

# 11 AVENUES. 11 PROPOSALS

## SOCIAL EUROPE

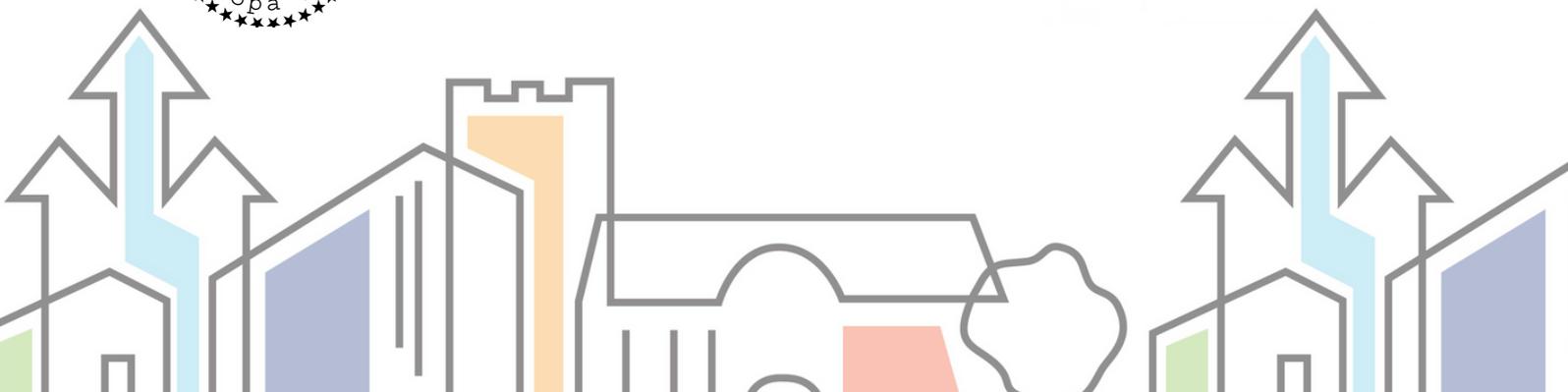
With the adoption of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027 accompanied by a unique Recovery Plan conditions have been created to develop a more just, resilient and sustainable Europe. A robust and new cohesion policy is one of the cornerstones of this ambitious endeavour.

The 'Meet the Citizen 2.0' project of the European House covers 5 countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CZ, HU, HR, RO and SK); all of them are massive beneficiaries of the EU Cohesion Fund. Our 11 working papers indicate possible avenues how to use effectively these financial instruments in remote, less developed areas of these countries highlighting not only the importance of EU assistance in daily life of citizens but simultaneously contributing to reducing the still significant gap between the citizens and the EU institutions.

Each paper of ours offers not only a brief analyses of an important aspect of cohesion policy in Central and Eastern Europe but proposes also practical solutions for the involvement of citizens, their organisations and other stakeholders in practising partnership for making cohesion policy a success.



Co-funded by  
the European Union



A new EU framework has been set up to support different actions aimed at achieving a more social Europe. Employment, education, social protection, inclusion, and equal access to health care are core social domains, particularly in the light of the devastating effect of the Covid pandemic. Actions should be taken with a greater involvement of civil society actors. A more efficient civil contribution in the fields mentioned above should be linked to local, regional, cross-border and macro-regional levels of cooperation.

Civil society actors need to continue to take actions in the complex social domain of the European Union. Therefore, it is necessary to address the following questions:

What is “Social Europe”? The European Union has policies to promote employment, improve citizens’ living and working conditions, provide them adequate social protection and combat social exclusion in its Member States. Wages and employment, health care, pension matters, family support and education are core domains of social policies that belong to the Member States. This means that the EU does not have power to intervene but ensures legal protection, funding and coordination of all measures taken by the member countries in those fields.

The EU has also created the European Pillar of Social Rights that is about delivering new and more effective rights for citizens. The Pillar includes 20 key principles that are grouped in three categories: equal opportunities and access to the labour market; fair working conditions; social protection and inclusion.

How can Social Europe be linked to the EU Cohesion Policy and transboundary cooperation? The new Cohesion Policy for 2021-2027 set as a priority a more Social Europe. To achieve this, the Cohesion Policy has included the above issues of the European Pillar of Social Rights in its funding system. The Cohesion Policy will finance activities connected to quality employment, education, training, social inclusion, and equal access to health care. Through support for actions in these policy issue areas, the Cohesion Policy can strengthen social and economic cohesion in the member states and reduce inequalities between the rural and urban areas. In this context, a big number of civil society actors in the Central European region have implemented projects funded by the European Social Fund with the aim of promoting equal opportunities in the employment sector, strengthening social protection and inclusion of vulnerable groups.



The next generation of civil projects to be funded from the Cohesion Policy in the member states needs to activate the 20 key principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights. According to these principles, future projects with civil ownership should contribute to innovative and viable solutions in a variety of social domains and thus strengthen the link between the main objectives of the Cohesion Policy and the rights of citizens in fields such as education, training and life-long learning, gender equality, equal opportunities, employment, health care, support to children, inclusion of people with disabilities, housing and assistance for the homeless.

The Cohesion Policy places its main objectives also on a transboundary level, namely, to support transboundary actions such as Interreg, macro-regional cooperation as well as the relevant parts of the LIFE, Horizon and Erasmus+ programmes where citizens and their organisations have the possibility to make a further contribution to strengthening the social pillar of Europe. According to this, the new Interreg programme described challenges and needs of the Central European region in social issues as follows.

- Access to education, training, and lifelong learning: Education and training are of vital importance for the rural areas and less developed regions in Central Europe.
- At the same time, training and life-long learning will have an even more relevant role in the future. Digitalisation and automation are expected to lead to laying off workers in several sectors. This can put pressure also on those people who are employed in the rural areas and most notably in the less prosperous regions and induce them to join training or life-long learning activities. Therefore, there is a compelling need in the Central European region to encourage more people to take part in training, formal and non-formal education activities;
- Reducing long-term and youth unemployment: Employment is an important precondition for individuals to cover their needs and become members of the society. High employment rates contribute to less poverty and reduce social exclusion;
- Fighting poverty and social exclusion: The risk of poverty and social exclusion is still a significant problem in most regions and countries in Central Europe. The Wschodni region in Poland, the Východné Slovensko region in Slovakia, certain regions in Hungary and Croatia, face higher risk of poverty and social exclusion. An overall urban-rural comparison reveals further interesting trends. The risk of poverty and social exclusion is higher in rural areas in



Croatia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. In Slovenia and the Czech Republic, the rates are more balanced across the urban and rural areas. Combating social exclusion has become one of the most important goals of achieving a more social Europe and is a vital need for Central Europe as well.

To tackle complex challenges in the social domains mentioned above, complex approaches need to be adopted as well. Civil society actors in Central Europe should foster social innovation and generate new ideas and concepts for collaborations in social policy domains. The exploration of local knowledge and meeting local interests and needs should be a core part of the new actions with civil ownership.

## Follow-up, proposals

Civil actors who intend to join new initiatives and projects aimed at strengthening the pillar of Social Europe shall collect best practices in social policy domains financed by EU programmes in Central Europe. Best

practices are of significant importance in fields such as education, training and life-long learning, gender equality, equal opportunities, youth employment, health care, support to children, inclusion of people with disabilities, housing and assistance for the homeless. These types of best practice can help to activate the key principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights. For this aim, a common civil platform should be established at European level. The platform would evaluate those best practices and turn them into transboundary actions by using new approaches including tools of social innovation.

© European House Budapest, 2021

Published in the frame of the 'Meet the Citizen 2.0' project.

Contents of the publication do not necessarily reflect the opinion or the position of the European Commission.

The project is co-funded by the European Commission.

February 2021



Co-funded by  
the European Union

