Open letter: Investing in people and regions in the next EU budget

To: The Heads of State or Government of the European Union

Cc: António Costa, President of the European Council; Micheál Martin, Taoiseach (Irish Presidency of the Council)

Brussels, 15 October 2026

Dear Heads of State or Government,

Ahead of the European Council of 15–16 October, we write on behalf of the EUFunds4Social Coalition, which brings together European networks and national organisations including NGOs, social services, public health and service providers, lifelong learning and social economy actors, workers, and social partners.

We welcome the Irish Presidency's work to move the negotiations on the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework forward, and we recognise the difficult context in which you are preparing the next EU budget; however, Europe must deliver on the Treaty objective of economic, social and territorial cohesion.

We therefore reiterate our call on you to support strong EU social funding and in particular:

1. **Agree an overall budget in line with the European Parliament's position** of 1.27% of EU GNI.
2. **Secure adequate resources for Heading 1**, and place NextGenerationEU repayments outside the ceilings, as the European Parliament proposes.
3. **Preserve what the ESF and the ERDF guarantee**: stand-alone funds with €124bn for the ESF, as the European Parliament proposes, or at the very least dedicated, ring-fenced envelopes with their own objectives in every national plan, at least at current levels adjusted for inflation.
4. **Raise the social spending target from 14% to at least 25% of the National and Regional Partnership Plans,** to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights and respond to today's pressing social challenges, and introduce realistic co-financing rates.
5. **Earmark direct EU funding for social innovation**, capacity building and transnational cooperation of civil society organisations and social partners, and social economy actors within the EU Facility.

The Negotiating Box of 10 October proposes a smaller budget than both the Cyprus Presidency and the Commission and remains well below the level the European Parliament considers necessary. Heading 1, which carries cohesion and social investment, is also reduced, while it still has to absorb the repayment of NextGenerationEU. We welcome that the Presidency keeps the cohesion envelope at the level of the Cyprus box, slightly above the Commission proposal. However, this is roughly the same amount in cash terms as in 2021–2027, which means a reduction in real terms once inflation is taken into account. The box confirms a single fund delivered through National and Regional Partnership Plans, with a 14% social spending

target and part of the support offered as loans, while the EU Facility is reduced and its direct EU funding for social innovation has still no dedicated allocation.

Social and territorial investment is key to helping Europe respond to the major challenges of our time: rising inequality and polarisation, underinvestment in public services, the urban–rural divide, demographic ageing, skills shortages and a high need of upskilling and reskilling, high youth unemployment and inactivity, and the digital and climate transitions. The European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, both grounded in the EU Treaties, support quality employment, foster social cohesion and protect rights in every region of the Union. In doing so, they strengthen the foundations of our societies, our democracy and Europe's competitiveness.

We want an EU budget that continues to invest in people, communities, quality services and the social economy, with strong social funding and effective guarantees for inclusion. That means protecting people-centred support and minimum spending for social inclusion, child poverty, homelessness, health, youth employment and material deprivation, and keeping enabling conditions linked to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the European Pillar of Social Rights. It also means giving social partners, civil society and people with lived experience a real role in the design, governance and monitoring of programmes, and keeping EU funding accessible to not-for-profit organisations, for example by exempting them from co-financing requirements when they support groups facing heightened vulnerabilities or pursue social inclusion priorities, in the NRPP Regulation. This is how Europe's social market economy can remain a source of resilience in an uncertain world.

We stand ready to work with you, the Irish Presidency and the European Parliament towards an EU budget that delivers for people and regions.

Yours sincerely,

The EUFunds4Social Coalition

Drafted by the EUFunds4Social Coordinating Committee:

Disability Support Europe

European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU)

Lifelong Learning Platform

Social Economy Europe

Social Platform

Social Services Europe (SSE)

Caritas Europa

European Network of Work Integration Social Enterprises (ENSIE)

Eurodiaconia

Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)

Co-signed by the following European networks:

Association de Recherche et de Formation sur l'Insertion en Europe (ARFIE)

Association for the Advancement of Assistive Technology in Europe (AAATE)

Autism-Europe

CEC – Acting for social inclusion

COFACE Families Europe

Confederation of European Firms, Employment Initiatives and Cooperatives (CEFEC)

Eurochild

EuroHealthNet

European Ageing Network

European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)

European Confederation of Industrial and Service Cooperatives (CECOP)

European Disability Forum (EDF)

European Federation of Ethical and Alternative Banks and Financiers (FEBEA)

European Federation of Hard of Hearing People (EFHOH)

European Food Banks Federation (FEBA)

European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR)

European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network (ERGO Network)

European Youth Forum

Impact Europe

Lumos

Mental Health Europe

Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)

Red Cross EU Office

Réseau Européen des Villes et Régions de l'Économie Sociale (REVES)

Reuse and Recycling European Union Social Enterprises (RREUSE)

SOLIDAR

YES Forum

National organisations

Albania

Roma Active Albania

Austria

arbeit plus – Soziale Unternehmen Österreich

CONCORDIA Social Projects

Dachverband berufliche Inklusion Austria (dabei-austria)

Belgium

ConcertES – Concertation des Organisations représentatives de l'Economie sociale

Konekt vzw

UNIPSO

Bulgaria

Integro Association

Croatia

Association of Persons with Disabilities of the City of Opatija

Croatian Association of Societies of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

Croatian Union of Associations of Persons with Disabilities – SOIH

Udruga osoba s intelektualnim teškoćama Istre

Czech Republic

NGO RomanoNet

France

ESS France – Chambre française de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire

Mutualité Française

Germany

ESTIA Agios Nikolaos Public Benefit Foundation

Amaro Drom e.V.

Greece

ALMA Panhellenic Association of Adapted Activities

Caritas Hellas

Center for Special Education of Children & Adults with Disabilities (K.E.E.P.E.A.) "Horizons"

Cerebral Palsy Greece / Open Door

Child and Adolescent's Center

ELEPAP Rehabilitation for the Disabled

Ergastiri Eidikis Agogis MARGARITA

ESTIA Agios Nikolaos Public Benefit Organisation

Organization for the Protection of Persons with Autism – Pervasive Developmental Disorders of Kastoria

Panhellenic Confederation of Social and Solidarity Economy Unions

PLOES EPSYME – Psychosocial Research Organisation

Society of Social Psychiatry P. Sakellaropoulos

THE NET

Theotokos Foundation

Ireland

Disability Federation of Ireland

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre

Social Justice Ireland

Italy

AIAS Bologna ETS

AIAS Nazionale ETS

Alleanza delle Cooperative Italiane

Anffas Nazionale

ANGSA

Anziani e non solo soc. coop. soc.

Associazione Generale Cooperative Italiane (AGCI)

Associazione Scuola Viva ETS

Confederazione Cooperative Italiane

Consorzio Nazionale Idee In Rete

Cooperativa sociale CEFF Francesco Bandini

Fondazione Paideia

GLIC – Rete Italiana dei Centri di Consulenza su Ausili Tecnologici

Legacoop

UCRI – Unione delle Comunità Romanes in Italia

Latvia

Latvian German Association (Latvijas Vācu savienība)

Lithuania

Public Institution Roma Community Centre Vilnius (RVC)

Moldova

Keystone Moldova

Roma Women Platform ROMNI

Netherlands

SOFT tulip

Poland

Fundacja Imago

Fundacja Jaw Dikh

National Auditing Union of Cooperatives (NAUWC)

Portugal

Humanitas – Federação Portuguesa para a Deficiência Mental

Romania

AFIN – ADV Group – SFA

Asociatia Curtea Culorilor

DUTY SOCIAL

Emozionecakes by Florina Delia

OPHORI Group

RISE Romania – Romanian Network of Social Economy

Slovakia

Caritas Slovakia

Roma Advocacy and Research Centre

TENENET NGO

Spain

AEMED – Asociación Empresarial de Entidades Madrileñas en Defensa de Colectivos con Especiales Dificultades

Associació Alba

Caritas Spain

Confederación Española de Cooperativas de Trabajo Asociado (COCETA)

Confederación Galega de Persoas con Discapacidade (COGAMI)

Federación Autismo Galicia

Fundació Support-Girona

Fundación Secretariado Gitano

Grupo Social ONCE

IN-RED – Galician Business Association of Non-profit Entities for Disability

Red Acoge

Spanish Confederation of Social Economy Enterprises (CEPES)

Turkey

Zero Discrimination Association

Ukraine

Odesa Regional Society of Roma Culture “Romani Zbora”