioned** in the communication on the European Pillar of Social Rights, although **the two references are more symbolic** than meaningful. The first mention occurs under the analysis of the three targets of the Social Pillar Action Plan from 2021, regarding the employment target, where it is stated that “employment rates of specific groups show a mixed picture”, **pointing to data from the Fundamental Rights Agency regarding Roma employment**, among others.

Despite the fact that the same FRA report on the situation of Roma in Europe highlights **significant gaps in education and poverty reduction**, which are the other two targets of the Social Pillar Action Plan, the Roma are mentioned under neither of these two important headings in the communication. Once again, **references to Roma are restricted to employment** and to their potential as untapped labour reserve. This is outrageous, in a context where **70% of Roma (and 77% of Roma children) experience poverty** and social exclusion in the European Union and have some of the worst educational outcomes of all groups.

The second reference is in a very short **paragraph that simply lists all the strategies that make up the Union of Equality**. While we welcome the explicit link between the latter and the Social Pillar, it is far from sufficient to merely mention the existence of the Union of Equality and its strategies, **without building meaningful, fruitful synergies** between the two documents. The communication limits itself to stating that gaps identified will be tackled by implementing the Union of Equality strategies, which is a transparent way to **silos the inclusion of discriminated groups under their respective strategies, instead of mainstreaming** their concerns through the EU’s main socio-economic frameworks.

We further **appreciate the importance given to the fight against discrimination throughout the communication**, including the recognition that “The enforcement of EU anti-discrimination laws and policies also remains central.” While there are **no references to ethnic minorities** anywhere in the communication and only one mention of diversity (once again, in relation to employment and hiring), there are nonetheless **7 mentions of discrimination** in the text, even if, sadly, **none of them is about antigypsyism**.

The most important of these references is the **explicit inclusion of the Racial and Employment Equality Directives**, which we salute, together with the Commission's **calling on Member States to "ensure effective sanctions against discrimination."** However, the rest of the mentions are less impressive, and **focus primarily on the potential for discriminatory action by AI systems**, calling for the implementation of "safeguards against discrimination and other risks to fundamental rights." These are, without a doubt, very important provisions, however **we would have liked to see much more action on human-perpetrated discrimination**, which is rampant and increasing in the EU and in the world, and which AI discrimination is also based on. The Commission also announces the **publication of a study on housing inequality and discrimination in 2027**, which we welcome and to which we are actively contributing.

The communication is **no longer presented as the Second Social Pillar Action Plan** (our italics), as it was initially billed for the past two years. We assume this is because it **does not touch the original 2021 headline targets**, nor does it launch a new overarching framework. Instead, the document mainly assesses implementation progress, reviews ongoing initiatives, and **streamlines priorities within the existing framework**. While the shift is understandable, its original purpose was to **reinforce and reaffirm the Social Pillar and strengthen its reach**, objectives which now appear **somewhat diluted**. Its publication at the end of July, virtually outside the annual EU policy cycle, together with the more modest framing of the initiative, **raises questions about its capacity to generate renewed political momentum** and drive meaningful policy change.

The 16-page document is structured around 4 main dimensions:

1. **Progress since the 2021 Action Plan on the 2030 headline targets**
2. **The 2021 Action Plan: implementation and delivery**
3. **Strengthening the implementation of the Pillar**, with three important subsections on *the cost of living and affordability; Artificial Intelligence – the future of work and shared prosperity; and inequalities, fairness and equal opportunities*.
4. **Making social rights a reality for all**, with two subsections on *simplification, implementation and enforcement; and coordination, funding, and monitoring for social and employment priorities*.

We salute statements such as “**The European Pillar of Social Rights is social Europe’s defining framework**”, “Europe [...] seeks to **lead the way globally in solidarity, equality, and people’s well-being**”, and “The Pillar and its principles **remain as relevant as ever – if not more so**” (our bold). These are welcome commitments at a time when competitiveness and investment in security and defence dominate the political discourse. As we understand it, the communication is meant to **strengthen what exists** in terms of the Social Pillar commitments of 2021, as well as complement it with some **new actions in additional targeted areas**.

In its first section, the communication **takes stock of progress on the three headline targets of 2021**, noting that we are **on course to reach the employment target** (76.1% employment rate against a target of 78%), but we **lag behind on skills** (only 39.5% participation in adult training against a target of 60%) **and on poverty reduction** (only -3.5 million people in poverty against a target of -15 million). Despite being the only target on track, only progress on labour market participation receives an additional paragraph of text in this section. Nonetheless, we welcome that the narrative is **not just one of mere activation, but also considers job quality**, in which context the upcoming Quality Jobs Act is mentioned as a proposed Action. Nothing further is said about poverty reduction in the section itself, but the **EU Anti-Poverty Strategy is referenced in the Actions**. Regarding the skills target, nothing further is mentioned and no Action is proposed.

The second section, dedicated to the implementation of the 2021 Social Pillar Action Plan, is **remarkably short and devoid of meaningful content**. It recalls the Porto Social Summit, the 2024 La Hulpe Declaration and the 2025 Pact for European Social Dialogue, and notes that the Action Plan’s final milestone was its own review, which indicated tangible progress in implementing the 75 actions, but also persistent gaps and a need to accelerate delivery.

The third section is, arguably, the heart and soul of the document, and is dedicated to **three identified “pressure points which require urgent attention”** (our bold), namely the **cost of living** and affordability; **Artificial Intelligence** – the future of work and shared prosperity; and **inequalities**, fairness and equal opportunities. Each of these receives its dedicated subsection.

The subsection dedicated to **affordability and the rising cost of living** is of course a positive development, given that over 70% of Europe's Roma (including 77% of children) experience poverty and social exclusion. However, it **fails to point in any way to the free market and unchecked company profits**, instead reverting to the old activation approach. In this context, however, we **welcome references to supporting those facing complex barriers**, including through Public Employment Services (though it could have been more supportive of the latter) and to the **quality of jobs, including through adequate wages**. We additionally appreciate comprehensive references to **housing, food poverty, transport poverty, and access to essential services including care**, with a focus on their affordability. The Actions of this section mention EU action on activation for persons facing multiple barriers, the Affordable Housing Act, the European Care Deal, and a monitoring report of the Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages.

The subsection on **Artificial Intelligence** is focussed on reaping the opportunities provided while safeguarding against the intrinsic risks. It is positive that the text reaffirms a focus on "**upskilling and reskilling, supporting labour market transitions** through effective activation policies and **adequate income protection**." For vulnerable workers, these are essential. However, in the section on the supportive role of AI in access to services, **insufficient attention is paid to the continued need for human involvement** and oversight in sensitive, compassionate sectors such as healthcare, social care, long-term care etc. We warmly welcome the extensive paragraph dealing with **AI bias and ensuring that AI does not reproduce discrimination**, which is very much needed in a world where machines learn from humans.

The Actions foreseen under this section include the creation of **a High-level Experts Group to examine the potential impact of AI on the labour market**, and potential activities to support the responsible adoption of Algorithmic Management tools and practices in workplaces. It is regrettable, and quite shocking, to note that the proposed Actions for this subsection remain **confined to employment and the labour market**, despite the narrative also recognising the broader societal impact of AI, including opportunities for services and risks of discrimination.

The third and final subsection, dedicated to **inequalities, fairness, and equal opportunities**, is very timely, as the European Union has avoided confronting persistent inequalities for more than a decade. It is refreshing that the text acknowledges **wealth concentration and income polarisation** as negative trends, as well as **regional, territorial and environmental disparities** which deepen these inequalities. In terms of the latter, we particularly appreciate the recognition that “socio-economically disadvantaged, **discriminated and marginalised groups are often more exposed to pollution and environmental degradation**, and to the negative effects of climate change” (our bold). We further appreciate that the Commission will publish a study on distributional impact assessments in the Member States in 2027 and will further promote their use.

The subsection mentions discrimination, but largely **relegates it to the implementation of the Union of Equality** and its strategies, which, as argued before, is insufficient. Alongside the Racial and Employment Equality Directives, we note the mention of the **Pay Transparency Directive** which, beyond the gender pay gap, should also tackle **the ethnic pay gap**. We welcome the strong emphasis on **reducing inequalities across the lifecycle**, including through affordable and accessible healthcare, better territorial access to essential services, early intervention to prevent the accumulation and intergenerational transmission of disadvantage, and targeted social investment. We particularly appreciate the focus on **health inequalities and workforce shortages**, as well as the strengthened **European Child Guarantee**, the new target on improving the basic skills of disadvantaged learners, and the broader commitment to **place-based, person-centred policies** that support social mobility, intergenerational fairness and adequate pensions.

The Actions in this subsection are the most comprehensive of the three and include **some very positive initiatives**, such as monitoring of socio-economic inequalities and social mobility, supporting inclusive hiring practices, an upcoming Education Package, focused primarily on Vocational Education and Training (VET), and the upcoming Youth Strategy. In particular, we want to highlight the **right to stay initiative**, which should entail extensive **investment at the local level in services and jobs** close to communities, so that people can find what they need, including employment, where they live.

The fourth section of the document deals primarily with the **implementation of the Social Pillar and the additional proposed actions**. A recurrent central theme of this process is ‘simplification’, which seems to be a European Commission mantra in recent times. While streamlining can be a positive endeavour if it improves outcomes, we caution that **simplification of processes must never lead to a reduction in provision (quantity or quality), entitlements, or rights**. It is slightly unnerving that the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy only gets mentioned in passing, as does the Child Guarantee, whereas **employment instruments (such as the Fair Labour Mobility Package or the Quality Jobs Act) are given much more prominence**.

In terms of governance, the **input of social partners is deemed “essential”** in the design and implementation of policies (our bold), while **civil society organisations are only recognised as “key partners”**, their input limited to “amplifying marginalised voices, monitoring implementation gaps, and fostering grassroots innovation.” While these are crucial, this kind of language creates a **clear hierarchy of impact** and **falls short of elevating civil dialogue** on the same footing as social dialogue. Encouragingly, the communication confirms the **firm embedding of the Social Pillar within the European Semester**, including through the **Social Convergence Framework**, and urges Member States to **maximise funding opportunities** under the RRF, ESF+, ERDF, the Social Climate Fund, Erasmus+ and the new National and Regional Partnership Plans.

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ERGO Network welcomes the call for **better implementation of the existing Social Pillar measures and targets** included in the communication, as well as most of the additional actions proposed in it. We stand ready, together with our national members, to support all efforts that **ensure that the delivery of these actions also reaches Europe’s Roma**, so that the Social Pillar remains the EU’s social compass, guaranteeing wellbeing for all.

*For more information on ERGO Network’s work on the European Pillar of Social Rights, please contact Senior Policy Adviser **Amana Ferro** – a.ferro@ergonetwork.org*

* While artificial intelligence-based tools may have been used to support the preparation of this publication, the content, analysis, and final outputs were developed, reviewed, and approved exclusively by human authors.