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**NOTE**

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From: Presidency  
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council  
Subject: Breaking the Poverty Cycle: Developing person-centred enabling and activation services  
- *Exchange of views*

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Delegations will find attached a Presidency steering note on the above subject, with a view to the exchange of views at the Council (EPSCO) on 9 March 2026.

## **BREAKING THE POVERTY CYCLE: DEVELOPING PERSON-CENTRED ENABLING AND ACTIVATION SERVICES**

### **Breaking the Poverty Cycle**

In 2025, President von der Leyen, at the State of Union address, reaffirmed the Union's long-term vision, underlining that the Union will set out its plan to help eradicate poverty by 2050<sup>1</sup>. The achievement of this overarching objective in the Union, is being challenged persistent cost-of-living pressures, macroeconomic challenges and financial insecurity.

Long-standing challenges, such as in-work poverty, rising housing and affordability constraints as well as a considerable number of families with children experiencing poverty, illustrate the multidimensional nature of this issue. This underscores the need for more comprehensive and effective policy responses. These responses include not only providing adequate income support for those in need but also enhance active inclusion and access to essential services. Poverty experienced early in life continues to have deep and lasting effects both at individual and societal levels, driving inequalities in social participation, while reinforcing the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage. Thus, we need stronger preventive mechanisms to reduce the likelihood of people falling into poverty in the first place and simultaneously address intergenerational poverty.

### **Developing person-centred enabling and activation services**

Enabling and activation services that are person-centred have proven to be effective ways in tackling social inequalities and empowering persons to develop their full potential.

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<sup>1</sup> 2025 State of the Union address

Reinforcing investment in integrated, high-quality and adequately resourced enabling services - including social inclusion services (for example social work, counselling, coaching, mentoring, psychological support, rehabilitation) and other general enabling services, including early childhood education and care, healthcare, long-term care, education and training, and housing are essential for addressing the structural drivers of poverty as well as breaking the cycles of disadvantage.

Prioritising policies that facilitate early engagement and personalised assistance, including individual skills assessments, career counselling and targeted training or reskilling opportunities aligned with labour market needs is key. For activation policies to be effective, it is essential that they are designed around the individual's goals, capacities and social context, recognising that self-determination, social connections and self-efficacy are essential to breaking cycles of exclusion. Person-centred design also promotes dignity, autonomy and choice.

In parallel, breaking poverty's complexity requires collaboration across sectors – such as social services, health, education, employment and housing - with seamless pathways for individuals to access what they need “under one roof” or through coordinated referral systems. Specifically, strengthening links between social protection systems and public employment services is essential, alongside incentives that make transitioning into work financially viable and sustainable. Such enabling approaches not only support labour market integration but also contribute to broader social participation, equal opportunities and social cohesion.

Furthermore, engaging local organisations, peer support groups and grassroots actors helps to ensure that services are tailored, targeted and accessible. Community-based models also foster mutual support and social capital, which are key factors in sustainable inclusion.

In order to achieve maximum results, interventions need to build confidence, reduce internalised stigma and enhance coping capacities so as to produce effective social outcomes, in line with the green and digital transitions.

The first-ever “EU Anti-Poverty Strategy”, in the first half of 2026, is expected to strengthen and highlight the importance of person-centred, enabling and activation services. While some progress has been made towards the 2030 target on reducing poverty, the overall pace remains slow. Poverty continues to disproportionately affect women, families with children and people in vulnerable situations, highlighting the urgency of more coherent, targeted and forward-looking actions. It is imperative for policies to be effective, to complement remedial services and encompass prevention-oriented approaches. Strengthened policy coherence and coordination at both EU, national and regional levels, also through the European Semester, are essential to ensure that no one is left behind.

### **Objective of the exchange of views**

Considering the above, ministers are invited to exchange views on effective policies to break the cycle of poverty, with particular emphasis on the role of person-centred, enabling and activation services. The discussion aims to facilitate exploring the transition from purely monetary benefits to holistic and supportive personalised assistance and in-kind services. In this context, ministers may reflect how social protection systems and activation services can be better aligned towards autonomy, social inclusion and employment.

## Questions for discussion

Against this background, ministers are invited to reflect on the following questions:

- 1. What measures are you implementing that have effectively strengthened person-centred enabling and activation services to prevent poverty and/or social exclusion;*
  - 2. How can person-centred enabling and activation policies be embedded in the upcoming first ever EU Anti-Poverty Strategy?*
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