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Funding overview of sustainability OPPORTUNITIES FOR social services

**2023 REPORT**

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**Eurodiaconia**

This report explores funding programmes that support projects explicitly aligned with sustainability objectives relevant to the social sector. Additionally, it sheds light on the initiatives and actions undertaken by both Eurodiaconia and our members in this domain.

The report delves into various funding programs that have a direct alignment with sustainability objectives within the social sector. This involves identifying and analysing financial venues and initiatives that are explicitly designed to address and contribute to sustainability goals. By exploring these funding programs, the report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of available resources for organizations operating in the social sector.

In addition to exploring funding opportunities, the report sheds light on the proactive measures taken by Eurodiaconia and its member organizations. This involves showcasing the initiatives, projects, and actions implemented by these entities to advance sustainability goals within the social sector.

The report aims to provide a holistic understanding of the landscape where funding, sustainability, and social impact intersect. This involves not only identifying financial resources but also recognizing the practical efforts on the ground.

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**WHO WE ARE**

Eurodiaconia is a European network of churches and Christian NGOs   
providing social and healthcare services and advocating social justice.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **OUR ORGANISATIONAL VALUES** | **OUR MISSION AND VISION** |
| * Love * Courage * Dignity * Hope * Trust | |  | | --- | | Inspired by our Christian faith, our vision is of a Europe where social injustice is eradicated and each person is valued, included and empowered to realize their fullest potential, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalized.  Eurodiaconia is a network of churches and Christian organisations that provide social and health care services and advocate for social justice. Together we work for just and transformative social change across Europe. | |

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# why this topic

The European Commission’s political agenda, set by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in 2019, places significant emphasis on both the green transition and the digital transition.[[1]](#footnote-1) These two transformations, often referred to as the ‘twin transition”’ are expected to complement each other and are both highly prioritised topics for investments through the EU programmes and funds.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The EU and its member states have allocated a substantial budget of €550 billion within the current long-term budget (2021-2027) that will go towards the objective of reaching climate neutrality.[[3]](#footnote-3) In 2021, the EU took a critical step by adopting the EU Climate Law, which legally binds the EU to the Green Deal and commits it to achieving climate neutrality by 2050.[[4]](#footnote-4) Realising this ambitious goal necessitates substantial investments spanning over all sectors. Such profound transformations inevitably put our social fabric to the test. Consequently, it is crucial for social services to remain flexible and adaptive in order to become more sustainable and support individuals throughout the green transition.

There are numerous EU based funding opportunities suitable for social services that include a sustainability aspect. These opportunities include programmes such as Erasmus+, the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme, the European Social Fund+, Horizon Europe, LIFE and European Solidarity Corps. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that even when calls for proposals do not explicitly outline sustainability objectives, applicants may still be required to address and provide commentary on the environmental impact of their projects during the application process.

This report delves into funding programmes that support projects explicitly aligned with sustainability objectives relevant to the social sector. Additionally, it sheds light on the initiatives and actions undertaken by both Eurodiaconia and our members in this domain.



|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **The EU and its member states have allocated a substantial budget of €550 billion within the current long-term budget (2021-2027) that will go towards reaching the objective of climate neutrality by 2050**  **+ €550 000 000 000** |

# A Policy framework: THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

The following section provides a policy framework on the European Green Deal (EGD). This is supported by some funding, but more importantly, it is relevant to understand this policy framework when applying for EU funding for projects related to sustainability.

The European Green Deal is a package of policy initiatives presented by the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in December 2019 that sets the EU on the path of achieving its goal of climate neutrality by 2050. Achieving climate neutrality by 2050 means getting to net zero greenhouse gas emissions for EU countries as a whole. This will primarily be accomplished through emission reduction measures, the promotion of green technologies, and the preservation of the natural environment.[[5]](#footnote-5) The EGD highlights the need for a holistic and cross-sectoral approach for tackling the climate crisis in which all relevant policy areas contribute to reaching the climate neutrality goal.[[6]](#footnote-6) Some of the policy initiatives of the EGD include:

### FIT FOR 55

Fit for 55 refers to the EU’s target of reducing net greenhouse emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels. The Fit for 55 package comprises a series of proposals aimed at revising and updating EU laws and while introducing new initiatives to align the EU policies with the climate objectives agreed by the Council and the European Parliament. The package of proposals aims at providing a solid framework for reaching the climate objectives while ensuring a just and socially fair transition, maintaining and strengthening innovation and competitiveness and sustaining the EU’s position as a global leader in the fight against climate change.[[7]](#footnote-7)

### Emissions trading system and EMISSIONS trading system 2

The EU Emissions and Trading System (ETS) is a ‘cap and trade’ system that was introduced in 2005. It caps the total volume of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from installations and aircraft operators responsible for around 50% of EU GHG emissions. The system allows for trading of emission allowances so that the total emissions of the installations and aircraft operators stay within the cap and the least-cost measures can be taken up to reduce emissions. Trading allows companies to determine what the least-cost option is for them to meet a fixed cap. The price of the carbon is set by the market through trading and based on a wide range of factors. The cap is designed to decrease annually, reducing the number of allowances available to businesses, which allows companies to slowly adjust to meeting the increasingly ambitious target for emissions reductions.[[8]](#footnote-8)

In 2023, a new separate emissions trading system, Emissions Trading System 2 (ETS2), was created, covering fuel combustion in buildings, road transport, and additional sectors (mainly small industry not covered by the existing ETS).[[9]](#footnote-9) The new system aims to ensure cost-effective emission reductions and generate revenue that will be available to Member States and for support under the new Social Climate Fund.[[10]](#footnote-10)

While the EU Emissions Trading System extension was established with the commendable goal of curbing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting sustainability, the potential negative social impact of this extension cannot be overlooked, as this extension is expected to disproportionately burden lower-income groups who have less financial ability to adapt through a change of heating system or electrical car. This disparity raises serious doubts about the fairness and equity of the proposed measures, as the very communities that may be hit hardest are likely to see only a fraction of the funds allocated to addressing their needs.

### the Social climate fund

In order to address any social impacts that arise from the ETS2, the European Commission proposed to introduce the Social Climate Fund. The Social Climate Fund’s size will align with a specific amount of the proceeds generated from the auctioning of emission allowances within ETS2.

The objectives of the Social Climate Fund include financing temporary direct income support for vulnerable households and providing support for measures and investments that lower emissions in the road transport and buildings sectors, thereby reducing expenses for vulnerable households, micro-enterprises and transport users.

The Fund should allocate financial resources to EU Member States to facilitate initiatives and investments that enhance the energy efficiency of buildings, promote the decarbonization of heating and cooling in structures, which incorporate renewable energy sources, and enhance access to low-emission transportation. These efforts should primarily benefit vulnerable households, small businesses, and transportation users. Subject to the effectiveness of these investments in reducing costs and emissions, the Fund may also be used to provide short-term direct income to vulnerable households.[[11]](#footnote-11)

It’s regrettable that only a fraction of the proposed extension to the Emissions Trading System (ETS2) will contribute to the Social Climate Fund (SCF), raising concerns about the adequacy of resources allocated to address social impacts. The limited allocation to the SCF, coupled with the absence of sufficient targeting, underscores the potential insufficiency in meeting the Fund's objectives. It is imperative for policymakers to reevaluate the distribution mechanisms to ensure a more equitable and impactful utilization of funds, thereby maximizing the positive outcomes for vulnerable households.

### the european climate law

The European Climate Law writes into law the goal set by the EGD, i.e. the target of reducing the net greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 and the goal of climate neutrality by 2050. The law aims to make sure that all EU policies are contributing towards reaching the goal and that all sectors of the economy and society are doing their part.[[12]](#footnote-12)

### the eu strategy on adaptation to climate change

The Adaptation Strategy outlines the EU’s approach to cope with the inevitable consequences of climate change and achieve climate resilience by 2050. The strategy has four main goals: to make adaptation smarter, faster and more systemic, and to strengthen global cooperation in tackling the impacts of climate change.[[13]](#footnote-13)

### the eu biodiversity strategy for 2030

The EU’s biodiversity strategy for 2030 is an all-encompassing long-term plan designed to safeguard the environment and undo the harm done to ecosystems. It seeks to lead Europe’s biodiversity towards restoration by 2030, incorporating precise measures and commitments to achieve its goals. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the strategy aims to enhance the resilience of our societies to upcoming challenges, which encompass the effects of climate change, wildfires, insufficient food supplies, and disease outbreaks.[[14]](#footnote-14)

### farm to fork strategy

The Farm to Fork Strategy aims to make food systems fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly. The strategy has the following key goals:

* Achieving a neutral or positive environmental impact
* Contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts
* Revise the decline in biodiversity
* Ensuring food security, and public health by making sure everyone has access to adequate, safe, nutritious, and sustainable food
* Maintaining food affordability while generating fair economic returns, supporting the competitiveness of the EU supply sector, and promoting fair trade[[15]](#footnote-15)

It is important to note that the farm to fork strategy has been criticized by some as to risking triggering an increase in food prices that will, as for the ETS extention, hit the lowest income groups the hardest, as they spend a higher share of their revenues of essential expenses such as food.

### european industrial strategy

The European Industrial Strategy is the EU’s long-term vision for industrial policy. The strategy focuses on increasing the resilience of the single market, dealing with the EU’s strategic dependencies and accelerating the green and digital transitions.[[16]](#footnote-16)

### circular economy action plan

The EU’s Circular Economy action plan includes initiatives throughout the whole life cycle of products. The strategy targets how products are designed, endorses circular economy practices, supports sustainable consumption, and aims to ensure the prevention of waste and the longevity of the resources used in the EU economy.[[17]](#footnote-17)

### the JUST TRANSITION mechanism

The Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) is a key tool that makes sure that the green transition happens in a fair way that does not leave anyone behind. The JTM addresses the social and economic effects of the transition by focusing on the regions, industries and workers who will face the biggest challenges. It does this through three pillars:[[18]](#footnote-18)

* A new Just Transition Fund is implemented based on territorial just transition plans. The fund supports territories expected to be the most negatively affected by the transition by up- and reskilling workers, investing in SMEs, investing in new firms, research and innovation, environmental rehabilitation, clean energy, job-search assistance and the transformation of existing carbon-intensive installations.[[19]](#footnote-19)
* The Just Transition Scheme under InvestEU supports projects in territories that have an approved just transition plan or projects that benefit those regions if they are essential for the transition of those areas. Infrastructure projects that improve the connectivity of the just transition regions could for example be covered.[[20]](#footnote-20)
* The new Public Sector Loan Facility will benefit the regions most affected by the green transition, such as coal- and carbon intensive regions. It is designed to support a diverse array of sustainable investment initiatives aimed at fulfilling the developmental requirements of these areas due to the climate transition. These projects encompass various fields, including energy and transportation infrastructure, district heating networks, energy-saving measures, and social infrastructure.[[21]](#footnote-21) Beneficiaries of the facility will receive a grant from the Commission and a loan from the European Investment Bank.[[22]](#footnote-22)

### InvestEU

The InvestEU programme is a vital component of the European Union’s strategy for sustainable recovery, leveraging both private and public funds to address top policy priorities, such as the green and digital transition, innovation, and social investments. It is also a key part of the response to disruptions in the global energy market caused by Russia’s war against Ukraine. The programme consolidates multiple EU financial instruments, simplifying access to finance and making investment in European projects more efficient and flexible.

The InvestEU programme comprises three components: the InvestEU Fund, the InvestEU Advisory Hub, and the InvestEU Portal. The InvestEU Fund, implemented through financial partners, is backed by a €26,2 billion EU Budget guarantee, enabling it to mobilise at least €372 billion in additional investments. It supports the EU’s policy priorities, streamlines investment support, attracts other investors, stretches public funds, and enhances the investment environment in Europe. Ultimately, it aims to bolster economic recovery, green growth, employment, and social well-being across EU.[[23]](#footnote-23)

### CLEAN, AFFORDABLE AND SECURE ENERGY

Since 75% of EU greenhouse gas emissions come from energy production and use, a decarbonization of the energy sector is crucial for reaching a climate-neutral EU. The EU is working at various levels to achieve clean, affordable and secure energy sources:

* By promoting the advancement and uptake of more environmentally friendly energy sources, such as renewable offshore energy and hydrogen
* By encouraging the unification of energy systems across the EU
* By developing interconnected energy infrastructure through EU energy corridors
* By reevaluating existing laws on energy efficiency and renewable energy, including their 2030 target

The buildings sector is a large energy consumer that stands for over one third of the EU’s greenhouse gas emissions. In June 2021, EU ministers gave their approval to conclusions regarding the Commission’s strategy for a renovation wave. These conclusions highlighted the importance of social inclusivity, economic revival, and environmentally friendly progression. The ministers supported the strategy’s goal to increase energy-related renovation rates within the EU by 2030, with the aim of doubling its current rates.[[24]](#footnote-24)

# Existing funds and programmes

The following section includes EU funds and programmes that can be used for funding projects on the topic of sustainability.

# the european regional development fund

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) provides financial support to both public and private entities across the EU regions, aiming to diminish economic, social and territorial imbalances as one of the financial instruments under the Cohesion Policy. The fund supports investments through dedicated national and regional programmes.

In 2021-2027, the fund is enabling investments to make the EU and its regions:

* **more competitive and smarter,** through innovation and support to small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), as well as digitalization and digital connectivity (PO1).
* **greener,** low-carbon and resilient (PO2).
* **more connected** by enhancing mobility (PO3).
* **more social,** supporting effective and inclusive employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare, as well as enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism (PO4).
* **closer to citizens,** supporting locally-led development and sustainable urban development across the EU (PO5).[[25]](#footnote-25)

Based on their prosperity, all regions and Member States will concentrate the support on fostering a more competitive and smarter Europe (Policy Objective 1 – PO1), as well as supporting a greener, low-carbon transition toward a carbon-neutral economy and building resilience in Europe (PO2) through the mechanism known as ‘thematic concentration’.

Each region and Member State is required to allocate a minimum of 30% of their funding to PO2. Additionally:

* More developed regions or Member States must allocate at least 85% of their funding to PO1 and PO2.
* Transition regions or Member States are expected to allocate at least 40% to PO1.
* Less developed regions or Member States are required to allocate at least 25% to PO1.

Furthermore, all regions and Member States are mandated to dedicate a minimum of 8% of their funding to urban development, implemented through various local development partnerships employing various tools. Operations funded by the ERDF are also anticipated to contribute 30% of the total financing towards climate objectives.[[26]](#footnote-26)

### how to access funding

The ERDF is delivered through shared management, which means that both the European Commission and national authorities in member states are in charge of running the fund. The Member States’ administrations choose which projects to finance and are responsible for the day-to-day management. Calls for proposals under ERDF can be either on a national or regional level. The authority relevant for each regional/national context can be found [here.](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/in-your-country/cohesion-policy-in-the-eu_en)

# Interreg VI

Interreg is a series of programmes aimed at promoting cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation. It encourages collaboration between regions and neighbouring countries. Interreg 2021-2027 is the sixth period of Interreg and therefore called Interreg VI. Almost EUR 10 billion are shared between around 100 Interreg programmes across the borders, in and outside the EU.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Interreg has the following priorities, which will contribute to the main objectives of the Cohesion Policy:

* A more competitive and smarter Europe (PO1)
* A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe (PO2)
* A more connected Europe (PO3)
* A more social and inclusive Europe (PO4)
* A Europe closer to citizens (PO5)

Interreg VI has the following 2 specific objectives for the current programming period:

* Interreg Specific Objective (ISO) 1: A better cooperation governance:
* To enhance the institutional capacity of public administrations.
* To resolve legal and administrative obstacles in border regions.
* To promote sustainable democracy.
* To strengthen mutual trust among citizens.
* Interreg Specific Objective (ISO) 2: A safer and more secure Europe
* For actions in the fields of border crossing management, mobility and migration management, including the protection and economic and social integration of third country nationals.
* To support employment and labor market measures such as improving access to employment, encouraging life-long learning, promoting gender balance and fostering equal opportunities.

Interreg has 4 strands that consist of different programmes:

1. Interreg Strand A: Cross Border Cooperation

This strand has a budget of EUR 6,5 billion and consist of cross-border programmes that are implemented within the EU and at the EU’s external borders.

* 49 programmes aiming to turn border obstacles into opportunities between EU Member States.
* 10 Interreg IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance), which are operating at the EU’s border with IPA countries and mainly contribute to the EU enlargement policy.
* 5 Interreg NEXT programmes, implemented at the EU external eastern and southern borders. Four cross-border support cooperation action with Ukraine and Moldova.

1. Interreg Strand B: Transnational Cooperation

* 14 transnational programmes will continue to support cooperation activities at larger scale in Europe and beyond.
* 4 transnational programmes; Interreg Baltic Sea Region, Interreg Danube Region, Interreg IPA Adrion and Interreg Alpine Space programme will directly support the Macro Regional Strategies covering their geographical area. 80% of their thematic concentration should be aligned with a Macro Regional strategy.
* Transnational programmes linked to Sea Basin Strategies, like Interreg Atlantic Area or Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin also apply the thematic concentration.

1. Interreg Strand C: Interregional Cooperation

The allocation for this strand amounts to more than EUR 550 million and aims at boosting the effectiveness of the Cohesion Policy by promoting exchange of experiences, innovative approaches and capacity building between regions.

For the period of 2021-2027, four cooperation programmes will continue:

* Interreg Europe
* Interact
* URBACT
* ESPON

The programmes cover all 27 EU Member States. Additionally, URBACT will cover 5 IPA beneficiary countries: Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania. ESPON will, next to Norway and Switzerland, include Lichtenstein and Iceland.

1. Interreg Strand D: Outermost Regions Programmes

Strand D concerns 4 geographical areas:

* Amazonia, Caribbean
* Middle Atlantic/Gulf of Guinnea
* Indian Ocean
* Mozambique Channel[[28]](#footnote-28)

### how to access funding

Interreg is managed under shared management (with the exception of strand D), which means that both the European Commission and authorities in Member States are responsible for running the programme. Administrations in the Member States choose which projects to finance and are responsible for the day-to-day management. Open Interreg calls can be found [here.](https://interreg.eu/call-for-project/) Information about relevant Interreg programmes for each region can be found [here.](https://interreg.eu/)

# horizon Europe

Horizon Europe is the EU’s funding programme for research and innovation actions for the period of 2021-2027. It addresses the issue of climate change, contributes to the attainment of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals and enhances the competitive edge and expansion of the European Union. It promotes cooperation and amplifies the influence of research and innovation in crafting, bolstering and executing EU regulations while confronting worldwide issues. It also aids in generating and more widely disseminating exceptional expertise and technologies. Additionally, it generates employment opportunities, fully harnesses the talents within the EU, stimulates economic advancement, encourages industrial competitiveness and maximizes the investment impact within a strengthened European Research Area.

Horizon Europe consists of three pillars, with the second pillar being particularly relevant for social services. The second pillar consists of the following 6 clusters: Health; Culture, Creativity & Inclusive Societies; Civil Security for Society; Digital Industry & Space; Climate, Energy & Mobility and Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture & Environment.[[29]](#footnote-29)

### how to access funding

Horizon Europe is managed under direct and indirect management, which means that the funding is managed directly by the European Commission, as well as by third parties, in this case the Joint Research Centre. Calls for proposals can be found on the [Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal.](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home)

### Examples of calls for proposals

**Pillar 2; Cluster 2; Culture, Creativity & Inclusive Society**

**HORIZON-CL2-2023-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-09**

**Addressing housing inequalities in a sustainable, inclusive and affordable way**

**Expected outcomes:** Projects should contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

* Provide guidance on effective measures that can increase the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities, migrants, refugees and disadvantaged groups by reducing housing inequalities and improving access to quality housing.
* Provide policymakers with a comprehensive overview of how income and wealth polarisation affect the housing market against the background of changing interest rates and inflation.
* Support policymakers in better understanding how the green and digital transition could affect housing inequalities and how “supply-side” land use policies as well as social innovation could help address such inequalities in a sustainable way.
* Provide local and regional policymakers with guidance based on best practices to support the development of affordable and inclusive housing facilities, including energy efficient housing.[[30]](#footnote-30)

**HORIZON-CL2-2023-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-10**

**Tackling inequalities in the green and digital transitions**

**Expected Outcomes:** Projects should contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

* Policymakers at EU/national/local level are provided with a comprehensive view of the risks of widening existing inequalities or create new ones as a result of the twin transition.
* Policymakers at EU/national/local level are provided with policy options that could address existing inequalities and mitigate potential negative socio-economic effects of the twin transitions.

**Scope**: The next decades will be defined by the twin green and digital transitions. These transitions have to be just and socially fair. To achieve this, policymakers need to both recognise existing inequalities and vulnerabilities and take into account the possible distributional impacts of new/revised policies (e.g. the Green Deal and its Fit for 55 Package), against (updated) baseline scenarios. While some aspects of the transitions are subject to (distributional) impact assessment and have been scrutinised by policymakers and relevant stakeholders, the twin transitions might fail to address or, worse, widen existing inequalities and/or create new ones.[[31]](#footnote-31)

**HORIZON-CL2-2024-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-04**

**Social services: economic and social returns and value added**

**Expected Outcome**: Projects should contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

* Well-founded evidence on the social and economic returns of social services, including interlinkages between child poverty and gaps in access to social services, and interlinkages in access to employment and access to social services.
* Improved understanding of the channels through which social services may foster and accelerate a fair green and digital transition.
* Identification and use of the best methodology to capture and measure the value added of the provision of social services, including informal social services, in the EU Member States and Associated Countries in different geographical areas (rural and urban).

**Scope**: Social services have a fundamental role in our society, safeguarding and promoting the welfare and well-being of vulnerable groups (e.g. migrants, people with disabilities, homeless, youth at risk, and more in general, unemployed people, low-income and poor households and women). The proposals should consider social services in a broad manner, including both universal social services of general interest such as healthcare, education, as well as other social services childcare, employment services, long-term care and social inclusion services for persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion (including counselling, coaching, mentoring, crisis centres or shelters, housing support services).[[32]](#footnote-32)

**HORIZON-CL2-2024-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-09**

**The role of social economy in addressing social exclusion, providing quality jobs and greater sustainability**

**Expected Outcome**: Projects should contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

* Address challenges of the policy and legal frameworks that hinder the thriving of social economy and the scaling up of its successful activities.
* Better integrate the role and weight of social economy organisations in addressing social exclusion and providing quality jobs in multilevel policymaking.
* Contribute to improve the working conditions in social economy organisations, including in the care sector.

**Scope**: Almost 3 million social economy entities in Europe offer concrete and innovative solutions to key challenges EU society faces e.g. they create quality jobs, contribute to equal opportunities and socioeconomic inclusion of disadvantaged groups (including people with disabilities), they also play an important role in Europe’s welfare systems and help revitalise Europe’s rural and depopulated areas, therefore contributing to the Long-term vision for the EU’s rural areas.[[33]](#footnote-33)

# life

LIFE is the only EU funding programme that is solely dedicated to the environment and climate actions for the period of 2021-2027. The programme is part of the Green Deal package and is dedicating €3,5 billion for environmental activities and €1,9 for climate action, which is the most substantial budget allocation yet.[[34]](#footnote-34)

The LIFE programme aims to:

* Enable the transition to an economy that is sustainable, circular, energy-efficient, and reliant on renewable energy sources, while also achieving climate neutrality and enhancing resilience.
* Safeguard, recover, and enhance environmental quality, encompassing air, water, and soil.
* Cease and invert the decline in biodiversity.
* Address the deterioration of ecosystems.

The LIFE programme is structured into two fields – Environment and Climate Action, and implemented through four sub-programmes:

1. Under the Environment field:

* Nature and biodiversity
* Circular Economy and Quality of Life

1. Under the Climate Action field:

* Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation
* Clean Energy Transition[[35]](#footnote-35)

### how to access funding

LIFE is managed under direct and indirect management, which means that the funding is managed directly by the European Commission, as well as by third parties. Calls for proposals can be found on the [Funding and Tender Opportunities Portal.](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home)

### Examples of calls for proposals

**LIFE-2023-CET-ENERPOV**

**Alleviating household energy poverty and vulnerability in Europe**

**Scope**: Actions should contribute to actively alleviating energy poverty and energy vulnerability and build on the tools, indicators and resources of existing initiatives, such as the Energy Poverty Advisory Hubor the energy poverty pillar of Covenant of Mayors.

The proposed action should cover one or more of the following aspects:

* Support the renovation of private multi-apartment buildings with vulnerable residents, with a special focus on reinforcing and adapting the governance and decision-making structures of building management and homeowners associations, tackling related regulatory framework barriers (e.g. property and/or rental laws), split incentives (where relevant), and setting up and coordinating relevant support services. The renovation actions supported should take into account the ability of residents to remain in their homes to avoid gentrification.
* Design and pilot sustainable, large-scale programmes to improve the skills and capacity of energy vulnerable households with a view to improving household energy efficiency and/or increasing the uptake of renewable energy solutions, thereby lowering household energy bills and improving comfort, and empowering vulnerable and energy poor consumers to take actively part in the energy market. These programmes should be tailored for vulnerable households and may include the provision of feedback, energy efficiency measures (e.g. draught proofing, simple insulation measures, or optimisation of existing building technology systems), financial support schemes, or collective solutions (e.g. group purchases, collective self-consumption/energy sharing schemes, peer to peer trading). These actions should be embedded in, and add value to, structural frameworks and activities involving public authorities, societal intermediaries or other relevant actors. A key element of the proposed activities should be the development of a strategy ensuring that the programmes will be sustained after the end of the project, linking to available sources of funding.
* Facilitate the delivery of capacity-building for regional and/or local authorities and societal intermediaries and support these actors in setting up cross-sectoral coordination structures to address energy poverty and vulnerability. This capacity-building should ultimately lead to the relevant actors co-designing and rolling out integrated interventions and support schemes for the benefit of vulnerable households. The actors involved are expected to represent all relevant sectors (e.g. energy, social, health, and housing) to ensure a holistic participatory approach to the alleviation of energy vulnerability in the long term and to improve social cohesion.
* Support obligated parties in setting up and testing schemes for energy efficiency improvement measures for the benefit of vulnerable households under the energy efficiency obligation schemes of the proposed EED (recast), including, where applicable, working together with local authorities or municipalities, and/or relevant networks such as the Covenant of Mayors. It is expected that obligated parties, in particular, are either directly involved or their support is clearly demonstrated in the proposal.[[36]](#footnote-36)

**LIFE-2022-CET-ENERPOV**

**Addressing building related interventions in vulnerable districts**

**Scope**: Proposed actions should facilitate the market uptake of renovation approaches for the large-scale rollout of building-related interventions for vulnerable districts, clusters of buildings, or groups of such buildings managed by e.g. common building management entities, social/public housing organisations, or private owners of a large housing stock, in line with the Renovation Wave and the Commission Recommendation on Energy Poverty. Activities should demonstrate the effectiveness and replicability of the proposed approaches for the energy renovation of vulnerable districts.

Proposals should clearly identify the type of housing targeted: private or public rental housing, individual or multifamily buildings, owner-occupied or mixed tenure, etc. In case of rental properties, actions should help ensure that tenants’ total costs of occupancy are maintained after renovation works in order to avoid district gentrification.

The approaches should be one or more of the following:

* Supporting the renovation of private multi-apartment buildings, with a special focus on reinforcing and adapting the governance and decision-making structures of building management and homeowners associations, tackling related regulatory framework barriers (e.g. property and/or rental laws), and setting up and coordinating relevant support services.
* Developing and implementing roadmaps for the energy renovation of a vulnerable district or group(s) of buildings with vulnerable residents, involving all stakeholders in the elaboration and implementation of the investment plan. Such roadmaps should prevent lock-in effects. Low cost measures can only form a small, complementary part of the roadmaps.
* Rolling out holistic, industrialised deep renovation solutions, including also approaches based on pre-fabricated modules for the renovation of vulnerable districts.[[37]](#footnote-37)

# NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS

The New European Bauhaus (NEB) is an initiative that was launched in the autumn 2020 by the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, which connects the European Green Deal to our living spaces and experiences. The NEB takes the European Green Deal and transforms it into tangible change on the ground that enhances our daily life, encompassing areas such as buildings, public spaces, and even aspects like aesthetics and furniture.[[38]](#footnote-38)

The initiative aims to inspire a movement, cutting across disciplines and building on participation on all levels, which will facilitate and steer transformation of our societies based on three inseparable values:

* Sustainability: climate goals, circularity, zero pollution, and biodiversity
* Aesthetics: quality of experience and style beyond functionality
* Inclusion: from valuing diversity to securing accessibility and affordability[[39]](#footnote-39)

### how to access funding

The initiative has two strands of public funding: funding at EU level, which can be accessed through the [Funding and Tender Opportunities portal](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home), and funding through the [Member States’ own resources and initiatives](https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/about/national-contact-points_en). The funds for projects to support the New European Bauhaus at EU level can be found in existing EU programmes, such as Horizon Europe, LIFE, The Single Market programme, Creative Europe and Erasmus+. There are calls specifically dedicated to the implementation of the European Bauhaus Initiative, as well as calls that are contributing to the implementation of the initiative.[[40]](#footnote-40)

### examples of calls for proposals

**HORIZON-CL2-2022-HERITAGE-01-10**

**The New European Bauhaus – shaping a greener and fairer way of life in creative and inclusive societies through Architecture, Design and Arts**

Projects should contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

* Create innovative architectural and design solutions that emphasise the use of new forms and materials in line with the European Green Deal objectives.
* Leverage the social function of architecture, arts and design, combining functionality and sustainability with aesthetics, arts and culture, with the aim of driving social inclusion and accessibility, as well as strengthening the contribution of culture to sustainability.
* Examine cultural transformations driving sustainability and explore new cooperation paths among relevant stakeholders, including cultural and creative industries, interested in designing a new European way of life in line with the New European Bauhaus.

This should be achieved by combining the three dimensions of sustainability, quality (of life, of human experiences and of architecture) and social inclusion. The NEB is essentially a project that aims to be a bridge between the world of science and technology and the world of art and culture, where citizens take ownership of the Green Deal.[[41]](#footnote-41)

**HORIZON-HLTH-2023-ENVHLTH-02-02**

**Evidence-based interventions for promotion of mental and physical health in changing working environments (post-pandemic workplaces)**

Research actions under this topic should include several of the following activities:

* Provide adequate and robust data on the impact (positive and negative) that the ongoing changes in the workplace are having on the mental and physical health of different categories of workers and working sectors (e.g. teleworkers, cross-border commuters, gig economy workers, and vulnerable groups such as women, migrants and young and older workers with increased demonstrated risk for MSDs), including gender and intersectional analyses, where appropriate;
* Generate evidence (including data) not only on mental health, but also on mental well-being at the workplace and how changing work organisation due to the twin transitions and the pandemic affects workers’ work-life balance and work ability;
* Generate evidence (including data) on the importance of risk factors (such as stress caused by new working environments, static postures and physical inactivity, physically strenuous and highly repetitive work arising from the workplace design) in the development of chronic and acute diseases;
* Increase the understanding of the links between different health-promoting factors in the working-built environment and physical and mental health outcomes, and how these may be mutually reinforcing;
* Explore the health impacts of changing working times, including excessive and atypical working hours and work in different time zones that blur work from leisure time, limiting recovery. Effects should consider a wide range of diseases;
* Provide recommendations for effective interventions to prevent occupational risks and support the mental and physical health and well-being at individual (worker), organisation (employer) and policy (government) levels for different sectors/types of work, including an analysis on their cost-effectiveness, sustainability and barriers to implementation at national and/or EU level;
* Advance the development of a scientific framework addressing occupational safety and health (OSH) across policies and sectors and support new and sustainable (future-proof) tools, guidelines and policies concerning the evaluation and design of physical and psychosocial work environment;
* Provide tools and approaches to anticipate new OSH risks, also taking account of lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance in relation to digital technologies and associated new ways of working.[[42]](#footnote-42)

**HORIZON-CL5-2023-D4-02-05**

**Supporting the creation of an accessible and inclusive built environment (Built4People Partnership)**

Proposals are expected to address all of the following:

* Develop innovative methods to ensure and facilitate the implementation of accessibility at all stages of design and construction processes, as well as the monitoring and testing of results.
* Demonstrate (and where applicable produce) innovative planning and design tools for new and existing buildings and/or multi-modal hubs and/or public spaces and/or other infrastructure for people’s use with the triple aim of:
* improving comfort (e.g. improving air quality, reducing noise or vibrations);
* making them accessible and inclusive for persons with disability and/or older persons;
* transforming the built environment towards sustainability (including social sustainability), climate change mitigation and adaptation, e.g. relying on nature-based solutions.
* Address the adaptability of the built environment over its lifecycle, to ensure flexibility for accessibility adaptations (e.g., in the case of changing needs of people with increasing disabilities and reducing mobility).
* Make the facilities of the built environment under consideration more energy efficient overall, therefore reducing GHG emissions.
* Ensure the involvement of persons with disabilities by means of a participatory approach.
* Consider the possible creation of new job opportunities that are concerned with implementing, monitoring and maintaining accessibility of the facilities of the built environment.
* Demonstrate the solutions in at least two demonstrators.
* Where applicable, investigate solutions aiming at removing barriers, improving storage of (cargo-)bicycles, improving charging possibilities for electric (cargo-)bicycles in an inclusive way (e.g., considering the specific needs of older persons, multi-generational groups, and persons with disabilities).
* Where applicable, design public spaces to promote soft and active modes of mobility through attractive, safe, and green infrastructure for healthier and environmentally friendly lifestyles, therefore lowering carbon emissions and noise pollution.
* Where applicable, develop solutions to ensure the mobility of person with disabilities (including visually impaired users) inside buildings in an autonomous, ubiquitous, and pervasive way.
* Where new digital tools are used in the built environment (including to address energy efficiency and comfort in buildings), ensure their accessibility for persons with disabilities and older persons.
* Ensure the project’s dissemination activities include actions targeted to contributing to the activities of the NEB Community, and to sharing information, best practice and results within the NEB Lab[[43]](#footnote-43)

**ERASMUS-YOUTH-2023-YOUTH-TOG**

**European Youth Together**

The action seeks to specifically support:

* The promotion and development of more transnational structured cooperation, online and offline, between different youth organisations to build or strengthen partnerships focusing on solidarity and inclusive democratic participation of all against a backdrop of the backlashes on socio-economic structures and in line with the EU Youth Strategy, the EU Youth Goals and the Youth Dialogue.
* The implementation of EU Frameworks and initiatives such as country specific recommendations from the European Semester as far as they relate to the youth area.
* Youth organisations involved in initiatives to encourage young people to participate in the democratic process and in society by organising trainings, showcase commonalities among young Europeans and encourage discussion and debate on their connection to the EU, its values and democratic foundations. This includes organising events as a lead-up to the 2024 elections to the European Parliament.
* The promotion of participation of under-represented groups of young people in politics, youth organisations and other civil society organisations by engaging vulnerable and socio-economic disadvantaged youth;
* New ways to empower youth organisations in dealing with the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, by supporting innovative ways of cooperation and network creation, development and management. Indicatively, this could include enhancing collaboration between youth organisations in a digital context through non-formal learning methods and organisational models such as alternative modes of exchanges and mutual aid.
* The reinforcement of the European dimension of the activities of youth organisations, including activities on how to live better together after the pandemic and helping to design sustainable future ways of living transnationally.[[44]](#footnote-44)

# Eurodiaconia’s Sustainability work

**ENVIRONAMENTAL ROUNDTABLE**

In 2021, Eurodiaconia organised a webinar called the “Environmental Roundtable”. The Environmental Roundtable was held prior to the United Nations’ COP26 Climate Summit as a way to gain momentum on climate change related topics and to begin articulate a Eurodiaconia green working group. The webinar focused on lifting the different sustainable practices and green-focused projects implemented by our members. It enabled Eurodiaconia members to connect, collaborate, and network on matters relating to environmental sustainability. Through interactive sessions, and discussions, participants were encouraged to share their experiences, challenges, and successes in implementing green initiatives. This collaborative exchange not only facilitated mutual learning but also laid the groundwork for future partnerships and joint endeavours.

**WORKSHOP DURING THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

On the Annual General Meeting in 2023, Eurodiaconia organised a workshop on the topic of sustainability and diaconia. The workshop focused on EU policies on sustainability, how members work with sustainability, what Eurodiaconia is doing on the topic and how we could become more sustainable. Central to the workshop was an exploration of EU policies on sustainability, providing a foundational understanding of the broader context within which diaconal organizations operate. By aligning with EU frameworks, the workshop aimed to empower members with insights into the policy landscape, encouraging them to leverage and contribute to the broader sustainability agenda at both regional and national levels. It also enabled members to exchange and in doing so to foster sharing of ideas, inspire innovation, and create a collective source of best practices.

**NETWORK MEETING ON ENERGY P****OVERTY**

An issue related to sustainability and the social sector, which is monitored by Eurodiaconia on the European level, is energy poverty. The term energy poverty, or fuel poverty, relates to the inability of a household to keep its living arrangements adequately warm or cold to ensure a sufficient supply of electricity, which often leads to the worsening of health conditions, social exclusion, or even premature death. In recent years, the situation for numerous EU citizens has become even more challenging due to the COVID-19 crisis followed by the surge in energy prices and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. While the percentage of EU citizens unable to sufficiently heat their homes dropped from 8% in 2020 to 6,9% in 2021, it rose to 9,3% in 2022.[[45]](#footnote-45)

On the 5th and 6th of June 2023, Eurodiaconia organised a network meeting on energy poverty, which was hosted by Diaconia Valdese in Italy. The meeting aimed to provide a forum where members could gain relevant knowledge on the topic and exchange their experiences and good practices to help tackle energy poverty and the cost-of-living crisis. Opportunities and challenges at the European, national and local level were also discussed. As a result, Eurodiaconia developed a policy position on energy poverty, including policy recommendations to address energy poverty[[46]](#footnote-46).

**ROUNDTABLE DURING THE SOCIAL** **POLICY DAYS**

On the 8th of November 2023, Eurodiaconia organised a roundtable under the Social Policy Days, which focused on the topic of sustainable social services, the EU Green Deal, and financing. Present at the roundtable were representatives from Social Platform, the European Commission’s DG Grow, as well as Eurodiaconia members working on sustainability topics.

The roundtable provided a strategic platform for in-depth discussions on the integration of sustainability principles within the realm of social services. Recognizing the integral role of social services in community well-being, participants engaged in conversations that not only underscored the importance of sustainability but also explored concrete strategies to infuse these principles into the fabric of social service provision. Through interactive discussions, participants shared insights into ongoing initiatives, challenges faced, and successful strategies employed in advancing sustainability within their respective spheres.

**WORK ON FUNDING**

Eurodiaconia monitors calls for proposals from the EU funding programmes and private foundations that are relevant for social services. This includes calls on the topic of sustainability. The calls are published on Eurodiaconia’s website and disseminated through the monthly funding newsletter. Are you involved in a sustainability project? Please, reach out to our projects team or any of our colleagues and let us know.



# members’ sustainability work

### protestant church of the netherlands

The Protestant Church of the Netherlands has set up its own goals on sustainability and is aiming towards becoming climate neutral by 2030. “Green Churches” is a project run by the Protestant Church of the Netherlands that supports churches in becoming more sustainable. The biggest impact of the project will be to make information and service about sustainability accessible and user-friendly for local churches.[[47]](#footnote-47)

The Protestant Church is working on raising awareness about circular economy, fair food systems and energy use. The values in the bible, such as love and care for all of God’s creation (not only humans), sharing, simplicity and community are good foundations for promoting a more sustainable way of life. A real love and care for all creation is seen as the real source of change rather than spreading fear, anger and hopelessness.

The main challenges seen by the church when it comes to promoting sustainability is the focus on the fear of the solutions rather than the fear of climate change itself. The answer should therefore be to stop talking about restrictions and start talking about what a good life is. Moreover, the truth that a change of our current way of live will need to be made must be told, but combined with solutions and positive examples.

Several initiatives by local churches have had a positive impact. One local church, for instance, established a local subsidy for farmers to promote more nature inclusive practices. This initiative not only created more bio diversity, but also a significant impact on the local community by involving many people. Additionally, other churches have formed small work groups to enhance the sustainability of houses in their neighbourhood or initiated swap-stores where people can exchange clothes and toys.

### diaKoniE deutschland - germany

Five years ago, Diakonie Deutschland initiated a network about sustainability with the ambitious goal of fostering collaboration among diaconical organisations in Germany. This includes those who have already implemented environmental or sustainability management systems and those who are just beginning this journey. The network comprises representatives from diaconical organisations at all levels, including diaconical federations operating on state and federal levels. Discussions within the network have covered topics such as corporate social responsibility, reporting, management systems and renewable energy sources.

The overarching objective of the network is to create a platform for sharing best practices, facilitate information exchange, and ultimately work together to enhance their commitment to sustainability. Aside from sharing insights and practices, the network aims to gather valuable information and knowledge that can be employed in lobbying efforts on the national level.

One of the network’s most notable achievements is the project “1000 gardens”, which originated in the state of Baden-Württemberg and has now been rolled out all over Germany with the support of the network. Through the project, Diakonie Deutschland together with the German NGO Naturschutzbund Deutschland (NABU) try to achieve more biodiversity with the help of plants that are native to the specific area and improve the conditions of insects around various diaconal facilities. To this end, diaconal institutions identify areas that are suitable for nature-based enhancement and contact the respective NABU regional associations or local groups directly to discuss possible projects together. An important focus is also on making maintenance plans in order for the efforts to be sustainable over time.[[48]](#footnote-48)

### kirkens bymisjon (The church city mission) - norway

Kirkens Bymisjon’s strategy for 2020-2025 has three main objectives, in which environmental sustainability is one of them. Traditionally, the organisation has championed sustainable development goals through its emphasis on re-use and re-design in vocational rehabilitation projects and other work-related activities. Furthermore, their cafés and other activities which involve food, prepare and serve meals with expired “sell by” dates from grocery stores.

In a significant step towards environmental responsibility, Kirkens Bymisjon has initiated Eco-Lighthouse certification for all its activities and initiatives. The Eco-Lighthouse certification, akin to the ISO 14001 certification, serves as a tool for Norwegian organisation to make smart and profitable environmental choices. The certification process assesses the environmental impacts of waste, energy usage, transportation, procurements, and work environment. The findings are compiled into an annual climate and environment report, accompanied by an action plan with measures that should be implemented in the coming year.

Skattkammeret (The Treasury) is a good example of a project that promotes sustainability. Skattkammeret provides free loans of equipment for outdoor and sports activities to people, kindergartens, schools, clubs and organisations, with the main target group being young children and young people. The project aims to increase physical activity, social inclusion and the enjoyment of an active lifestyle.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Another noteworthy example is the Church City Mission Miljø (Environment), which is a social enterprise that collects pre-loved clothes and textiles in containers/collector boxes. The textiles are then sorted, re-sold, re-designed or exported for re-use and re-selling. The initiative operates in different Norwegian municipalities and employ people who, for various reasons, have faced long-term unemployment.[[50]](#footnote-50)

The primary challenges in their sustainability efforts revolve around shifting the mindsets of their employees and gaining their commitment. Additionally, complying with legislation that mandate the payment of VAT when re-selling goods, including second-hand clothes and dishes cooked with ingredients that have expired “sell by” dates poses a significant hurdle.

One of their earliest success stories lies in the establishment of the first Matsentralen (food bank) in Norway 10 years ago.[[51]](#footnote-51) Over the years, Matsentralen has evolved into a network of food banks dedicated to redistributing surplus food from the food industry to non-profit organisations supporting disadvantaged people in Norway. In 2022 alone, Norwegian food banks saved more than 5508 tons of food from going to waste and redistributed this to more than 500 non-profit organisations that help people in vulnerable situations in Norway.[[52]](#footnote-52)

However, the ultimate success is found in the small steps taken each year by all of their people when it comes to changing their habits, such as recycling, using public transport, replacing cars and other equipment, and inspiring others to do the same.

### diaKoniE austria

A good example of a sustainability project in social services is Diakonie Austria’s project “Energy WITH Spirit: Pioneering Implementation of a Solidarity-Based Energy Community in the Evangelical-Diaconal Sector in Austria”, which aims to contribute to overcoming the challenges of the energy crisis by involving vulnerable population groups in the energy transition. The project consortium consists of 11 partners from business, science and research, as well as the Protestant-diaconal sector. The project is anchored in the Renewable Energy Expansion Act Package, approved by the Austrian National Council in 2021. Its primary goal is to transition Austria’s electricity supply to entirely renewable energy sources by 2030. This legislative amendment enables people across property boundaries to join forces and produce, store, consume and sell energy together.

The central concept of the project is the Renewable Energy Community, which is set to ensure that the jointly produced energy is made available to socially disadvantaged and poverty-stricken people as well as to the common good in a form of solidarity. The Renewable Energy Community consists of producers (property owners who invest in sustainable energy generation through photovoltaic systems and build them on their own properties), prosumers (the sponsoring institutions that use the properties), and consumers (different user groups). The consumers receive 10% of the energy, which is being produced by photovoltaic systems in the form of electricity, as a donation. The target group for the consumers in the project is focused on socially disadvantaged and/or poverty-stricken households, people in primary care (particularly beneficiaries of subsidiary protection) and the “working poor” without government subsidies. The solidarity-based concept of “a tenth for those who need it” is unique in the Austrian energy communities to date and distinguishes the “Energy WITH Spirit” project.[[53]](#footnote-53)



# CONCLUSION

Recognizing the challenges posed by the transition for social and health service provision, Eurodiaconia secretariat is determined to support its members towards long term sustainability as well as to monitor the social impact of the environmental transition on vulnerable groups. To achieve this, we have taken a proactive approach by establishing a dedicated working group, for members to exchange ideas, be informed on how to tap into existing support mechanisms in the framework of the transition, and to promote proven best practices. Our collective efforts aim to mitigate challenges and pave the way for a more sustainable and resilient future for both Eurodiaconia member organizations and the communities they serve. This dedicated working group will shape Eurodiaconia policy input on a socially just environmental transition, in the context of the European Green Deal, but also more broadly in the context of the 2024 European election and upcoming new European Commission mandate. If you are interested to know more about this working group and process, please contact the Eurodiaconia secretariat.



**Eurodiaconia**

**2023**

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A blue flag with yellow stars

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