

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2024

FOR A EUROPE THAT REGAINS HOPE



emmaus
EUROPE

ACTIVISTS FOR CHANGE

Founded in 1949 in France, Emmaus is an international movement present in 20 European countries that provides an unconditional welcome to all those who need a roof over their heads, shelter or a place to rebuild their lives. The Emmaus movement is also a pioneer in the circular economy. Historically involved in rag-picking to self-finance its work, it has become a key player in Europe's reuse and recycling schemes. **We believe in a Europe that pulls humanity upwards.**

A EUROPE OF SOLIDARITY AND PROTECTION FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE

The Emmaus groups in Europe have seen a deterioration in the situation of the people they take in and the families they support as a result of inflation in recent years. Moreover, despite increasing needs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and growing tensions on our continent, public health service budget cuts, particularly mental health budgets, are worsening the lack of access to mental healthcare in several countries. This hinders care for people made vulnerable by precarious circumstances or difficult migration journeys and we feel it keenly in our support. The action plan for the European pillar of social rights has led to significant progress, notably with the creation of the homelessness platform, but there is still work to be done.

► FOR A EUROPE THAT PRIORITISES THE MOST VULNERABLE

We call for priority to be given to the most vulnerable in the construction of all policies, guaranteeing greater protection for these people and equitable opportunities.

We support the creation of a social right of veto in order to guarantee greater social equity in Europe. This right would involve: (1) Proper consultation of those affected and civil society organisations, (2) an assessment of the impact of any proposed legislation on the 10-20% most deprived members of society to ensure that they are protected. If the findings of this assessment are not satisfactory, an independent body could be called upon to activate the social right of veto, thus halting the legislative process.

- **Include and prioritise the most vulnerable people in each piece of EU legislation.**
- **Put in place a social right of veto on all European policy.**

► FOR A EUROPE THAT URGENTLY GETS TO GRIPS WITH HOUSING FIRST

Each edition of the report on substandard housing in Europe published by the Fondation Abbé Pierre, a member of Emmaus Europe, and FEANTSA, underlines the growing scale of the homelessness and unfit housing crisis. In 2022, at least 895,000 people were homeless in Europe, while according to Eurostat, 19.2 million people were living in substandard housing conditions.

Although the EU is not responsible for housing policy, it is crucial that Europe takes these issues into account when developing policy that impacts housing. Recognising substandard housing as a public health issue would enable the EU to effectively intervene in this area. It will therefore fall to the European institutions and Member States to work together to create an unconditional right to emergency housing, and a minimum housing standard in Europe.

For over 15 years, the “housing first” policy as implemented in Finland has consistently proved its worth. The European Commission, the European Parliament and Council must play an active role in promoting this European model in all the Member States.

The creation of EPOCH (European Platform on Combatting Homelessness) almost three years ago was a first step towards implementing concrete initiatives. However, to date, EPOCH has not had the resources it needs to achieve its aims. It is crucial that the European Commission clearly designates a body responsible for managing the platform and allocates it a multi-annual operating budget so that EPOCH can work effectively and its long-term future is secured.

- **Recognise substandard housing as a European public health problem.**
- **Create an unconditional right to emergency housing and a minimum housing standard in Europe.**
- **Encourage all the Member States to put in place a “housing first” policy based on the Finnish model.**
- **Allocate the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH) with a structural budget for its governance and work.**

► FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE INTERCONNECTED WITH ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

We advocate a fair transition, enabling the most modest households to make energy and transport savings, and the strengthening of the polluter-pays principle.

The European Commission has launched the “Renovation Wave” strategy to achieve the Green Deal objectives and specifically to double the number of building renovations over the next decade. However, the strategy does not clearly set out the instruments and guarantees needed to ensure that this renovation wave will prioritise people on the lowest incomes.

The €86.7 billion allocated to the Social Climate Fund (SCF) for 2026-2032 needs to be adequately increased to meet future needs, notably with regard to the rollout of the wave of renovation needed and to address the fuel poverty of the lowest-income households.

- **Work towards launching a Marshall Plan to implement the Renovation Wave of housing stock and supported housing, accommodation and centres for vulnerable people.**
- **Bolster as much as possible the principle of environmental responsibility, encouraging polluters to bear the cost of their actions.**

▶ FOR ACCESS TO SOCIAL PROTECTION, A MINIMUM INCOME AND A DECENT WAGE

We support access for all to social welfare, a minimum income equivalent to at least 60% of the median standard of living for people as soon as they become adults in each EU country, and a decent wage. At the same time, there is a need throughout Europe to address long-term unemployment and offer quality employment access pathways.

We suggest that Europe should be a driving force for developing a green transition income enabling the shock caused by the switch to a post-growth economic model to be absorbed in order to inter-link these issues with Green Deal issues.

Finally, it is also vital that coordination of national social security systems is improved in order to guarantee swift and effective portability of entitlements.

- Guarantee access to social welfare for all.
- Guarantee a minimum income equivalent to at least 60% of the median standard of living in each EU country as soon people become adults.
- Devise a green transition income.
- Guarantee a decent wage for all throughout Europe.
- Ensure the portability of national social security system entitlements.

▶ FOR A MORE AMBITIOUS SOCIAL AGENDA

We are calling for an ambitious social programme, providing everyone with access to quality, affordable and accessible key services, such as education, healthcare, transport, quality food, water and social services.

- Step up the EU's action in the fields of access to education, healthcare, transport, quality food and social services.

▶ BETTER CARE FOR CHILDREN IN CARE AND SUPPORT TOWARDS AUTONOMY AFTER THE AGE OF 18

A majority of children placed in care end up on the streets after the age of 18, a number of them with addiction, housing, employment and psycho-social support access problems. We would like Europe to take up this issue to enable these children to leave public institutions able to live their adult lives.

- Commit to a European strategy to support children in care until they become adults and guarantee them access to housing, employment and social support.

▶ FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND AGAINST ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

We demand that all European policies include criteria to combat gender inequality, eliminate all forms of discrimination, and promote fair treatment and equal representation for all.

▶ FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A EUROPE OF PEACE

Europe should continue supporting Ukraine to defend itself against the Russian invasion, but to prepare for a peaceful future Europe must also limit the arms race in which it has once again engaged in recent years and support peace networks.

- Limit the European arms race, while helping Ukraine to defend itself.
- Support pacifist networks.

► FOR AN INCLUSIVE DIGITAL EUROPE

Nowadays, people need to be able to go online to fully participate in society and benefit from a wide range of services, which have mainly become digital, such as those offered by e-government. For example, in France alone, in 2022 the CREDOC research centre revealed that in the space of five years, the number of citizens who were digitally excluded rose from 13 to 16 million. Despite appearances, the digital divide persists and is widening because of the rapid digitalisation of key services. We need to recognise and take steps to address the harmful impact that this is having on the most vulnerable people's living conditions and access to rights. The digital transition can offer real benefits to the most deprived people. However, if the access and digital skills challenges are not addressed, the digital transition is likely to further exclude people in vulnerable situations.

Concrete measures are needed to address digital exclusion in Europe and provide access for all to online services. There are already some European initiatives in this area, but they need to be improved to include the most vulnerable people. Following the success of the European Web Accessibility Directive for people with disabilities, it is a good time to review the directive in order to broaden its scope. This review should guarantee web accessibility via mobile devices so as not to exclude those without PCs or laptops. Moreover, it needs to take into account people who are digitally illiterate and those with language difficulties. At the same time, we think that there is a need to broaden the scope of the digital education action plan and specifically include a section on developing the digital skills of socially-excluded communities.

Apart from these changes, we firmly believe that the EU can play a leading role in the fight against digital exclusion by adopting a proactive approach. A significant first step would be to carefully examine the option of classifying internet and digital device access as basic services, just like water and electricity. This would maintain a high standard for digital access and would encourage the Member States to take concrete action to address digital exclusion. Moreover, it is crucial that the EU takes bold decisions to encourage the continuation of in-person public services in order to provide assistance to people who will remain excluded from digital services.

- **Review the web accessibility directive (2016/2102) and include provisions covering other excluded communities.**
- **Broaden the digital education action plan to include a section on the digital skills of socially-excluded groups.**
- **Examine the possibility of classing internet and digital device access as a basic commodity, just like water and electricity.**
- **Maintain in-person public services to help people who will still be excluded from digital services.**

AN ECONOMIC EUROPE THAT SAFEGUARDS OUR COMMON FUTURE

Since the 1940s, the Emmaus Movement in Europe has been one of the pioneers of the circular economy, and has been generating an income to fund its work, mainly by reusing goods that are donated, collected and sometimes repaired, in order to then resell or redistribute them.

While focusing on this work, we are very aware of the ecological challenges facing the world and, in particular, the impact of climate change on the poorest people, on the displacement of populations and the crises it causes. We want a Europe that takes these issues seriously enough to keep our hopes alive. Although the first steps taken with the Green Deal are encouraging, there is a need to go further.

► FOR PRIORITY TO BE GIVEN TO RE-USE

We are calling for EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) schemes to fully support the waste hierarchy in all sectors and throughout the EU. This would mean prioritising reuse, repair and preparation for reuse activities. As a matter of fact, reuse is more energy efficient and creates more jobs than recycling. Therefore, it is vital that a significant swathe of EPR payments in all waste streams are allocated to reuse, repair and preparing for reuse activities so that EU policy is consistent with the waste hierarchy.

Moreover, the objectives are key tools for achieving the waste management and prevention objectives, but they have not been used to their full potential to date. The EU should include objectives in all of its waste-related policy, following the example of the Member States and regions that have already set targets in this area. These objectives need to be ambitious for significant results to be achieved.

- Steps to be taken to ensure that each Extended Producer Responsibility programme fully upholds the waste hierarchy.
- Most of EPR payments to be allocated to reuse, repair and preparing for reuse activities.
- Clear, quantified and ambitious waste prevention, reuse and preparation for reuse objectives to be set.

► FOR A SPECIAL PLACE FOR THE SOCIAL SOLIDARITY ECONOMY (SSE) IN THE WASTE COLLECTION, MANAGEMENT AND REUSE SECTOR IN EUROPE

Ragpickers' associations and, more broadly, players in the social solidarity economy were the pioneers of the circular economy. The social impact of their actions, in addition to their ecological expertise in the field of reuse, justifies the important place that should be given to them in waste management channels. They should be given access to a specific percentage of waste.

Furthermore, initiatives to stimulate the social economy, such as the resource recycling work done by social enterprises, help guarantee fair labour markets and effective social welfare systems, such as those promoted by the European Pillar of Social Rights. By strengthening the social economy sector, we are giving more power to stakeholders working for social and environmental well-being, with this being crucial for turning a Green Social Deal into reality.

- The social economy to have a special place in the waste collection, management and reuse sector in Europe.
- Social economy organisations to have access to a specific percentage of waste.
- The Social Economy Action Plan to be strengthened and the resources provided to achieve ambitious objectives.
- The Social Economy Parliamentary Intergroup to be strengthened.

It is vital that the initiatives listed in the Social Economy Action Plan are moved forward and a long-term vision is developed. To this end, we recommend that the European Parliament's "social economy" intergroup is bolstered and a European commissioner for the social economy is appointed.

- **A European social economy commissioner to be appointed.**

► **FOR THE MANUFACTURE OF GOODS TO BE REGULATED**

Reuse and recycling schemes should not be the solutions to constant overproduction, with little regard for social rights and the environment in producer countries. It is important that industry-specific production reduction objectives are set and effective monitoring is undertaken. At the same time, it is vital that work continues on product eco-design, in this way fostering product reuse.

We also want to flag up the textile sector practice of handing out gift vouchers when clothes donations are made (known as "shwopping"). The use of this practice by some clothing brands is negatively impacting the third sector and the social economy. It promotes the purchase of new items and in this way fosters a non-sustainable approach. We feel that it is crucial that this "shwopping" practice is banned in order to guarantee that reuse goes up in practice. As a matter of fact, remunerating shoppers for donating unwanted clothing to major brands diverts quality reusable items away from long-standing reuse stakeholders, while encouraging shoppers to buy new items of clothing.

We also need a large-scale European initiative to combat fast fashion. With this in mind, the introduction of green contributions offering genuine incentives in EPR schemes, incorporating bonus/penalty systems based on the volume of products put on sale, could play a pivotal role in achieving ambitious waste reduction objectives. This is why we are calling for the introduction of a penalty for the brands that launch over 5,000 new clothing products per year.

- **New product reduction objectives to be set for each industry and guarantee effective oversight.**
- **The practice of "shwopping" to be banned in the clothing sector.**
- **A penalty to be introduced for the brands that launch over 5,000 new clothing products per year.**

► **FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL CRITERIA IN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT TO BE STRENGTHENED**

Currently, the majority of contract award procedures use the lowest price as the only award criterion, to the detriment of a more resilient economy.

We support stricter guidelines and greater leadership in green and social procurement, encouraging the increased inclusion of social clauses, set-aside contracts and environmental criteria in all tendering procedures.

- **Environmental and social criteria to be brought into public procurement contracts and access to be facilitated for social economy organisations.**

► SKILLS ACQUIRED IN THE SOCIAL ECONOMY TO BE RECOGNISED

Current skills policy mainly focuses on formal education, meaning that there is little recognition of skills acquired informally or on the ground, particularly for those in the greatest need. However, social organisations show that the development of manual skills goes hand-in-hand with job creation and preparing the workforce for a circular future. Future initiatives should concentrate on recognition of certification issued by skills providers working with disadvantaged workers, in this way facilitating their social and labour market integration.

- Certification of skills acquired when working for social economy organisations to be recognised.

► THE MOST VULNERABLE TO BE SUPPORTED AGAINST OVER-INDEBTEDNESS

Moreover, since the creation of the very first SOS Familles Emmaus in France in 1967, addressing serious debt has been one of the Emmaus Movement's important work areas. Solely staffed by volunteers, the SOS Familles Emmaus support financially precarious households, advising them about their household budget and providing them with repayable, interest and admin fee-free loans. They are in touch with social services, who refer people in serious debt, who may need one-off support with setting themselves up and making plans for the future, for instance.

We firmly believe that the European level offers a great opportunity to promote and extend this type of initiative, preventing many people from falling into poverty in each of the Member States.

- The Member States to be encouraged to develop incentives to invest in solidarity finance.
- Access to be guaranteed for all, particularly the most vulnerable, to payment methods: uphold the legal right to have a bank account.
- The way instant debit cards work to be changed.
- The accessibility of financial products to be simplified and improved for vulnerable communities: this should go hand-in-hand with a reform of the banking system.
- Access to personal micro-credit to be facilitated.
- Serious debt to be prevented and addressed by continuing to develop associations and mechanism that offer support with budgeting.

► A EUROPEAN JOB GUARANTEE

We must take shared responsibility for a lack of employment, as there are not enough job opportunities offered by private-sector businesses and the public sector to enable all citizens looking for work to find a job. In France, Emmaus is fully involved in the "Zero long-term unemployed territories" experiments.

In line with the recommendations contained in the report adopted by the European Committee of the Regions in 2023, the resolution advocating job creation through local experiments, and the creation of an ESF + Social Innovation Budget for developing zero long-term unemployed area projects, we firmly believe that the implementation of a European Job Guarantee would be an effective solution.

- A European Job Guarantee to be created.

This initiative would provide opportunities for the long-term unemployed through a State-managed programme, offering them jobs that match their skills and career aspirations. The main facets of this guarantee should include: (1) provide job opportunities that match individual skills and career aspirations, (2) guarantee the voluntary engagement of the unemployed, without any conditions or sanctions if they turn down a job (such as losing their unemployment benefit), and without repercussions for participants who opt to leave a job or the programme, and (3) offer quality, meaningful jobs suited to the challenges of the green transition.

In a nutshell, a European job guarantee is a concrete solution for addressing unemployment and promoting a fairer and more prosperous society for all.

A EUROPE OF HUMAN RIGHTS, FOR ALL HUMAN BEINGS

Europe has gradually moved away from human rights in its migration policy. The Emmaus groups can testify to this through their work in welcoming the victims of push back on the Balkan route and in the Mediterranean, and their support for rough sleepers in the rest of Europe.

We call for a Europe that returns to the simple principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and remembers that it stood up and said “never again”: the **Geneva Convention** must retain its full meaning today.

The legislation adopted in the new migration and asylum pact does not respect the spirit of these texts so we recommend that it is not implemented.

► FOR ARTICLE 13 OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS TO BE UPHELD

Article 13 of the UDHR states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.”

Today, however, it is virtually impossible to obtain a visa to come to Europe from Africa or certain Asian countries. Obtaining asylum at the risk of one’s life has become practically the only way to get to Europe. This policy is untenable in human rights terms.

- **Article 13 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Convention to be replaced at the heart of EU migration policy.**
- **A return to a proper visa policy.**

► FOR A DIGNIFIED RECEPTION, AND THAT FAMILIES AND CHILDREN ARE NOT LEFT ON THE STREETS

The Dublin Regulation has created too much misery by preventing people from applying for asylum in the country where they had ties and forcing them to return to their country of first entry. This principle is not called into question by the Pact.

Waiting 18 months to be able to apply for asylum after being “Dublined” without rights or support has left families on the streets, with these very vulnerable situations caused by migration policy itself. This situation is worsened by the new Migration and Asylum Pact. Asylum seekers must be able to choose the country where they will rebuild their lives. Their access to accommodation, healthcare and the job market, as provided for in the 2013 reception directive, must be improved.

- **The country of first entry principle to be abolished.**
- **Asylum seekers to be allowed to choose the country where they wish to claim asylum.**

► FOR A EUROPE THAT SAVES LIVES AND STOPS FINANCING AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES AND THE MILITARISATION OF BORDERS

We demand an end to the outsourcing of European borders and to readmission agreements with authoritarian regimes that compromise migrants' and refugees' safety and rights. In line with the Geneva Convention, Europe must put an end to push backs and the militarisation of borders embodied by Frontex. Frontex's budget has risen from €6 million to €845million in 14 years. Over 2,500 men, women and children died or went missing in the Mediterranean in 2023, according to the UN. This is an intolerable situation! We demand that most of this budget be reallocated to maritime search and rescue, proper reception and integration policies.

- An end to border outsourcing.
- Frontex to be restructured and most of its budget to be reallocated to reception work.
- A European humanitarian maritime search and rescue operation to be set up, based on the Mare Nostrum model.

► FOR INTEGRATION TO BE PROMOTED

We call for policies to promote the social and economic integration of refugees and migrants, ensuring their access to work, housing, a dignified reception and sustainable inclusion. There must be a firm commitment to diversity and inclusion, recognising the richness of different cultures and identities within the European Union.

- Policies to foster the socio-economic integration of migrants and refugees to be put in place.

► AN UNCONDITIONAL AND PROPER RECEPTION AND ACCOMMODATION SERVICE FOR ALL

The Migration and Asylum Pact compromises the right of asylum, worsens border detention conditions, and neglects the challenges of receiving migrants. We are firmly opposed to the ensuing detention and deprivation of liberty for men and women.

Access to appropriate accommodation and housing for migrants and refugees should be a reception policy priority. Sadly, the pact does not address any of these critical issues. It ignores the awful living conditions and extreme vulnerability experienced by many people. It is vital that the EU and its Member States guarantee reception conditions that comply with international law.

- An end to detention of migrants and refugees throughout Europe.
- Unconditional and proper accommodation to be guaranteed for anyone needing protection in the EU.
- Member States to be equipped with the resources and means needed to provide a proper reception service by simplifying European funding access procedures.
- The resources needed to implement the Reception Directive to be freed up.

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For more information and examples of concrete actions in connection with the 2024 European elections, visit our specific page:
<https://emmaus-europe.org/language/en/european-elections-a-crucial-issue-for-emmaus/>

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