The European Social Fund Plus post-2027

2024/2077(INI) - 11/03/2025 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 432 votes to 155, with 82 abstentions, a resolution on the European Social Fund Plus post-2027.

Principles of the ESF+ post-2027

Parliament insisted that the ESF+ must continue to be the key and primary instrument for supporting the Member States, regions, local communities and people in strengthening the social dimension of the Union and in pursuing socio-economic development that leaves no one behind.

According to Members, the objectives of the ESF+ should be to:

- address **social challenges** such as the consequences of climate change and digitalisation, contribute to tackling and adapting to these challenges, while combating issues like rising living costs and wage pressures;

- promote **long-term investment and growth** with a focus on social and territorial cohesion;

- enhance **upward social convergence**, especially for the most deprived people, and invest in human capital, employment, skills development and social inclusion, while boosting entrepreneurship and social innovation, investing in children, addressing the digital and green transition, demographic challenges and regions impacted by crises, among others Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine;

- improve **employment opportunities**, facilitate fair labour mobility, promote quality job creation, ensure decent working conditions, and increase employment participation rates, especially for women, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups;

- achieve **social inclusion**, high employment levels with sustainable quality jobs, adequate wages, decent working conditions, fair social security systems, and access to education, vocational training, and lifelong learning for all;

- continue operating under the **shared management governance** model;

- invest in tackling **persistent social challenges** and primarily address structural social and economic issues.

Parliament advocated a **robust, strengthened, and independent ESF+,** with significantly increased public support for instruments in Member States. It emphasised that achieving ESF+ objectives post-2027 will require a substantial and justified increase in the ESF+ budget within the 2028-2034 financial framework.

The Commission is urged to:

- provide increased, specific, and properly allocated funding to achieve ESF+ objectives and those of the European Pillar of Social Rights;

- protect the budget allocation of the ESF+ so that it can be used for its main objectives and beneficiaries and to propose a **financial reserve instrument** that enables the EU to respond rapidly and in a flexible manner to social emergencies and crisis situations.

Objectives, priorities and budget

Parliament underlined that horizontal principles, such as gender equality, anti-discrimination based on sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, nationality, or racial or ethnic origin, and freedom of movement, should be integral to the ESF+.

The ESF+ should target **disadvantaged people** in our societies and invest in projects targeting women's employment and the social and economic inclusion of **women**. Members called on the Commission to include in the specific objectives of the ESF+ the promotion of the just transition, ending homelessness, the promotion of social enterprises in the social economy and the socio-economic integration of people in vulnerable situations, including migrants, young people, older people and those living in areas impacted by demographic decline and persons with disabilities or chronic diseases, as well as those coming back to the labour market after a longer absence.

Parliament insisted, furthermore, that all the Member States should allocate **at least 5 %** of their ESF+ resources to **tackling child poverty** and those Member States with a rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion above the EU average should allocate a higher amount to tackle the problem more effectively.

The Commission is urged to raise the earmarking for social inclusion beyond the current 25 % and the earmarking for food aid and basic material assistance for the most deprived persons to **5 %**, in response to rising **living and food costs**. Members also called for the strengthening of efforts to support the implementation of the Youth Guarantee: the Commission is urged to propose an increased earmarking beyond the current 12.5 % of their ESF+ resources for all Member States to support the targeted actions and structural reforms to support quality **youth employment**, vocational education and training, in particular traineeships and apprenticeships.

The ESF+ should also aim to: (i) provide a healthy and well-adapted working environment in order to respond to health risks related to changing forms of work, and the needs of the ageing workforce; (ii) promote the effective implementation of the **European care strategy** in all Member States by investing in quality community-based and home care services and infrastructure. The Commission is further encouraged to allocate sufficient financial resources to capacity building, enabling social partners to play a relevant role in their areas of expertise.

Functioning of the Fund

Parliament called on the Member States to ensure coordination between regional and local authorities and organisations and their involvement in projects financed from national budgets. It insisted on the need to maintain the partnership approach of the current ESF+.

Members called for the **reduction of the administrative burden** and bureaucracy, notably by simplifying the application processes for accessing funds and leveraging digitalisation. They advocate that the rules governing the ESF+ should allow public money to be allocated only to those employers that respect workers' rights and the applicable rules on working conditions.

Lastly, increased efforts should be made to ensure that organisations and citizens are aware of all the opportunities the ESF+ can provide.