Blue Book draft
September 2024

Content

1. Green transition

Programme area objective

Acceleration of the green transition towards a more sustainable society.

Rationale for the support

The triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss demands an acceleration of the green transition. This programme area supports the transition towards climate neutrality in 2050 through the implementation of the EU's Green Deal and its legal obligations.

The green transition gives Europe an opportunity to build resilience. Societies must adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. Further efforts are needed to ensure access to affordable, reliable, and clean energy. Energy use must become more efficient, and it is crucial to secure more sustainable supplies of raw materials to scale up clean technologies.

Pollution and unsustainable consumption lead to environmental degradation that damages ecosystems and increases biodiversity loss. To strengthen resilience across sectors, the resource-intensive linear economy must evolve into a resource-efficient circular economy. Efforts are needed to protect and restore nature, and to reverse the degradation of ecosystems.

Some groups and areas suffer disproportionately from the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. The geographical dimension of the green transition must therefore be addressed.

The green transition can significantly impact individuals and societies. Equality and non-discrimination are cross-cutting principles that shall be addressed throughout the programme area.

Areas of support

- Clean energy transition.
- Air, water, and soil pollution.
- Energy security.
- Sustainable and smart mobility.
- Circular economy.
- Industrial carbon management.
- Natural sinks for absorbing carbon.
- Climate change adaptation.
- Biodiversity and ecosystems.
- Green governance.

How the objective will be addressed

The programme area aims to strengthen all levels of government to enable implementation of and compliance with the EU's Green Deal. This may include regulatory processes, management systems, and the use of digital solutions, as well as access to and sharing of data. Knowledge sharing, awareness raising, and capacity building will contribute to achieving the programme area objective.

The programme area supports applications of nature-based solutions, low-carbon technologies, and environmentally friendly practices. The funding is suitable for smaller infrastructure projects as well as projects that may lead to larger investments, such as consequence analyses, feasibility studies, or testing of new concepts and pilots. The funding may cover areas where the private sector sees limited potential benefits from investments.

The scope of each programme will be defined by selecting areas of support. Unless otherwise agreed, and to avoid complex programme design, the scope shall be limited to a restricted number of areas of support.

Key actors and beneficiaries

Citizens, the public sector, and the private sector must mobilise and work together to address the programme area objective. Public institutions, all levels of government, and private entities are the main actors. Civil society organisations, entities from the Donor States, and international organisations can be valuable partners. The supported measures will benefit the general public.

The programme area will promote social inclusion, gender equality and youth empowerment. It will target the people most affected by climate change and environmental degradation.

Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).

2. Green business and innovation

Programme area objective

Green value creation and competitiveness.

Rationale for the support

This programme area contributes to the EU's climate goals in line with the European Green Deal and the EU Industrial Policy.

A green and competitive private sector is key to achieving the transition to a low-carbon, circular, and climate-resilient economy, as well as to reaching the EU's goal to be the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

The European Green Deal is Europe's growth strategy. Private enterprises must innovate net-zero technology and shift to resource-efficient circular practices and clean energy sources. They should seize green market opportunities for growth and adapt their business models to meet stricter environmental rules and standards. These opportunities are essential for gaining a competitive edge, and companies that succeed will have an advantage in the net-zero economy.

The private sector has the potential to drive the green and digital transitions by developing and bringing innovative solutions to the market. However, the level of innovation varies across Europe. Private enterprises in contexts with low levels of innovation are more at risk of falling behind in the green and digital transitions. They are also less successful in accessing EU funding. Enhancing their competitiveness will attract private investments, create better jobs, and drive sustainable economic growth.

While it is primarily the responsibility of private enterprises to exploit market opportunities in the green transition, public funding is needed to stimulate and accelerate the transition, as it reduces risks and may unlock private capital.

It is also crucial to promote gender balance in the green economy and support female entrepreneurs in participating in the green and digital transitions.

Areas of support

- Development of green or blue technologies, products, processes, and services and bringing them to market.
- Investments in, and applications of green or blue technologies, products, processes, and services.
- Promotion of start-ups and female entrepreneurs in the blue or green economy.
- Improving business skills and fostering entrepreneurial mindsets.

How the objective will be addressed

This programme area will contribute to harnessing the growth potential from the European Green Deal for land-based and maritime enterprises to promote a sustainable green and blue economy.

It will foster value creation through environmentally sustainable practices, contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and ensuring a transition to a resource-efficient circular economy.

To promote enabling and emerging technologies, private enterprises will be supported in developing innovative technology, products, services, and processes, and in preparing to bring these innovations to market. Investments in, and applications of innovative technologies and solutions will also be supported.

Start-ups and female entrepreneurs will be supported in participating in the green and blue economy, including through mentoring and capacity building.

Improving the knowledge, skills, and capacity of private enterprises will also be a priority. This may include support for innovation ecosystems, including business cluster cooperation, incubator and accelerator services, or other activities that can increase innovation and sustainable growth in the business sector. Feasibility studies, market analysis to prepare new investments, and upscaling are also included. Additionally, the programme area aims to contribute to sustainable value chains.

Key actors and beneficiaries

Private enterprises are the main actors and beneficiaries of this programme area.

Programme area specifics

- The programme area shall allocate at least 60% of funding to small and medium-sized enterprises (as per the EU definition).
- Small and medium-sized enterprises, and large enterprises with less than 25% public ownership shall be the main recipients of support under this programme area.
- When necessary to fulfil the programme objectives, non-commercial and non-profit organisations (including clusters and business associations) and public entities can apply for support for "soft measure" activities.
- Measures to promote digitalisation and gender equality shall be included in all programmes.
- Projects with bilateral partnerships shall be given priority.

3. Research and innovation

Programme area objective

Enhanced excellence in research and research-based innovation, strengthening the foundations for the green transition, democracy, rule of law, human rights, social inclusion, and resilience.

Rationale for the support

Research and innovation strengthen value creation and competitiveness, and build knowledge and capacity to solve societal challenges and support democratic values and principles. They play a crucial role in addressing systemic and persistent challenges that burden citizens and communities in Europe, such as climate change and environmental degradation, security threats, health issues, transformations in working life and the labour market, rapid technological change, and disinformation.

Research and innovation are key to strengthening the understanding of these complex societal challenges and helping address them through the development of innovative responses that further the green transition and enhance resilience, social cohesion, inclusive growth, green jobs, democracy, and active citizen participation, as well as the well-being of citizens. Furthermore, research and innovation contribute to addressing the gap in research and development in Europe.

Areas of support

- Cooperation on research and research-based innovation.
- Informing evidence-based policymaking on societal challenges.
- Engaging citizens in science.
- Overcoming barriers for the career progression of women and early-stage researchers.
- Strengthening the research and innovation ecosystem, including research administration.

How the objective will be addressed

The programme area will build research and innovation capacity in the Beneficiary States, increasing their participation in the EU framework programme for research and innovation and contributing to the ambition of creating a single market for research, innovation, and technology in Europe (the European Research Area).

It will support basic and applied research focusing on the green transition, climate, energy, and the environment; the digital transition; a competitive and sustainable economy; health; and resilient, socially inclusive, and democratic societies.

Research within the social sciences and humanities, as well as cooperation across disciplines and sectors, is encouraged. The programme area will foster the integration of research, education, and innovation.

Support for researchers' careers, especially those of women and young researchers, will align with the new Charter for Researchers.

The engagement of citizens, including NGOs, in research and research-related activities will be encouraged to amplify the impact of research and innovation. This will strengthen the understanding of democracy based on scientific knowledge. By contributing to evidence-

based decision-making and policy development, the programme area will benefit policymakers, stakeholders, and society at large.

Emphasis will be placed on strengthening the research and innovation ecosystem, e.g. by supporting advances towards open science and enhancing the skills of research administrators.

Fundamental to this programme area is the safeguarding of core principles and values in research and innovation, such as research ethics, integrity, and open science, in line with the Pact for research and innovation in Europe and the Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research. This encompasses ethical and human rights dimensions of new technology, including artificial intelligence.

Key actors and beneficiaries

Researchers in the public and private sectors are the main actors in achieving the programme area objective. The engagement of universities, research organisations, private companies, citizens, and policymakers is also vital. The public at large is the end beneficiary.

Programme area specifics

- Partnerships between Donor State and Beneficiary State entities are mandatory in all research projects unless otherwise stipulated in the programme agreement.
- The project selection and management under the programme area will be aligned with the principles of the EU framework programme for research and innovation as far as possible. This includes provisions on gender equality, non-discrimination, and open science.
- The minimum duration of all research projects will be 36 months unless otherwise stipulated in the programme agreement.

4. Education, training, and youth employment

Programme area objective

Enhanced quality, access and relevance of education and training for the digital and green transitions, human rights, democracy, and youth employment.

Rationale for the support

Quality education and training are fundamental to the well-being of individuals and their personal development and lay the foundation for active citizenship and a democratic culture. Access to education, training and apprenticeships adapted to young people's needs is vital for a successful transition from school to work, while lifelong access to education and training supports employability and professional development.

Quality education, training, reskilling, and upskilling are crucial to achieving the green and digital transitions, addressing labour shortages, bridging the skills gap, and adapting to the ongoing transformation of jobs due to technological development. Quality education and training fuel research, innovation, and social and economic development, as well as competitiveness.

Areas of support

- Innovative approaches in education and training.
- Cooperation between education and training institutions and the labour market for enhanced youth employability.
- Professional development of teachers, educators, trainers, school leaders and administrative staff in education.

How the objective will be addressed

The programme area aims to strengthen the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that learners need to participate in the green transition, promoting increased understanding of global societal challenges and their interconnectedness.

Enhanced digital capacity will be supported, along with the strengthening of transversal skills that enhance civic competences and democratic participation such as creativity, critical thinking, and media and digital literacy. Empowering learners to build a universal culture of human rights will be prioritized.

Emphasis will be placed on increased cooperation with the labour market to enhance the relevance of education and training.

The programme area will build the capacity of teachers, trainers, school leaders and administrative staff at all levels of education.

Programmes may address both formal and non-formal education and training and may include interventions at institutional as well as national levels. Cross-sectorial collaboration is encouraged.

Rather than addressing the areas of support broadly, each programme will focus on specific challenges or gaps to make an impact on institutional capacity and learning communities in the Beneficiary and Donor States.

An important aim is to strengthen the participation of the Beneficiary States in the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, and in the European Education Area, as well as achieving synergies with European funding.

Key actors and beneficiaries

The main actors are educational institutions, school providers, and institutions involved in decision-making and public policy at all levels, addressing both formal and non-formal education and training.

Partnership with industry and organisations in both the private and public sectors, including international organisations, is encouraged. The end beneficiaries are students, teachers, and other staff at all levels of education and training, as well as enterprises and employees. Specific attention will be given to persons in vulnerable situations.

Programme area specifics

- Partnerships between Donor State and Beneficiary State entities are mandatory in all projects unless otherwise stipulated in the programme agreement.
- All programmes shall promote inclusion and diversity, including gender equality.
- The practice of financing and management under the programme area will be aligned with the principles of the EU framework programme for education, training, youth, and sport as far as possible.
- Student and staff mobility and exchanges may be embedded in institutional cooperation projects. Individual mobility outside the context of institutional cooperation will not be supported.

5. Culture

Programme area objective

Increased participation, sustainability, and diversity in culture and cultural heritage.

Rationale for the support

Culture is a global public good with intrinsic value and a driver for sustainable development. Arts and culture are vital components of the democratic infrastructure as venues for freedom of expression and critical reflection, fostering dialogue and respect for diversity. Cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is a valuable source of knowledge and resilience, contributing to the vitality and shared prosperity of local communities.

Broad participation in cultural life enhances social cohesion and contributes to informed, engaged and democratic societies that are more resistant to threats from disinformation, hate speech and extremism. Inequalities in cultural participation and restrictions on artistic expression undermine these benefits and need to be addressed.

Increasing threats from climate change call for adaptation measures and for the safeguarding of cultural heritage and traditional knowledge. At the same time, culture and cultural heritage can be drivers of the green transition through raising awareness, increasing knowledge, and contributing to reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

With the right skills in place, the digital transition offers new prospects for accessibility and outreach and serves to strengthen the management and revitalisation of cultural heritage.

Culture and cultural heritage offer a wide scope of opportunities for bilateral cooperation.

Areas of support

- Cultural and artistic creation and cooperation, capacity building, outreach, and exchange, with specific regard to cultural diversity.
- Sustainable restoration, revitalisation, and management of cultural heritage.

How the objective will be addressed

The programme area will promote freedom of cultural expression through artistic and cultural creation, exchange, and mobility. To increase participation, this will be coupled with support for capacity building and outreach, including through cultural education.

The programme area will support measures that ensure human rights, cultural diversity, and the participation and cultural self-expression of women, minorities, and persons from disadvantaged backgrounds and areas.

It will also support the green and digital transition of the arts and culture sector through capacity building and networking, and through joint cultural programming to reduce emissions.

To create conditions for socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable cultural heritage management, this programme area will support capacity building, research, monitoring, and risk analysis.

Support for the restoration, revitalisation and reuse of cultural heritage monuments, sites and environments will include climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

To improve access to cultural heritage, the programme area will support documentation and accessible presentation, outreach, awareness raising and training, including in traditional craftsmanship, and the use of digital technologies.

The revitalisation of cultural heritage will contribute to sustainable development by enhancing skills and knowledge and generating local revenue. A participatory approach will ensure relevance and the equitable sharing of benefits across the community.

To ensure outreach, inclusive and active participation, and to help pool the competences needed to respond to challenges, the programme area will encourage multi-stakeholder partnerships across sectors and disciplines, involving, among others, the education sector.

Key actors and beneficiaries

Public and private entities and academic institutions in the field of the arts, culture, and cultural heritage, independent cultural actors, and civil society organisations are the main actors.

The end beneficiaries are the general public, with a focus on people with limited access to culture, minorities, and persons from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.
- All programmes shall allocate funds to strengthen the independent cultural sector.

6. Local development, good governance, and inclusion

Programme area objective

More resilient, inclusive, and sustainable communities.

Rationale for the support

Climate change, the green and digital transitions, shifts in the global economy, pressure on democracy, and demographic trends are major interdependent challenges impacting European communities.

European regions are gradually catching up, but many still struggle and are ill-equipped to reap the benefits of the green and digital transitions. Investments and innovation are increasingly concentrated in metropolitan areas and the economic downturn has exacerbated existing economic, social, and territorial disparities. More than a fifth of the EU's population is considered at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with women, immigrants, refugees, Roma, and other disadvantaged groups disproportionately affected.

Local and regional actors manage approximately half of European public investments, including the largest share of climate action investment. Sustainable local and regional development is therefore crucial for national socio-economic development, building resilience, diversity, prosperity, and democracy in a green and digital Europe.

Areas of support

- Local investments in the green transition, climate action, environmental sustainability, social inclusion, and employment, and the digital transition.
- Local institutional development and public governance.
- Local democracy, local and community media, and information integrity and open local government.
- Socio-economic inclusion promoting equality, non-discrimination, diversity, and active participation of disadvantaged communities.
- Networking and policy exchanges between municipalities and with central government.

How the objective will be addressed

Achieving the programme area objective relies on integrated, territorial, socio-economic development rooted in local democracy, gender equality and human rights. Good governance principles should guide the necessary political and institutional processes.

Capacity building of local authorities and stakeholders is highlighted, with an emphasis on improving governance mechanisms, fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships, community-led local development, inclusion, and integration, effective local democracy, and place-based approaches.

The aim is for local and regional authorities to better leverage their potential, aligning local development with EU objectives, aligning national and local priorities, and ensuring that investments are used to respond to citizen's needs.

Focus is placed on holistic multi-sectoral methods to support structural change, pilot novel approaches, enhance existing initiatives and services, and improve access to, and use of other sources of funding.

Key actors and beneficiaries

Local and regional authorities are crucial to achieving the programme area objective. The principle of partnership is the cornerstone, building on multi-level governance and ensuring the involvement of other key actors, i.e. the local communities, national authorities, civil society, economic and social partners, and academia.

Special emphasis is placed on disadvantaged areas and groups.

Donor partners and international organisations can be valuable partners.

Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.
- All programmes shall include capacity building to support good governance at the local level.
- A gender perspective shall be integrated into the design and implementation of all programmes.

7. Roma inclusion and empowerment

Programme area objective

Enhanced inclusion and empowerment of Roma.

Rationale for the support

Roma constitute Europe's largest and most discriminated minority. Roma populations are disproportionately affected by structural and systemic racism and human rights violations, further exacerbating their social and economic marginalisation.

The EU Roma Strategic Framework 2020-2030 focuses on principles of equality, inclusion and participation, addressing socio-economic inclusion in the areas of education, employment, health and housing. EU Member States have developed national Roma strategic frameworks as well as anti-racism action plans, and this programme area aims to support and complement their implementation.

Areas of support

- Combatting antigypsyism and all forms of discrimination.
- Integrated measures at the local level targeting social service provision and innovative pilot projects.
- Capacity building for Roma and pro-Roma civil society organisations, particularly at grassroots level.
- Empowerment of Roma, particularly Roma women, children, and youth.
- Data collection, analysis, monitoring, and evaluation for use in policymaking.

How the objective will be addressed

This programme area will apply a human rights-based approach, including participatory approaches that involve Roma at all stages of the programme cycle. All measures should uphold international and European human rights standards and the EU's 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion.

Actively tackling antigypsyism is crucial in overcoming discrimination and marginalisation of Roma. This can be done through promoting inclusive public institutions and policies, Roma identity, culture, history, and language. Working with majority populations is key to changing attitudes, combatting stereotypes and hate speech, and targeting public institutions. Roma-led initiatives are particularly encouraged. An intersectional approach should be applied, keeping in mind that Roma might experience multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously based on ethnicity together with, for example, age, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

Integrated approaches to social inclusion should holistically interconnect education and training, employment, housing, health, and non-discrimination. Innovative pilot projects that can be upscaled and replicated are encouraged, such as in the areas of access to housing and addressing the negative impacts of environmental issues on Roma. Where possible, measures should promote desegregation and prevent the reinforcement of segregation. Geographical targeting of support to municipalities and regions with marginalised Roma communities should be considered.

Empowerment of Roma can be addressed through developing life skills, building confidence in advocating for their rights and participating in community-based initiatives, as well as through positive role models. Special emphasis should be given to empower Roma youth to build up the next generation of Roma leaders.

Interventions may also address environmental justice and the intersection between public health and safety concerns linked to environmental and climate change impacts, and the social exclusion faced by Roma.

Key actors and beneficiaries

Regional and local authorities, as well as Roma and pro-Roma civil society are the main actors. Partnerships with public authorities and local action groups are encouraged. Non-Roma and majority populations should also be targeted.

International organisations with competence in Roma inclusion and empowerment can be valuable partners.

Roma and Roma communities are the primary end beneficiaries.

Programme area specifics

- A participatory approach shall be applied throughout the programme cycle. This includes consultation with key Roma and pro-Roma stakeholders in the development of programmes and calls.
- All programmes shall include capacity-building measures for Roma civil society organisations.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.

8. Public health

Programme area objective

More resilient and inclusive public health systems.

Rationale for the support

Well-functioning public health systems are a precondition for economic and social cohesion. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the fragility of national health systems and exacerbated long-term structural challenges. Despite unparalleled EU financial support, including through the European Health Union and the EU4Health Programme 2021-2027, many health systems still struggle to provide sustainable healthcare, and inequalities in life expectancy and the burden of diseases remain. Regional disparities in access to healthcare both within and between countries are widening, and gender inequalities in health persist.

Health inequality is shown to reduce economic and social productivity and lead to higher healthcare and welfare costs. The pandemic triggered a significant increase in the prevalence of anxiety and depression, especially among children and youth. Furthermore, a spike in antibiotic use during the pandemic has accelerated the already alarming levels of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Finally, climate change and economic challenges continue to affect the social determinants of health and overall healthcare funding. This has a negative impact on the resilience of health systems, health equity, and outcomes.

Areas of support

- Development of public health systems and access to primary healthcare.
- Antimicrobial resistance (AMR).
- Mental health and the promotion of mental well-being and healthy lifestyles, with a focus on children and youth.
- Women's health, including through promoting universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services and responses to domestic and gender-based violence.
- Capacity building and patient involvement, with a focus on strengthening patient rights.

How the objective will be addressed

A human rights-based approach to health is central to achieving the programme area objective and should guide all health programming. This approach provides a set of clear principles for designing and assessing policy and health service delivery. It targets discriminatory practices and unjust power relations at the core of unequal health outcomes. In this context, integrating a gender perspective into the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes is important to promote equality.

As the principal agents of structural change, government agencies and public health institutions are key to achieving the programme area objective.

Key actors and beneficiaries

Patients' associations, civil society organisations, academia, and organisations of healthcare professionals are important partners, with Donor partners providing specialised support in programme and project development and implementation. Coordination and cooperation with international organisations can add value to the activities supported.

Health programmes will benefit diverse groups, with special emphasis on disadvantaged areas and groups, including women and girls, children, and youth, LGBTIQ+ persons and Roma.

Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.
- All programmes must include projects addressing women's health.

9. Disaster prevention and preparedness

Programme area objective

Improved disaster resilience.

Rationale for the support

Most European countries are vulnerable to disasters arising from climate change, urbanisation, demographic pressure, intensive land use, or infrastructure being located in areas prone to flooding, draughts, heatwaves, fire, or earthquakes. They are also susceptible to emerging risks linked to the accelerated introduction of new technologies, the green transition, and the consequences of war in Europe. Socially deprived and densely populated areas are particularly at risk, with women and girls and disadvantaged groups disproportionately impacted.

The programme area aims to increase the capacities of Beneficiary States in identifying vulnerabilities, anticipating hazards, enhancing disaster prevention, raising awareness, and promoting preparedness.

It will contribute to improving disaster resilience in line with national strategies, EU Disaster Resilience Goals, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, as well as international standards set by intergovernmental organisations.

Areas of support

- Risk and vulnerability competence and capacity building at national, regional, or local level.
- Prevention of risks and vulnerabilities, including related to new technologies and the green transition.
- Disaster resilience across all sectors and levels of society.
- Chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) safety and security.
- International and cross-border cooperation and learning and development, including effective risk management implementation.
- Gender- and youth-sensitive disaster risk management.

How the objective will be addressed

Investments in disaster prevention and mitigation are more cost-effective than post-disaster rebuilding and recovery efforts. Implementation of international standards and guidelines should therefore be supported.

Taking a whole-of-society perspective, the programme area focuses on enhancing risk governance and contingency planning. This involves improving the understanding of disaster risks and hazards, including information integrity gaps, and investing in disaster risk reduction through capacity building and training for strengthened civil protection and sustainable safety and security measures. The whole-of-society perspective also encompasses investment in innovation and technology such as early warning systems, cybersecurity, and defences against hybrid threats.

Given that disaster impacts often reflect and reinforce gender inequality, the programme area should include support for gender- and youth-sensitive approaches for better disaster risk management.

It should also support efficient coordination between authorities at every level and the sharing of good practices, including through the use of international networks.

Key actors and beneficiaries

The main actors are all levels of government, including decision-makers, emergency response and planning authorities, and law enforcement. Other relevant actors are civil society organisations, international organisations, local communities, and the private sector.

Communities and groups in vulnerable situations who are most exposed to disasters will also benefit.

Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.

10. Domestic and gender-based violence

Programme area objective

Prevention and combatting of domestic and gender-based violence in line with international and European human rights standards.

Rationale for the support

Domestic and gender-based violence is widespread throughout Europe and remains underreported. Such violence can be of an economic, psychological, physical, or sexual nature. It may also be online, and technology facilitated. Anyone can be affected by such violence, with women and girls being disproportionately impacted. Too frequently, this kind of violence leads to loss of life.

Prevention will not only save lives and reduce trauma and other impacts of violence but will also promote social and economic progress.

The Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) serves as a reference and guideline for the EEA and Norway Grants' efforts in this area.

Areas of support

- Prevention.
- Protection.
- Prosecution.
- Coordinated policies.

How the objective will be addressed

Effective prevention and combatting of domestic and gender-based violence requires comprehensive and coordinated policies across sectors. Strengthening capacity, building knowledge, and understanding, advocacy, and awareness raising are important means to this end.

The safety, rights and needs of victims must be central to these efforts. Victims from marginalised or socially excluded communities may need tailored measures to ensure equal access to protection, support, and justice. This calls for an intersectional approach that takes into consideration that victims may experience multiple forms of discrimination or disadvantage based on factors such as age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, or disability.

Addressing root causes is key to stopping the use of violence. Prevention efforts can be enhanced by challenging stereotypes and engaging men and boys. Offering services to perpetrators of violence or persons at risk of using violence is also particularly important.

Another critical aspect is protecting and supporting victims who have experienced violence. This requires effective coordination and cooperation at local level to ensure safety and to help victims recover, for example by providing "one-stop shop" services.

Gender-sensitive and victim-centred investigations and judicial proceedings to secure the prosecution of perpetrators will be supported.

Policy coordination will contribute to a common understanding of domestic and gender-based violence and its root causes and increase the likelihood of reaching common policy goals and measures. Mechanisms designated to coordinate, implement, monitor, and

evaluate national policies, including data collection, research, and international cooperation, are important tools for achieving progress.

Key actors and beneficiaries

Public entities at national and local levels are the main actors, with international and civil society organisations being vital partners.

The main beneficiaries will be women and girls in vulnerable situations, including those who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Beneficiary States and Donor and/or an International Partner Organisation and Beneficiary States.
- All programmes shall include cooperation with civil society organisations.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.

11. Access to justice

Programme area objective

Increased access to an independent, accountable, and efficient justice system of high quality in line with international and European human rights standards.

Rationale for the support

Human rights, democracy and the rule of law create an environment in which countries can promote sustainable development, protect individuals from discrimination, and ensure equal access to justice for all. Most people will experience legal, and justice needs over the course of their lifetime. Judicial backlogs can take years to clear, reducing the accessibility and quality of justice. Ensuring people-centred justice is key to strengthening the rule of law, increasing people's confidence in the judicial system, and safeguarding a sound business and investment environment.

Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights provides the main elements of a fair and resilient justice system. The independence, accountability, quality, and efficiency of the judiciaries in European countries are crucial pillars in ensuring the rule of law is upheld and the balance of powers and stability maintained. High-quality and timely dispute resolution ensures that the justice system works for the benefit of citizens and businesses alike.

The development of digital technologies has the potential to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the justice system, making it more accessible. However, it is crucial that this modernisation is in line with human rights standards.

Areas of support

- Independence and accountability of the court system.
- Quality and efficiency of the court system, including judge craft and leadership in the judiciary.
- Equal access to justice, including a child-friendly and gender-sensitive court system.

How the objective will be addressed

The resilience of the court system relies on the independence and accountability of the courts. This programme area will focus on introducing measures for the protection of judges from inappropriate internal and external pressure, increased transparency, and improved public awareness of the role of the judiciary and the consequences of undermining its independence.

The fairness of the court system hinges on the quality and efficiency of the courts and equal access to justice for all. This programme area will invest in the capacity building of judges and court staff as a prerequisite for ensuring quality, timely planning, and efficient case management. This will lead to increased judge craft and strengthened leadership and court management in the judiciary, fostering proactive judges and thereby positively impacting the quality and efficiency of the courts. Efforts to improve administrative efficiency should include proper data collection and analysis, time management, concentrated hearings, summary proceedings, digitalisation, alternative dispute resolution, and alternative sanctions.

To further strengthen the fairness of the court system, the programme area will support: gender-sensitive court systems in performing their duties without bias and prejudice; child-friendly justice to ensure the best interest of the child and improve child protection, including

through their meaningful participation in judicial proceedings; and access to justice systems for persons in vulnerable situations, including child victims, victims of domestic and gender-based violence, and Roma women and girls.

Key actors and beneficiaries

Courts, including judges and court staff, prosecution, and other relevant public entities are the main actors in bringing about the desired change. International organisations and civil society organisations will have a role in supporting the changes.

Improved court systems will benefit all citizens, with targeted actions benefitting those in vulnerable situations.

Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.

12. Correctional services

Programme area objective

Improved correctional services in line with international and European human rights standards.

Rationale for the support

Many European prisons suffer from overcrowding, and standards across prisons vary considerably. Improvements are needed in terms of both material conditions and quality of service provision. Many offenders face challenges following their release from prison, hindering their full integration into society. Social reintegration is a key aspect of successful crime prevention strategies, and includes developing interventions designed to break the cycle of release and reoffending.

Minimum standards of detention conditions and systems across Europe are required to protect the human rights of prisoners, strengthen mutual trust between Member States and facilitate mutual recognition of judgments and judicial decisions.

The prohibition on torture and other cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment is enshrined in the 1984 Convention against Torture, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the 1987 European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. These instruments require that detainees are held in conditions compatible with respect for human dignity. Specific standards have been developed based on the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, such as the European Prison Rules.

The reports of the UN Committee against Torture (CAT) and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) provide concrete and detailed recommendations to each Member State.

Areas of support

- Prison conditions and treatment of prisoners and persons serving sentences in society.
- Alternative sanctions to imprisonment.
- Rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders.
- Support to prisoners in vulnerable situations, including women, juveniles, and minors.
- Education, training and support for prison and probation services staff, including management.

How the objective will be addressed

This programme area will invest in capacity building of prison and probation services staff, focusing on ethics, values, and security culture, as well as on rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners. A holistic approach to safety and security culture should be encouraged, centring on the implementation of dynamic security balanced with static and organisational security. The programme area will support improvements in legislative frameworks as well as strategy and policy developments in the field of prison and probation. Activities to strengthen National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs) can also be supported.

Sanctions alternative to imprisonment should be identified in close cooperation with the judiciary in the Beneficiary States. The strengthening of legal and operational instruments that will facilitate the use of alternative sanctions should be encouraged, with the aim of

reducing prison populations, fostering rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders, and strengthening the seamless cooperation between prison and probation services. When relevant, training for prison and probation staff in the use of alternative sanctions should be offered.

Vulnerable groups in prison, such as women, juveniles, and minors, physically and mentally ill persons, persons with substance addictions, LGBTIQ+ persons and non-nationals, suffer disproportionally compared with other prisoners. The programme area will support the provision of health services, including mental health care in prison. Interventions related to substance abuse and anger management, including for domestic and gender-based violence offenders, are also supported.

The funding for infrastructure, equipment and soft measures should be allocated to pilot prisons/projects.

Infrastructure improvements may also be supported, with careful assessment of the size, scale, and maturity of infrastructure projects before agreement is given.

Key actors and beneficiaries

Prison and probation services and other relevant public entities are the main actors. International organisations and civil society organisations will also have a role in supporting the changes.

Prison and probation services staff and prisoners, including women and juvenile offenders, will benefit from improved correctional services in line with international human rights.

Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.

13. Serious and organised crime

Programme area objective

Prevention and combatting of serious and organised crime in line with international and European human rights standards.

Rationale for the support

Serious and organised crime remains a key threat to the safety of those living in Europe. It undermines communities, causes substantial financial damage, and weakens the rule of law. Organised crime groups are often simultaneously involved in several criminal activities. Drug trafficking is the dominant and main profit-generating crime.

States have an obligation to prevent and combat hate crime, ensuring that all citizens enjoy the same human rights, and that society as a whole is protected. Law enforcement agencies must therefore proactively take measures to effectively prevent and combat hate crime and ensure justice for all victims.

Another serious crime that has particularly harmful impacts on fundamental rights, individuals, communities, and society at large is domestic and gender-based violence. In extreme cases, it leads to loss of life. Gender-based violence remains widespread in Europe.

Criminal proceedings are often not designed for children. Barnahus is a multi-disciplinary and interagency model developed to ensure that child victims of violence and sexual exploitation and abuse are not subjected to unnecessary stress in the context of examinations by law enforcement agencies. The Barnahus model also ensures that child victims receive proper and coordinated support.

Areas of support

- Prevent and combat selected forms of serious and organised crime, such as illegal drugs, environmental crimes, trafficking in human beings, migrant smuggling, and sexual exploitation and abuse of children.
- Methods and tools for the investigation of serious and organised crime
- Prevent and combat hate crimes as defined by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).
- Prevent and combat domestic and gender-based violence in line with the Istanbul Convention.
- Child-friendly justice and Barnahus cooperation, based on the model defined by the PROMISE Barnahus Network.

How the objective will be addressed

Serious and organised crimes are often transnational, requiring close cooperation between law enforcement agencies in different countries to enable effective investigation and prosecution, including recovery of criminal assets.

Collecting evidence via policing methods and digital and technological tools is an integral part of criminal investigations. This can take many forms, such as (digital) forensic examinations and interviews of victims, perpetrators, and witnesses.

Common and high-quality examinations and methodologies will increase mutual trust in the evidence shared between countries, facilitating the use of one country's evidence in another country's courts.

Capacity-building activities to strengthen the investigative process help uphold the rule of law and respect for human rights. Cooperation with international organisations supports law enforcement agencies in performing their duties in line with human rights and international standards. Cooperation with civil society organisations supports the efforts of the police to protect and serve the public, especially in crime prevention.

Gender-sensitive and child-centred approaches to prevention and investigation, and a victim-centred approach to prosecution, help counter biases in institutions and structures. It is also important to increase the reporting of hate crimes and domestic and gender-based violence to the police.

Key actors and beneficiaries

Public entities at national and local levels are the main actors. These include police and prosecution, courts, law enforcement agencies outside the police, and other relevant state actors.

International organisations and civil society organisations are valued partners that bring experience and expertise.

The end beneficiaries are victims of serious and organised crime, communities, and persons in vulnerable situations.

Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.

14. Asylum, migration, and integration

Programme area objective

Well-functioning national systems for asylum, migration, and integration in line with international and European human rights standards.

Rationale for the support

In recent years, Europe has faced several events with major repercussions for migration, asylum, and integration. The war in Ukraine caused the largest displacement of people in Europe since the Second World War, particularly affecting women, and children. The continued pressure on the routes across the Mediterranean and the Western Balkans adds to the challenge of increased migratory flows.

A well-functioning asylum, migration, and integration system that complies with human rights standards provides certainty, clarity and decent conditions for people arriving in Europe. It also allows the public to trust that migration is managed in a humane and effective way.

Beneficiaries of international protection often face barriers to accessing employment, education, healthcare, housing, and social services. Integration based on non-discrimination, equal opportunities, rights, and duties fosters social cohesion and a dynamic economy that benefits everyone.

The 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol are the key legal instruments defining "refugees", their rights, and the legal obligations of states. The European Pact on Migration and Asylum and the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) sets common minimum standards for migration and asylum processes in the EU. A comprehensive migration and asylum system requires a well-functioning integration policy. The EU has developed the Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 to support Member States in this area.

Areas of support

- National systems for asylum, migration, and integration, including ensuring gender sensitivity.
- Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees exercising their rights, with a special focus on unaccompanied children and other vulnerable groups.
- Operationalisation of national strategies and policies for integration.

How the objective will be addressed

The areas of support provide for a comprehensive approach to the asylum and migration chain. Strengthened capacities through digitalisation and smart ways of working will improve the quality and efficiency of the asylum chain, ensuring access to procedures and enabling migrants, asylum seekers and refugees to exercise their rights. Provisions for guardianship for unaccompanied children and legal assistance should be supported.

Support for strategic and contingency planning will prepare systems for unpredictable influxes of applications.

The programme area supports the various stages of integration, i.e. reception and early integration for refugees and asylum seekers, as well as long-term integration for refugees granted permanent or temporary residency. Appropriate housing and services in the early stages are basic rights, but they also support further integration. Quality interpretation

services and integration measures will also support migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in exercising their rights. Facilitating access to health services, education, and employment will reduce the risk of social exclusion.

The programme area provides support to facilitate the return of people with rejected asylum claims. Strategies related to return policies, may be explored and developed.

The programme area will also enable the bilateral and multilateral exchange of knowledge and best practices on ways to improve national systems for asylum, migration, and integration. It will also strengthen the cooperation between national and local authorities and civil society organisations.

Key actors and beneficiaries

Public entities at national and local levels are the main actors in bringing about the desired change.

Civil society and international organisations play an important role in this programme area, with civil society organisations bringing experience and advice in the law and policy development process and ensuring that implementation is in line with international law and national policies.

Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees will benefit, with unaccompanied children and other persons in vulnerable situations being the main beneficiaries.

Programme area specifics

- All programmes shall include cooperation between Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Priority shall be given to projects that support the rights of unaccompanied children and other migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in vulnerable situations.
- Cooperation with civil society organisations shall be explored during programme development.
- Investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) in projects shall only be supported alongside capacity building, training, or experience sharing (soft measures).
- The maximum level of funding for investment in infrastructure and equipment (hard measures) shall be set in the memorandum of understanding or, exceptionally, in the programme agreement.

15. Institutional cooperation and capacity building

Programme area objective

Strengthened institutional cooperation and increased quality of public services policies and regulations.

Rationale for the support

Robust, transparent, and more efficient and effective public administrations are essential for resilient and democratic societies.

Institutional capacity building and human resource development are among the principal tools for improving effective service provision and the protection and promotion of human rights by public services. Fostering digital citizenship and tackling information manipulation are also important areas of support.

Cooperation between Donor State and Beneficiary State institutions aims to contribute to the development of sound, efficient, inclusive, and responsive administrations, complete with the structures, human resources, and management skills needed to perform their respective tasks to a high standard. Support for these institutions and enhancing their capacities and response to societal needs is crucial for maintaining citizens' trust. In this regard, cooperation and knowledge exchange between Donor and Beneficiary States offers mutual benefits.

Areas of support

- Institutional capacity and human resources development in public institutions.
- Strengthened cooperation between public institutions in the Donor and Beneficiary States.
- Accessibility and quality of public services.

How the objective will be addressed

This programme area will contribute to improved quality of services, policies and regulations through capacity building, knowledge exchange and skills development.

It will support initiatives by local, regional, and national level public institutions, including initiatives to strengthen cooperation between institutions. Mechanisms for interaction between academia, civil and private sectors, public authorities, ombuds institutions, national human rights institutions, equality bodies, and parliaments can also be supported.

The programme area will facilitate the exchange of experiences and learning between partners in the Donor and Beneficiary States, providing networks, knowledge exchange, and sharing of best practices.

Key actors and beneficiaries

Public entities are the main actors in bringing about the desired change at national, regional, and local levels. Donor State institutions will be key partners.

The end beneficiaries will be the general public through improved government systems, strengthened services, as well as improved civil servants' skills.

Programme area specifics

- Partnerships between Donor State and Beneficiary State entities are mandatory in all projects.

Civil society fund

Fund objective

A vibrant and resilient civil society that protects and promotes democracy, the rule of law, and human rights.

Rationale for the support

A healthy democracy relies on a vibrant and resilient civil society that gives a voice to citizens and holds governments accountable. Civil society organisations contribute to reducing social and economic disparities by fostering informed public debate, taking part in policymaking, building social trust, and strengthening the participation of minorities and marginalised groups in democratic processes. They play a vital role in protecting and promoting human rights and countering discrimination.

Civil society in Europe faces increasing challenges, such as restrictive regulatory environments, limited access to resources, intimidation, and harassment, and obstacles to participation in decision-making. The digital transformation of civic space offers unprecedented opportunities but also poses challenges to civil society. These challenges threaten the ability of civil society to fulfil its mission. Civil society's role and engagement of citizens remain critical in protecting the values of the EU and citizen participation as enshrined in Articles 2 and 11 of the Treaty of the EU as well as the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Areas of support

- Democratic values, civic engagement, and media literacy.
- Civil society participation in democratic processes.
- Human rights, anti-discrimination, and social inclusion.
- Gender equality, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, and LGBTIQ+ rights.
- Climate action, environmental protection, and a just green transition.
- Organisational development and an enabling environment for civil society.

How the objective will be addressed

The objective of the fund will be achieved by supporting civil society organisations involved in advocacy, monitoring, strategic litigation, civic education, and citizen engagement. The supported activities may lead to, among others, reduced disinformation and hate speech, healthier information spaces, stronger independent media, a more participatory local democracy, and an inclusive approach to policy development.

The fund will place a strong focus on developing the capacities and resilience of civil society. Civil society organisations and other civic actors will be equipped with new skills to engage volunteers, diversify funding, connect with target groups, and communicate in complex operating environments. In addition, the fund will support civil society in defending civic space and advocating for better legislation and practices for civic participation.

Independent Fund Operators in each Beneficiary State will manage the programmes and ensure they remain accessible and respond to national needs. A transnational component will foster European-level learning and networking of civil society organisations.

Key actors and beneficiaries

Civil society organisations in the Beneficiary States, working at national, regional, or local levels, are the main actors in achieving the fund's objective. Social movements, informal groups, local community leaders, and human rights defenders are some of the most important partners for civil society organisations and may facilitate the engagement of specific target groups.

Public sector entities, private companies, and entities from the Donor States can also contribute to civil society activities through partnerships with civil society organisations. European civil society networks may provide support for advocacy initiatives and knowledge exchange.

In addition to supporting civil society organisations directly, the fund will benefit diverse target groups, including women, youth, minorities, or marginalised groups, LGBTIQ+ people, migrants and refugees, and Roma people.

Fund specifics

- All programmes shall include measures to reach out to underserved geographic areas and marginalised target groups.
- The provision of social services can only be supported if these services are necessary for enhancing advocacy, community participation, and/or civic engagement.
- At least 20% of the re-granting amount shall contribute to organisational development and an enabling environment for civil society.

Fund for capacity building and cooperation with international partner organisations and institutions

Fund objective

Strengthened capacity in the Beneficiary States and across the region to promote good governance, strong democracies, rule of law, and human rights.

Rationale for the support

International organisations and institutions are crucial for promoting and upholding the fundamental values of European cooperation. They can help foster resilient and strong democracies in cooperation with Beneficiary States and regionally by working with established networks.

Beneficiary States may benefit from input in the preparation, outreach, implementation and/or monitoring of programmes within the EEA and Norway Grants.

International Partner Organisations and institutions may contribute to improving the results of programmes and activities and ensuring their alignment with international and European standards, including EU law and policy. Their input to programmes may consist of relevant data, programme design, field expertise, and work on implementing international standards and making those standards a reality.

Areas of support

- Good governance.
- Democracy building.
- Rule of law.
- Access to justice.
- Strengthening national implementation of human rights.
- Countering manipulation of information, foreign interference, and disinformation.
- Anti-corruption.
- Human rights in the digital sphere and AI.
- Gender-based violence and violence against women.
- Hate speech and hate crime.
- Social inclusion, equality, and non-discrimination.
- Roma.
- LGBTIQ+.
- Strengthening national human rights institutions, equality bodies, and ombuds institutions.
- Education for democracy/civic education.
- Cultural expression and historic narratives.
- Free media/safe journalism.
- Minority rights and history.

How the objective will be addressed

The fund will aim to contribute to all three thematic priorities, with a focus on the second thematic priority, i.e. democracy, rule of law and human rights. It provides a flexible tool for Beneficiary States to benefit from the input of International Partner Organisations at national level, programme level, or project level.

Beneficiary States will be invited to take part in transnational initiatives based on voluntary participation. Through transnational cooperation facilitated by the International Partner

Organisations, the Donor and Beneficiary States will benefit from knowledge sharing and peer learning.

Cooperation can take various forms, which will be defined in framework documents and work plans. This can include strategic advice to Donor and Beneficiary States, participation in programmes and projects under nationally managed programmes, designing and implementing pre-defined projects, ad-hoc, long-term and/or transnational initiatives involving several countries, as well as events and conferences.

National human rights implementation can be strengthened through support in adhering to judgments from the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice. It can also be strengthened through support for domestic mechanisms for good governance and human rights protection.

Good governance can be promoted through more efficient and green public governance systems, inclusive policymaking, fighting corruption and economic crime, strengthening public procurement, and protecting civic space.

Key actors and beneficiaries

The main actors will be the International Partner Organisations themselves or institutions established by them, i.e. the OECD, the Council of Europe, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) or, in specific areas, the United Nations.

Beneficiary States can benefit from contributions at national level, programme level, project level or through transnational initiatives, ultimately improving the outcomes for their end beneficiaries.

Fund for social dialogue and decent work (Norway Grants)

Fund objective

Strengthened social dialogue between workers' organisations, employers' organisations, and public authorities and the promotion of decent work.

Rationale for the support

Every worker has the right to working conditions that respect their health, safety, and dignity in line with international and European human rights standards. Fair and just working conditions are also key drivers of social and economic resilience, inclusive growth, and competitiveness.

The International Labour Organization emphasises four pillars of "decent work": job creation, rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue. Despite its fundamental role, many people in Europe do not have access to decent work. Unemployment and skills mismatch, poor working conditions, discrimination, and the lack of social protection remain a challenge, with workers in vulnerable situations being the most affected.

Social dialogue is an efficient tool for achieving decent work and finding consensus-based solutions in response to the changing world of work and social disruption stemming from crises and transitions. The EU stresses the need to reinforce social dialogue and strengthen social partners, meaning workers' and employers' organisations, given their important role in policy- and law-making at national and EU level. This includes efforts to reverse the decline in collective agreements coverage and trade union density, which have diminished significantly in EU Member States.

The European Pillar of Social Rights sets the priorities for EU action for fair working conditions, equality, and inclusion in the labour market, underlining the importance of involving social partners and workers. Newer forms of work and digitalisation bring new opportunities for both employers and workers, but also challenges for decent work and social dialogue. Several groups of workers and the self-employed remain underrepresented in collective agreements and social dialogue.

Areas of support

- Strengthening social dialogue structures, practices, capacities, and policies.
- Promoting decent work, including the prevention, and combatting of social dumping and undeclared work.

How the objective will be addressed

Well-functioning social dialogue requires the involvement of strong, independent, and representative social partners, as well as public authorities. In several European countries, social partners lack the capacity and conditions to engage in social dialogue effectively. The fund is therefore dedicated to supporting institutional capacity building and training, as well as bipartite and tripartite social dialogue.

Establishing decent work for all involves enhancing fair and safe working conditions and creating better jobs. Support will be given to projects that increase decent work arrangements and the quality of jobs. This will include training of labour inspectorates and other regulatory authorities to enforce legislation, as well as capacity building and awareness raising among social partners and workers on the benefits of decent work. Cooperation between public authorities, social partners, and civil society organisations in addressing decent work will be supported.

Today's labour market challenges also require transnational cooperation, such as in addressing social dumping and undeclared work, and in integrating migrants and refugees. By collaborating across borders, resources and expertise can be pooled, and impacts strengthened.

Gender equality and non-discrimination are cross-cutting principles that shall be addressed throughout the fund.

Key actors and beneficiaries

Social partners and public authorities are the main actors and beneficiaries of the fund. International organisations, including organisations for workers and employers, are relevant partners. Civil society organisations representing workers in vulnerable situations can play an important role in contributing to decent work for these groups, and help create a bridge between these workers, employers, social partners, and public authorities.

Workers in particular need of improved conditions for decent work are the main beneficiaries of the fund. Specific attention will be given to groups of workers underrepresented in social dialogue and workers vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, and mistreatment in the labour market.

Bilateral cooperation plays an important role in the fund through the close involvement of Norwegian social partners, public authorities, and civil society organisations in exchanges of knowledge and experience.

Fund specifics

- Projects with bilateral partnerships shall be given priority.
- Transnational cooperation shall be supported.