



Elections to the European Parliament in June 2024 Policy Recommendations of the BAGFW

Summary

On the occasion of the elections to the European Parliament on 9 June 2024, the Association of German Social Welfare Organisations (BAGFW) is calling on the campaigning parties and the new College of the European Commission to set the following priorities for EU (social) policy in the next legislative period:

1. Strengthen the social dimension of the European Union (EU) and adopt further measures to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)
2. Adopt a social focus in the organisation of the next EU budget and facilitate better framework conditions for funding guidelines
3. Improve the framework conditions for not-for-profit organisations in Europe, especially those of the public benefit sector (*Freie Wohlfahrtspflege*)
4. Prioritise climate protection measures while ensuring a socially just transition
5. Coordinate and support EU-wide digital transformation, ensure digital participation for everybody
6. Develop EU-wide strategies and solutions to combat labour shortages, particularly in the social and healthcare professions
7. Develop a humane, solidarity-based migration and asylum policy

Introduction

On the occasion of the 2024 European elections, the BAGFW addresses its expectations and recommendations to the newly elected MEPs and the new EU Commissioners. In view of the current challenges of climate change, digitalisation, and demographic change, as well as developments in EU asylum policy, BAGFW is calling for a social, sustainable, and fair EU that focuses on people's needs. This requires bold social policy initiatives and a significant improvement in the framework conditions for the not-for-profit social economy. The BAGFW is concerned about populist and nationalist tendencies and calls on the new EU

Parliament and the EU Commission to defend and strengthen democracy and the rule of law. Civil society must be included as a political actor and democratic force in further shaping the EU. Civic engagement and citizen participation must be strengthened at European level.

1. Strengthening the EU's Social Dimension

The BAGFW is convinced that poverty reduction and greater social justice are necessary for stable economic development and the cohesion of the EU member states. A social and solidary EU strengthens equal living conditions

across all European regions. As a consequence, a social EU promotes acceptance of the European peace project and its achievements. The EU Parliament must work to ensure that the EU's social objectives are given the same importance as economic objectives on the EU agenda. The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2017 should serve as a foundation and be implemented consistently. This is why the BAGFW is calling for the following measures:

- The objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan must be consistently pursued. As part of the review of the EPSR Action Plan in 2025, further ambitious implementation measures at EU level must be developed. Among other things, the rights of vulnerable and/or disadvantaged groups must be strengthened and their participation in all areas of life must be promoted. The EU must become as inclusive as possible. This requires, among other things, a coordinated and complete implementation of the "Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030".
- Building on the "Council Recommendation of 30 January 2023 on Adequate Minimum Income Ensuring Active Inclusion", the EU Commission must propose a binding legal act in the form of a framework directive for minimum income schemes.
- The fight against poverty must become a core issue. In particular, the EU Parliament must commit to realising the goal of ending poverty and social exclusion in all its forms by 2030. In this context, the BAGFW expects, among other things, an intensification of joint efforts to combat poverty among children and young people. The Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee was the first step towards greater coherence of social, education, health, nutrition, housing and labour market policies at national level. Corresponding national strategies, such as Germany's

national action plan ("Nationaler Aktionsplan: Neue Chancen für Kinder") must be consistently evaluated. If necessary, improvements must be called for. This also includes clear and measurable targets for reducing poverty and social exclusion as children grow up, as well as indicators for measuring the achievement of targets, and review mechanisms.

- Demographic change has become one of the biggest challenges for all EU Member States. The Council Recommendation of 8 December 2022 on access to affordable high-quality long-term care is therefore particularly relevant for the new legislative period. Member States must be supported in improving access to high-quality and affordable care and support services as well as working conditions and work-life balance in this sector. Live-in carers and migrant care workers often experience exploitative and illegal working conditions. Regulatory efforts are needed to establish legally secure and fair working conditions for live-in carers.
- The work of the EU institutions against gender-specific unequal treatment, hierarchies and oppression must be continued in a consistent way. Care work must be shared fairly between the sexes.
- The BAGFW advocates for institutional anchoring of SURE programme support services as a stabilisation mechanism for future economic crises.¹ The introduction of a European Unemployment Stabilisation Fund (unemployment reinsurance) should also be discussed.

2. Social and Inclusive Budget from 2028

The new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will be negotiated in the coming legislative period. The BAGFW is in favour of a social and inclusive budget that continues to support the implementation of the EPSR. From the BAGFW's perspective, the following points are necessary for this:

Support to Mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency.

¹ SURE stands for "Support mitigating Unemployment Risks in Emergency" and is referred to as the European Instrument for Temporary

- Social and inclusive EU funds and programmes that implement the EPSR on the ground must be strengthened. There must be a clear focus on disadvantaged groups. This applies in particular to the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). To adequately promote social inclusion, at least 30% of a member state's ESF budget should be used for social inclusion measures and at least 5% to combat material deprivation and support particularly disadvantaged persons.
 - All EU regions must continue to be supported by the EU Structural and Investment Funds. Co-financing rates must be increased in all regional categories.
 - The partnership principle must be made mandatory in all European funding programmes. Experience shows that a genuine partnership between civil society and state actors in the planning, implementation and evaluation of EU funding programmes is the basis for successful EU funding.
 - The EU must create additional revenue sources that can be directly taxed. Current revenues come from customs duties and the plastic waste levy. The BAGFW suggests introducing a financial transaction tax to increase these revenues. Many member states support this idea.
 - The administrative burden of implementing EU-funded projects continues to be a major hurdle for project organisers. Simplified cost options such as standard scales of unit costs and flat rates have led to initial relief for project organisers. However, the EU must develop further measures to ensure that project organisers are able to apply for, implement and settle EU projects with as few errors as possible. The flat-rate allocation of personnel costs must be based on the collectively agreed wages to which the German social welfare organisations are committed.
- mainly provided by independent organisations and institutions. As a key characteristic they must all work under a specific public benefit not-for-profit status, which allows them to fulfil their tasks on the basis of a constitutional state mandate. This represents an important pillar of the German welfare state and makes a significant contribution to social welfare in Germany. Together the German social welfare organisations consist of approximately 120,000 organisations, 1.9 million employees and around 3 million volunteers. The German social welfare organisations thus guarantee a functioning, generally accessible and high-quality social infrastructure. In addition, social welfare organisations drive social innovation with their diverse range of facilities and services and disseminate these across the country. To continuously meet people's needs in areas such as child, youth and elderly care, nursing care, social counselling and support for vulnerable people, a framework is needed that further strengthens the social welfare organisation's work with and for people. This is why the BAGFW is calling for the following measures:
- Tailor-made funding programmes, i.e. to promote social innovation, digitalisation and the implementation of the European Green Deal, must be expanded.
 - A practical approach to state aid law, in particular by simplifying exemptions of social services from state aid regulations.
 - Low-bureaucracy support for small organisations applying for EU funds that fall under the remit of state aid law. The thresholds in the De-minimis-Regulations must be increased. In the General Block Exemption Regulation, the aid intensities must be increased.
 - The EU Public Procurement Directive must be revised. The use of social and environmental criteria must not only be an option, but it must be mandatory.

3. Strengthening the Not-for-profit Social Economy

Social welfare systems are very heterogeneous in the EU. In Germany, social welfare is

4. Socially Just Climate Protection, Socio-Ecological Transformation

The BAGFW welcomes the fact that the EU is increasingly aligning its policies with sustainability principles. The costs of the climate crisis are immense. This is due to a failure to protect the climate and too little climate protection. Only a consistent European sustainability policy that recognises climate protection as part of public services of general interest can overcome the existing and future challenges. At the same time, this transition must be ambitious, social, and fair. This requires a reorganisation of all areas of society. The BAGFW therefore calls for the following measures:

- The Paris Climate Agreement and the SDGs must be continuously implemented. There must be no competition between climate protection and social spending. The necessary socio-ecological transformation will only work if it goes hand in hand with social justice.
- Due to the climate crisis and the rapid extinction of species, the transformation of areas like energy, transport, food, buildings, and finance must be accelerated.
- In the political sphere, it is necessary to raise awareness of the urgent need for climate adaptation. The implementation of life-saving measures must be accelerated. Future heatwaves must be foreseen and prepared for, especially to protect vulnerable groups.
- The “polluter pays” principle must become central in EU policy. Luxury emissions must be reduced.
- Create (financial) framework conditions to ensure the transformation towards the climate neutrality of social services and facilities.

5. Promoting Digital Participation

In the 21st century, digital policy is also social policy. Parts of social, economic, democratic, and cultural coexistence are increasingly taking place in the digital space. Inclusion is a key issue here. Materially and socially disadvantaged groups are often excluded from

participation in the digital space. In addition to the expansion of the technical infrastructure, participation, inclusion, and accessibility must be important components of a digital transformation that leaves no one behind. The BAGFW therefore calls for the following measures:

- The development of an EU-wide social action plan for digital participation in the EU member states, with the aim of promoting digital participation for everybody. The action plan must follow up on the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade with tailored political action, for example on inclusion, child protection and sustainability. The goals of the Digital Decade and the Digital Compass must be consistently implemented. In addition to concrete expansion targets and funding opportunities for the EU-wide expansion of modern digital infrastructure, the action plan should also include measures to promote digital inclusion and education.
- The BAGFW calls for educational opportunities for basic digital skills for all people. For the EU funding period 2028-2034, funding programmes like Erasmus+ and ESF+ should allow a strong focus on digital skills.
- The not-for-profit social economy as a provider of social cohesion and social infrastructures must be empowered and equipped for the digital society.
- Data protection, personal rights and protection against discrimination must be guaranteed in the digital space. At the same time, we need good framework conditions for the EU-wide use of data for the common good, including uniform standards and secure interfaces, to be able to use data to provide the best possible support for our clients.
- Combat discrimination and other possible negative effects of the use of artificial intelligence (AI). Workers’ rights must be protected. Social solutions for job losses due to the use of AI must be found, e.g. by expanding the SURE instrument. We call for a framework for the EU-wide use of AI for the common good, due to the great

potential of AI to improve the lives of many people.

6. Skills and Labour Shortages: Promoting EU-wide Employment of Workers from the EU and Third Countries

Labour shortages for skilled and unskilled workers is an increasing challenge for society. Due to demographic change, this will become even more acute in the coming years. All EU member states are affected by this. Increasing labour shortages must be counteracted by recruiting and training people from EU and non-EU countries.

Internal EU migration falls under the remit of freedom of movement, which applies to all EU citizens regardless of their level of education or income. Freedom of movement should be actively promoted in view of labour shortages. Fair employment conditions must apply to all mobile EU workers at all times. In case of non-compliance, legally prescribed standards must be implemented. The rights of EU citizens seeking employment must be improved, particularly with regards to access to the labour market and social benefits.

The BAGFW believes that targeted recruitment from third countries can contribute to reducing labour shortages. Any recruitment must adhere to the principles of ethically responsible recruitment. Recruitment must always take into account the circumstances in the country of origin, the individual interests of the person and the requirements in the EU member states. Recruited persons must work and be paid under the same conditions as other employees with comparable activities. Any kind of exploitation must be prevented.

The BAGFW therefore calls for the following measures:

- Strengthen the free movement of EU citizens and improve the rights of EU citizens seeking employment, particularly regarding access to labour market and social benefits.
- Introduce EU minimum standards for the recruitment and employment of workers from third countries.

- Consider the specific features of the labour markets and social systems of the Member State when further harmonising labour migration.
- Safeguard the rights and interests of migrants, for example in the realm of the right to family life. Increased labour immigration must not result in lack of rectification of failures in labour market policy. Labour law and quality standards must not be lowered.
- The care profession must be made more attractive within the EU. The European Care Strategy must be implemented. Good working conditions must be guaranteed in the care sector, in particular through fair wages and compliance with labour protection standards.
- The recognition of foreign professional qualifications must be simplified at EU level.

7. A Fair and Just Common European Asylum System

The last eight years have been characterised by negotiations of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). This process has absorbed a great deal of attention and capacity, before it will be finalised in 2024. The BAGFW has the following demands for a new start to the CEAS from the political decision-makers in the newly elected EU Parliament and the new EU Commission:

- The EU Parliament and the EU Commission must ensure a functioning asylum system under the new migration and asylum package. This system must be equally fair for those seeking protection and EU Member States. It must fully respect the Geneva Convention on Refugees, the European Convention on Human Rights and primary EU law, including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- The CEAS must be viewed in the light of past achievements. Future laws that do not work in practice must be improved.
- The EU Parliament and the EU Commission, in their capacity as guardian of the treaties, must ensure that the CEAS is

- designed in such a way that it is implemented and complied with by all Member States. Member States must be held accountable to comply with the commonly agreed standards of EU secondary law, EU primary law and international law. As soon as any violation of rights is known from reputable sources, such as push-backs at borders, decisive action must be taken. Suitable independent monitoring mechanisms must be set up to prevent violations of fundamental rights.
- The EU Parliament and the EU Commission must ensure that the Member States fulfil their obligations without delay and make their solidarity contributions accordingly. Special incentives, including financial incentives, must be created so that the acceptance of asylum seekers by the Member States is used as a prioritised solidarity contribution.
 - Links between asylum seekers and individual EU Member States must be adequately taken into account in order to facilitate the sustainable integration of protection seekers.
 - The positive experiences gained from the reception of refugees from Ukraine should be incorporated into any reform considerations of the CEAS.
 - The EU and its member states must not conclude any agreements with third countries that disregard human rights and do not guarantee the protection of refugees. The principle of non-refoulement must be observed at all times.
 - Safe and alternative access routes into the EU must be continuously expanded. Those routes can help to ensure that fewer people have to embark on dangerous escape routes. At the same time, access to individual protection in the EU must always be guaranteed.
 - The EU Parliament and the EU Commission should support the member states in promoting the inclusion of refugees. Measures for social cohesion should also be given greater consideration.
 - The EU Commission should effectively counter the narrative spreading in the EU, that people seeking protection are posing a threat. People seeking protection should no longer be equated with irregular immigrants. Unauthorised entry into the EU by those seeking protection is a characteristic of flight and not an act that should be criminalised. At present, there are hardly any other options for asylum seekers to seek protection in the EU.

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Your contacts at the Association of German Social Welfare Organisations (BAGFW)

BAGFW EU Representation in Brussels

Tel: +49 30 24089 136

E-Mail: euvertretung@bag-wohlfahrt.de

Marius Isenberg, Chair of the BAGFW European Committee

E-Mail: Marius.Isenberg@awo.org

Alexander Friedrich, Chair of the BAGFW European Committee

E-Mail: Alexander.Friedrich@awo.org